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Index

INTRODUCTION	5
1. PROVOCATIVE ADVERTISING IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY	9
1.1 Fashion Industry	10
1.2 History of advertising (from the 80s)	12
1.2.1 Fashion Advertising.....	16
1.2.2 Provocative Advertising	18
1.2.3 Provocative advertising in the fashion industry	21
2. DIESEL.....	26
2.1 History of the firm	26
2.1.1 Diesel S.r.l.....	28
2.1.2 Diesel S.p.A.....	31
2.1.3 2000s.....	36
2.1.4 Diesel today.....	38
2.2 Diesel main characters	41
2.2.1 Renzo Rosso	41
2.2.2 Nicola Formichetti.....	45
3. THE PHILOSOPHY BEHIND THE BRAND	48
3.1 The brand.....	48
3.1.1 Brand identity	52
3.1.2 Customers	53
4. DIESEL ADVERTISING CAMPAIGNS.....	59
4.1 The philosophy behind Diesel Ads.....	60
4.1.1 DCT – Diesel Creative Team	63
4.2 Provocation as Innovation	66
4.2.1 The consequences of provocation	71
5. DIESEL ADVERTISING CAMPAIGNS STEP BY STEP	78
5.1 80s & 90s: the very beginning of Diesel advertising campaigns	79
5.2 2000s.....	83
5.3 From 2010.....	90

6. THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH.....	99
6.1 Methodology	102
6.1.1 Limitations.....	103
6.2 Measures	104
6.3 Results.....	113
CONCLUSIONS	130
REFERENCES	136
Bibliography.....	136
Scientific Journals	137
Articles	138
Sitography.....	143
Archive Source	146
Dissertations	146

INTRODUCTION

The object of this work is to improve the knowledge about the advertising strategies of one of the most well-known, innovative and worldwide distributed Italian brand in the fashion industry: Diesel. Diesel has been chosen because this brand, founded by Renzo Rosso, has been under the spotlight for its attitude to make the most controversial and provocative advertising campaigns.

Although there does not exist a deeply detailed bibliography about the firm, through the different articles that have been wrote, both in positive and negative manners, it is possible to retrace the history of this brand and its publicity moves together with the surrounding historical contexts.

Since the beginning, Diesel represented an upstream and innovative brand, following the leading of the owner Renzo Rosso who has always pointed out his belief in freedom and the willingness to do whatever he wanted without any filter. It is exactly this rebellious halo that is directly reflected on the way the brand advertises itself.

Indeed, through the reconstruction of Diesel history, the advertising characteristics and evolution in the years will be examined in order to figure it out whether those had a positive or negative response on the success of the brand.

First, the general characteristics proper of the fashion industry will be introduced, in order to present the scenario in which the firm was born. Significant attention will be put on the marketing and advertising field, explaining how fashion publicity evolved and changed in the last decades. In particular, attention was focused on the advertising flow made by provocative and dumb images that can find its starting point in Benetton Campaigns by Oliviero Toscani at the beginning of the 80s. The photographer motto says that “if an image does not provoke than you’ve thrown your money away”¹, underlining how important it is in a communication strategy to deal with the feelings of people, so to stimulate their reactions, understands them better and see in what they do believe.

¹ L. Lockwood, Cynthia Martens, Lauren McCarthy, “Fashion Advertising: Controversy — Where Has It Gone?”, *WWD*, 28th July 2014 (consultation date 13th May 2017)

We can say that, in this way, Renzo Rosso followed the path of Benetton and decided he would have made advertising campaigns, for Diesel, able to risk and be provocative while showing different society values and cultural identities.

After this background introduction, the history of the Company itself will be presented, focusing on its international evolution from a local small firm to a multinational one. Stressing the values, actions and development of the firm has been useful to highlight and understand the winning moves that made Diesel such a successful worldwide case.

Of course a key role in the growth of the Company has been played by the founder himself. Renzo Rosso has been able to position Diesel exactly where it wanted it to be: a young and international brand addressed to young and bold people. Recently, Rosso added a crucial component to the Diesel team, the creative director: Nicola Formichetti. Significant attention was centered on these two characters because they represent, at the best, the brand identity and vision. "From our David La Chapelle campaign featuring two sailors kissing in 1995 until now, Diesel has always and will continue to push boundaries"²said Renzo Rosso, "I love using advertising space or any place that we can use to express what we are feeling. [...]. It's my role, as creative director, to push boundaries and do something more inspiring. We want people to think, and to question things"³, said Nicola Formichetti.

After the presentation of "these two", I will give a general description of the brand and, in particular of its Identity and beliefs. These are, as a matter of fact, core factors that made this brand grow till where it is nowadays, reaching the target that best suits it.

What is even more important of this brand is that it does not simply sell denim products, but it suggests a lifestyle, someone you can be when wearing Diesel clothes.

This lifestyle is the one proposed in the advertising campaigns. I will explain the deep philosophy behind the way Diesel advertises and how this philosophy has been maintained along all the history of the brand. Of course, the advertising campaigns changed through the years.

However, what has never changed, though the years, is the provocative aspect and creativity behind the brand's advertising campaigns. Provocative advertising finds in the literature

² L. Zargani, "Diesel Promotes Love, Not Walls in Spring Ads", *WWD*, 14th February 2017 (consultation date 13th May 2017)

³ L. Lockwood, Cynthia Martens, Lauren McCarthy, "Fashion Advertising: Controversy — Where Has It Gone?", *WWD*, 28th July 2014 (consultation date 13th May 2017)

different theories that classify it as innovative and efficient way able to attract consumer attention. In particular, the theory of Darren Dahl, exposed in the *Journal of Advertising Research*, will be exposed.

Nevertheless, like everything else, provocative advertising, and specifically the one of Diesel, was never without criticism. I will list some examples of advertising that have been criticized, if not banned, but which have been justified without fear, by the Company.

Next, Diesel's advertising campaigns will be divided into macro historical section in order to clearly show Diesel reactions and moves toward the years. It has been interesting to see the different publicities changing and evolving according to the different historical contexts, world streams and circumstances. As a matter of fact, the thread of Diesel ads is to show and make people think about significant themes, but at the same time without forcing them to be necessarily serious and "boring" even when talking about relevant manners such as global warming, homosexuality, freedom and equality.

To quote the importance of showing and representing values and current themes on the billboards, Ellis Verdi, owner of De Vitto Verdi said: "We always look to have truth in our advertising. The more truth you reveal the more you hit a nerve. Almost everything we do gets some degree of notoriety or some kind of reaction"⁴.

Eventually an empirical research will be carried out to see whether if Darren Dahl's theory about the effectiveness of provocative advertising in attracting people's attention is founded. Therefore, a questionnaire will be created *ad hoc* for the purpose, and then, it will be submitted to a sample.

In the questionnaire, the cognitive, affective and conative variables will be tested. These variables influence the process of information of an advertisement. This will show in which degree these variables are affected according to the type of advertisement a person is exposed to. A comparison between provocative advertising and the rest of the more traditional and common advertisements will be done, in order to get the information needed.

From this, data will be collected and analyzed. Even though these data will not be obtained from a statistically selected sample, it will be interesting to see in what they will result.

⁴ L. Lockwood, Cynthia Martens, Lauren McCarthy, "Fashion Advertising: Controversy — Where Has It Gone?", *WWD*, 28th July 2014 (consultation date 13th May 2017)

It will be interesting to imagine which will be the brand next moves to improve its image and restore its success and notoriety worldwide.

1. PROVOCATIVE ADVERTISING IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY

Implementation strategies used in the advertising field can have different objectives that may vary from information to the sphere of emotions. Among the elements that can arouse emotions or particular feelings from the side of the recipient of the message, we can find fear, mood, warmth, irritation and sexual arousal. However, from the 1980s, another implementation strategy has begun to gain a great deal of popularity among marketers who have identified the use of provocative advertising as a valuable tool to challenge and cause particular reactions and feelings in the population. The provocation then began to be used as a full deliberate communication strategy.

The merit of having introduced provocative advertising is attributed to the Italian clothing firm, Benetton. This, in fact, has become the main character of many provocative appeals in advertising. In the last half of the 1980s, in Benetton's view, advertising should have stopped showing only the products that the brand offered. Rather, the images that were proposed by these new generation advertising campaigns became more and more provocative, referring to issues of the current society including racism, religion, death and disease and war. Given the record and popularity Benetton was able to gain thanks to its strategy, many other Companies, selling clothes but not only, began to follow the path, including Esprit, Diesel and Pirelli.

From this concept, that was taking more and more footing and be adopted by more and more Companies, scholars came to a definition of provocative advertising, or rather, to how the provocation aspect can be identified in an advertising campaign. Therefore, it can be defined as a "deliberate appeal, within the content of an advertisement, to stimuli that are expected to shock at least a portion of the audience, both because they are associated with values, norms or taboos That are habitually not challenged or transgressed in advertising, and because of their distinctiveness and ambiguity. [...]. The definition of provocation in advertising may be a deliberate appeal, within the content of an advertisement, to stimulate that they are expected to shock at least a portion of the audience, both because they are

associated with values, norms or taboos that are not habitually challenged or transgressed in advertising, and because of their distinctiveness and ambiguity”⁵.

1.1 The Fashion Industry

“Fashion industry, multibillion-dollar global enterprise devoted to the business of making and selling clothes.[...] Fashion is best defined simply as the style or styles of clothing and accessories worn at any given time by groups of people. There may appear to be differences between the expensive designer fashions shown on the runways of Paris or New York and the mass-produced sportswear and street styles sold in malls and markets around the world. However, the fashion industry encompasses the design, manufacturing, distribution, marketing, retailing, advertising, and promotion of all types of apparel (men’s, women’s, and children’s) from the most rarefied and expensive haute couture (literally, “high sewing”) and designer fashions to ordinary everyday clothing—from couture ball gowns to Juicy Couture-brand sweatpants. Sometimes the broader term *fashion industries* is used to refer to myriad industries and services that employ millions of people internationally”⁶.

Generally speaking, the fashion industry can be considered as consisting of four levels. Starting from the “production of raw materials, principally fibres and textiles but also leather and fur; the production of fashion goods by designers, manufacturers, contractors, and others; retail sales; and various forms of advertising and promotion. These levels consist of many separate but interdependent sectors, all of which are devoted to the goal of satisfying consumer demand for apparel under conditions that enable participants in the industry to operate at a profit”⁷. It can be said that the fashion industry is a product of the modern age. In fact, looking to the past, all the clothes dating back to the nineteenth century were hand-made by tailors. The tailor's profession, however, has strong roots and has existed for many years. The turnaround took place around the 1900s, with the advent of new technologies and globalization, which allowed the industry to shift from homemade to semi-industrial production and to the increase of profit margins thanks to exports. Early

⁵ R. Vezina, O. Paul, “Provocation in Advertising: a conceptualization and an empirical assessment”, *International Journal of research in Marketing*, XIV (1997), p. 179

⁶ J.S. Major, V. Steele, “Fashion industry”, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th April 2017 (consultation date 19th September 2017)

⁷ *Ibidem*

developments took place in America and Europe since they represented the wealthier and more developed continents. From here, this industry will be able to reach impressive data in terms of both production and employment.

The last twenty years have been the crowning of the fashion clothing industry that has evolved even further thanks to the expansion of the boundaries of thought. Among the driving forces of this development we can find “the fading of mass production, increase in number of fashion seasons, and modified structural characteristics in the supply chain have forced retailers to desire low cost and flexibility in design, quality, delivery and speed to market. [...]. In addition to speed to market and design, marketing and capital investment”⁸.

Nowadays it is easy to perceive how the fashion market is extremely competitive and what can guarantee the survival of a brand is the ability to be constantly innovative and update the products so that they are never equal nor flat.

Fashion is essentially characterized by the *change* factor, which allows consumers to admire a sequence of trends that has started since the night of the times.

In fact, the competitive spirit of fashion revolves around the seasonality that allows customers to have at their disposal clothing suitable for every season and situation. The constant change in fashion products and services is constantly on the rise, but unfortunately, the rate and direction of change is usually slower and less predictable than the fashion industry would want.

Fashion is creativity, fashion is taste, and experimentation. A series of factors such as plans and custom design are involved in the realization of the products, and these may vary depending on the element to be realized. “To some the design of fashion garments can be viewed as an art in its own right, though this is a notion supported more in countries such as France and Italy than in Britain. The majority of garments sold do not come into this category, but the inspiration for the design of many of those garments may have come from works of art”⁹.

“The continual change, i.e. fashion, involves the exercise of creative design skills which result in products that range from the basic to the rare and elaborate. The creative design personnel provide part of the mechanism by which the industry responds to the need for change.

⁸ V. Bhardwaj, A. Fairhurst, “Fast fashion: response to changes in the fashion industry”, *The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research*, XX, No. 1, February 2010, p. 165

⁹ M. Easey, *Fashion Marketing*, vol III, Oxford, John Wiley & Sons, 2009, p.5

At the same time, the ability to identify products that the customer needs and will buy is also essential to the industry. Marketing can help to provide this additional knowledge and the skills needed to ensure that the creative component is used to best advantage, allowing businesses to succeed and grow"¹⁰.

1.2 History of advertising (from the 80s)

Advertising is a form of communication capable of presenting and promoting impersonal ideas, goods or services by a well-identified promoter carried out on a fee-for-money basis. Therefore, it is, first of all, a form of communication, and as such it develops through a two-way process. This process can occur when the issuer and the recipient share the same codes. This includes the structured associations, the conventions shared by the sender and the recipient that allow to decode the signs in a proper way.

It is impossible to identify the time when the first form of advertising was made. However, we can bring back the premise of modern advertising in the invention of the mobile print by Gutenberg in the fifteenth century. The evolution of printing techniques allowed the birth of posters and periodicals of information, where the *réclame*, the ones that represent the first commercials, were included.

Only after the middle of the 1800s, in conjunction with the economical growing determined by the industrial revolution, there was a remarkable development in the advertising field.

By the end of the 1800s, thanks to the evolution of marketing culture, a trend was set in this field and it aimed at overcoming the old objective approach based on the generic presentation of a trademark or product. Now the focus is on fostering an orientation in order to enhance the quality and performance of goods and services.

As a matter of fact the need felt by Companies was no longer just to show that there was such a product or a brand, but there is the need to convince customers to choose them and prefer them among competitors¹¹.

However, let us move on to more recent years, we start from the 80s and see how advertising has evolved from here.

¹⁰ M. Easey, *Fashion Marketing*, vol III, Oxford, John Wiley & Sons, 2009, p.5

¹¹ G.P. Ceserani, *Storia della pubblicità in Italia*, Roma, Laterza, 1988

Advertising and promotions become very important tools within the marketing mix of Companies. Psychological research and lifestyles contribute to the refinement of advertising language, as well.

During the 1980s, the economic scenario changed noticeably, the economic recovery was beginning, with a consequent increase in demand. There are some trends in the market that will be consolidating until the early 90s, and that will influence the way Companies decide to move on the advertising side.

The consumer became more hedonist, there is an increase in competition alongside with the technology acceleration. Differentiation takes place more and more on the "soft" aspects of products and advertising contributes decisively to this differentiation.

At the end of the crisis that characterized the seventies, advertisers were able to find the courage to express themselves in total freedom and, inspired by the parallel expansion of the media and their lively programs, they often sought to attribute advertising with a spectacular character.

About this, during the seventh forum of marketing communication in Milan, November 1985, Marco Magnani, Creative Director RSCG Italia, said that today's products are standard and people know it. He continued saying that the added value that products can have is just an added value of communication, imagination, fantasy, poetry and therefore entertainment. By affirming that, he defined how communication was becoming more and more seductive to be convincing, even because only in this way it can be appreciated and accepted.

In the same years, a new "sexual revolution" came into place. For the first time, advertisements for men's underwear that contained very sexy, naked or almost sexy models were introduced in the market. In the same period, there was the explosion of sexy female advertising, as well. In general, the body has become the main player in the advertising world for both sexes, as it was becoming on the social level, alongside with the growing attention for health and good physical form.

The evolution that was taking place was based on some identifiable elements, such as in the progressive public re-evaluation of publicity, accepted not only as an information tool, but also as a spectacular element of daily life. There is a progressive crowding of the media channel and a greater use of advertising strategy to characterize the product, too.

The situation gradually enhanced the role of the brand as a reference point for consumer choices and, at the same time, for Company communication strategies. The brand image

worked as a guarantee for product quality and differentiation element. That is why advertising started to pay less attention to the intrinsic features of the products and to focus more on the creation of a system of values that could be associated with the brand itself.

The economic growth recorded in the second half of the 1980s was gradually depleting until the early 1990s. This entailed a twofold discomfort: on one hand, there was the decline in the purchasing power and in disposable income and on the other hand, there was big fear for an uncertain future.

All this promotes greater focus on consumption and greater selectivity in the purchasing choices that tended to prefer products able to offer an advantageous price-quality relationship.

This trend facilitated the expansion of hard discounts worldwide, which offered unbranded products at very competitive prices, using as arguments to support their business proposal the fact that they did not have to invest in advertising and promotion. In this way, these discounts markets were able to guarantee a quality level comparable to that of the best-known products but at lower prices¹².

In terms of marketing, progressive attention was being paid to the real and psychological needs of even smaller customer segments. There are new approaches based not only on the mass concept, but also on an individual, understood as a person, not only for the consumer potential he could express but also for the complex universe of values he could externalize. Communication became less emotional, more rational and informative. Advertisers returned to talk about the product and its features.

Inside the investments made in publicity there have been great changes in the 1990s: the ones reserved for traditional sectors of broad consumption such as food and alcoholic beverages have been reduced to the benefit of emerging sectors that need to be introduced such as tourism, information technology, new communication technologies, banks and insurance.

Moving towards the new millennium, among the main elements that characterized the competitive situation of the early years, there were, first of all a market that became more and more global thanks to the territorial expansion. Moreover, we had the chance to see the implementation of cost-effective strategies, standardization, and more mature purchasing power on the consumer side.

¹² G.P. Ceserani, *Storia della pubblicità in Italia*, Roma, Laterza, 1988

Advertising became self-referential and tended to have as its object less and less the product, and more and more itself, its own speeches and communication mechanisms. In revealing the secrets of its internal operation, the message sent tries to establish a complicity relationship with the recipient.

“Apparently, advertising seems to be experiencing a weakness because it seeks less and less to persuade it directly to buy a product. Indeed, it uses more subtle, engaging and effective persuasion than the past”¹³.

Nowadays, with technological advances, mobile commerce and social media become more and more part of our daily lives. In this regard, advertisers and their advertising campaigns have to equip themselves and respond accordingly.

Whether once the most effective communication tools were billboards and loudspeakers, today Companies need to consider smart phones, tablets, video footage, and more innovative tools to keep spreading their messages sharply and clear. According to studies, the attention time that people tend to pay to something became shorter and therefore there is the need for immediate gratification, especially online.

That is why, over the years advertisers have been trying to introduce new forms of advertising to attract the consumer, including advertising films that are becoming more common. Print ads usually exist in tandem with the movies, so to keep alive the good memories and functionality of magazines. Celebrities, who are gaining more and more power in the advertising context often become the main characters of the campaigns, and the moving image brings the product to life, reaching an audience that does not necessarily read glosses or respond to traditional billboards¹⁴.

What remains to be seen is how advertising campaigns will continue to adapt, taking into consideration the change in consumer behavior and the ever-faster technological advances. However, maintaining a consistent brand identity in all areas is crucial, but it is something more complicated by the growing number of advertising channels and outlets available today.

¹³ “In apparenza, dunque, la pubblicità sembra vivere una situazione di debolezza, perché cerca sempre meno di persuadere direttamente all’acquisto di un prodotto. In realtà, utilizza modalità di persuasione più sottili, coinvolgenti ed efficaci rispetto al passato”

M. Lombardi, *Il dolce tuono. Marca e pubblicità nel terzo millennio*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2005, p.67

¹⁴ D. Neikova, “The Fashion Advertising Campaign: Big Business & Brand Identity”, *Not Just a Label*, 24th September 2010 (consultation date 13th May 2017)

1.2.1 Fashion Advertising

“Fashion marketing is the application of a range of techniques and a business philosophy that centres upon the customer and potential customer of clothing and related products and services in order to meet the long-term goals of the organization”¹⁵.

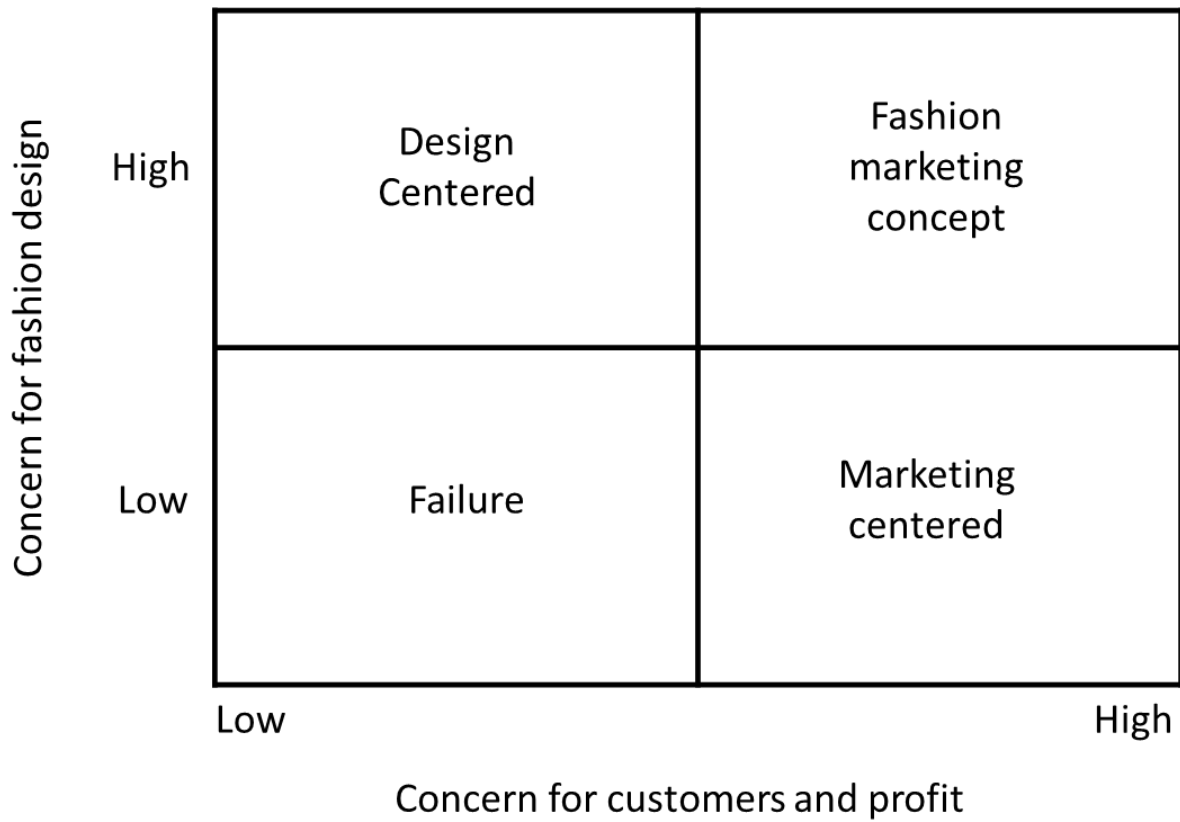
Marketing activities in this market include product development, pricing, promotion and distribution. If a fashion retailer or a producer wants to gain profit, the Company must be able to offer a product that consumers perceive as appetizing and this product must be presented to potential customers so that they want to buy it.

Within the fashion industry, there are endless variants of business structures that are focused on meeting customer needs. Whether it is a small or a multinational Corporation, known all over the world, diversification remains a key feature, the one that is able to confer uniqueness and originality. Moreover, by paying attention to the recent legislative changes, the gradual removal of worldwide commercial barriers and the spread of the Internet and digital world, one can easily notice how the fashion industry has become increasingly global. This involves significant variations in the cultural, social and economic fields of the participants. The consequence of these variations in size, experience and perspective hang on the marketing of fashion that is not uniform at national level, anymore.

In the *Fashion Marketing* volume written by Mike Easy, the concept of fashion marketing is identified as the relationship that intervene between marketing and design. Indeed, it can not be assumed that a superficial promotion is enough to succeed in this business, as at this kind of surface marketing can only work for a limited number of Companies. Therefore, it is important, for a fashion firm to study and analyze its consumers and, above all, to consider the more frequent possibility that many people do not know what they like until they are presented with several choices, or that their preferences may change over time, too. A simple model that shows the interrelationship between fashion design and marketing can be seen in the matrix in Figure.

¹⁵ M. Easey, *Fashion Marketing*, vol III, Oxford, John Wiley & Sons, 2009, p. 7

Fig. 1.1: The fashion marketing concept



Source: personal elaboration of M. Easey matrix (2009)¹⁶

¹⁶ M. Easey, *Fashion Marketing*, vol III, Oxford, John Wiley & Sons, 2009, p.10

This matrix explains how the lower the concern for customers, the more professionals and designers are likely to fail. Once we say this, the fashion world must not overestimate the role of marketing, nor overestimating its design capability, or defining profiles.

Through the use of sophisticated marketing techniques such as focus groups, surveys, data mining and market segmentation, and through systematic approaches such as electronic data reporting, inventory monitoring and constant evaluation of advertising results, marketers are able to keep track of consumer tastes. The importance of meeting the target customer has greatly increased. Every step-design, production, distribution, promotion is, nowadays, consumer-oriented¹⁷.

When designers and entrepreneurs in the fashion industry realize that the contribution marketing can give to their brand, progresses can be made. By embracing the different approaches that marketing has towards the fashion industry, many companies have been shown that giving equal value to all those as design, customers and profit will provide success. However, the fashion marketing practices are often criticized. The most obvious example is the criticism that most of the fashion industry lacks sensitivity to environmental issues and encourage a conspicuous consumer consumption society and massive use of Earth materials.

1.2.2 Provocative Advertising

In order to properly define provocation in advertising, it is important to consider, that provocation is based on the same conceptual and strategic levels of other execution strategies such as fear, humor, heat, irritation and sexual appeals.

However, although provocation has a close resemblance to some of these elements, we must still be aware that they are different from each other and each one has its own peculiarities. Therefore, it is important to distinguish between provocative appeals and other appeals. For example, considering provocative appeal and sexual appeals, the latter are used in situations that are far from the idea of advertising a product. On the other hand, provocative appeals deserves much attention and direct inquiry as they include other references than sexual appeals, "provocative advertising is an original and distinctive execution strategy and it

¹⁷ M. Easey, *Fashion Marketing*, vol III, Oxford, John Wiley & Sons, 2009, p.10

includes much more than other appeals since they for instance also can refer to political and racial issues"¹⁸.

As mentioned in the introduction of the chapter, the definition of provocation in advertising is identified, in 1997, by Vézina and Paul, as "a deliberate appeal, within the content of an advertisement, to stimuli that are expected to shock at least a portion of the audience, both because they are associated with values, norms or taboos that are habitually not challenged or transgressed in advertising, and because of their distinctiveness and ambiguity"¹⁹.

Thus defined, the provocation in advertising alludes to and includes three different concepts, which are distinction, ambiguity and transgression of norms and taboos. These are elements of high significance and the same might be considered determinants in the identification of provocation within an ad.

Let us try to define in detail these characteristics.

Distinction is at the heart of the innovative character of such a strategy that induces consumers to become accustomed to a particular type of provocation. At the same time distinction, it is a fundamental tool for defending against imitations. It is therefore necessary to always be on alert and constantly renew ads to keep originality.

"Ambiguity is the extent to which the ad leaves room for various interpretations, if not of its content, at least of the intentions of the advertiser. The basic precept behind this intentional ambiguity is that a provocative message which contains no ambiguity is more likely to be dismissed immediately by those receivers that are shocked and, consequently, is more likely not to be processed at all"²⁰.

The third component, the use of transgression of norms and taboos, has recently been subject of further researches.

When something is considered by the population as a taboo, and this taboo is violated, it is more likely and more easily subject to the provocative and transgressive adjective. This happens in the advertising field, too. However, it is easy to see how the standards of public decency have changed in the last thirty years, sometimes even radically. One of the factors,

¹⁸ R. Vezina, O. Paul, "Provocation in Advertising: a conceptualization and an empirical assessment", *International Journal of research in Marketing*, XIV (1997),p. 179

¹⁹ *Ibidem*

²⁰ S. Anderson, A. Patterson, *Provocative Advertising: The Swedish Youth's Response*, Master's Thesis, Lulea University of Technology, Department of Business Administration and Social Sciences, International Business and Economics Programme, a.y. 2004, Supervisor Lars Backstrom, p. 8

to which the merit of these changes have been attributed, is advertising. Similarly, it can be argued that social legislation has played a role in the development of advertising practices. Consequently, numerous studies that discuss on the issue of decency in advertising, and viceversa, are available. Thus, the use of transgression of norms and taboos can be considered a crucial element: provocative advertising can not only be distinctive and ambiguous²¹.

In order to completely understand the definition of provocative advertising, let us outline what is not provocative in advertising. Of course, there are other ways to capture attention and create awareness in people. In fact, according to Amstrong, in the advertising world there are other appeals, different from the provocative ones. These appeals are *emotional appeals*, *rational appeals*, and *moral appeals*. The appeal that will be chosen, it will be the one that best suits the ultimate goal of the advertising campaign, directly declared by the advertiser and the Company. "Appeals that are direct to the audience's sense of what is right and proper are moral appeals and they are often used to support social causes such as cleaner environment, better race relations, equal rights for women and aid to the needy"²². Given their nature, *moral appeals* are commonly less used in the publicity of everyday products. On the other hand, *rational appeals* are aimed at promoting the products, their features, and their functionalities. These are therefore directly addressed to the audience's self-interest. "*Emotional appeals* are one way to communicate the intended message and these appeals are used in an attempt to rouse up negative or positive emotions that will encourage purchase. Emotional appeals include several different themes, fear, guilt, regret and shame and negative appeals that are used in order to convince people to do things they should do"²³. Taking advantage of humor and public submission is a way that Companies have often used to achieve their determined goals. In particular, advertising campaign's objectives have mainly to do with gaining attention, influence attitudes, increase the appeal of an advertised complaint, and create customer actions.

All these different appeals have their own advantages and disadvantages, and they are chosen according to the nature of the advertisement, the goal of communication and the brand itself.

²¹R. Vezina, O. Paul, "Provocation in Advertising: a conceptualization and an empirical assessment", *International Journal of research in Marketing*, XIV (1997), pp.177-194

²² G. Amstrong, *Principles of Marketing*, IV Edition, Edinburgh, Pearson Education Limited, 2005, p.417

²³ S. Anderson, A. Patterson, *Provocative Advertising: The Swedish Youth's Response*, Master's Thesis, Lulea University of Technology, Department of Business Administration and Social Sciences, International Business and Economics Programme, a.y. 2004, Supervisor Lars Backstrom, p. 10

“In today’s society where people are exposed to various types of advertisements every day it is important that the advertiser outline an appeal or theme that will produce the desired response, reach out the target audience and break through the clutter. All of the above described appeals have its advantages and advertisers are all the time striving to create successful and attention getting advertisements. Due to this, more and more advertisers have chosen to go for appeals that are provocative and shocking since advertisements built on these appeals are most likely to get the audience attention”²⁴.

1.2.3 Provocative advertising in the fashion industry

At the beginning of the chapter the definition of provocative advertising has been described as "a deliberate appeal, within the content of an advertisement, to stimuli that are expected to shock at least a portion of the audience, both because they are associated with values, norms or taboos That are habitually not challenged or transgressed in advertising, and because of their distinctiveness and ambiguity"²⁵.

Now we will discuss about provocation advertising in the specific industry of fashion where many and many firm saw this marketing trend as the perfect tool through which capturing attention and stimulate the public reply.

When we talk about provocative advertising in the fashion sector, there are brand names that immediately come to mind. First of all Benetton, which, as mentioned above, can be considered the pioneer of this kind of marketing strategy. The person behind the start of everything is the photographer Oliviero Toscani who, for the period from 1982 to 2000, has become the anchor of this approach. In an interview, the Italian photographer has strongly stressed how provocation is a positive force that can move and arouse something in people and make them more creative and actively thinking. In fact, he said "If an image does not provoke, then you've thrown your money away"²⁶.

He also expressed the opinion that there is a preponderance of annoying images in recent years and that these images are all conceived by not at all smart-minded marketing executives.

²⁴R. Vezina, O. Paul, “Provocation in Advertising: a conceptualization and an empirical assessment”, *International Journal of research in Marketing*, XIV (1997), pp.193-194

²⁵ Ivi p.179

²⁶ L. Lockwood, Cynthia Martens, Lauren McCarthy, “Fashion Advertising: Controversy — Where Has It Gone?”, *WWD*, 28th July 2014 (consultation date 13th May 2017)

With these words, it is clear that Toscani is not afraid nor tired to modify the fashion industry, jet. We can recall *Unhate*, the advertising campaign that in 2011 has a significant impact in the brand success and promotion.

5 million results, among which 20,000 discussions, 1,500 blog postings, 60 percent more Facebook fans and 60 percent more visits to benetton.com are the results recorded right after the campaign's release. This has led to an incredible increase in the sequel on social networks, which had never happened before. However, positive results were not only in the digital world, the advertising has also received numerous awards in international competitions thanks to the audacity and originality of its proposal. Following Benetton, we can find many other brands that have seen in provocation advertising an effective way to attract consumers and the society in general. Among this American Apparel, famous for its sexually charged advertising images, which portray mostly young women in suggestive and sometimes vulgar positions. The American brand has gained popularity over the years for its provocative and openly sexually-inspired publicity, especially under the direction of the founder, subsequently dismissed, Dov Charney²⁷.

Another evident example of provocation advertising is the one provided by Calvin Klein. This brand and the sexual side have been friends since the Company's first advertising campaigns launched about forty years ago. We remember the very avant-garde as well as risky provocation of the '90s, that represented Kate Moss in topless straddling on the nude chest of Mark Wahlberg. We remember the first Calvin Klein jeans marketed by young characters like Brooke Shields who claimed that "nothing" came between her and her Calvins and the latest erotic grapefruit hold by Kendall Jenner in 2016. "The Calvin Klein campaigns made a huge impression on the public. They were gutsy and completely in tune with the rise of youth culture"²⁸ said Edwina Ehrman, curator of the V & A's Undressed exhibition.

Likewise, Diesel, which has become popular for its unconventional advertising, still pushes the limit today. We talk about advertising depicting a young woman in a denim burka, and another wearing a denim papal dress and hat. These images have been able to attract a great deal of attention. Diesel's latest creative director, Nicola Formichetti, said that these type of figurative

²⁷ L. Lockwood, Cynthia Martens, Lauren McCarthy, "Fashion Advertising: Controversy — Where Has It Gone?", WWD, 28th July 2014 (consultation date 13th May 2017)

²⁸ B. Holt, "Calvin Klein launches predictably provocative advertising campaign. But can sex still shock?", *The Telegraph*, 11th May 2016 (consultation date 1st August 2017)

representations are far more effective than the one that advertises the simple products. This is because “consumers do not just buy denim because it fits, rather, they also like to feel that they are part of the same energy and philosophy”²⁹.

However, if we want to describe provocation advertising in the fashion industry nowadays, the words that best fit this period are “very quiet”. Sam Shahid, chairman and creative director of Shahid & Co., said that the twentieth-century campaigns had great ideas, they were built on stories and concepts, sexual and sensual, but above all on thoughts. Today, however, it seems like everyone has become more conservative and more oriented towards the single product³⁰.

Let us try to list and outline what could be the factors that led to this trend reversal. Shahid says that “It could be because print is not what it was. It used to be you could tell a story in print. Now it’s all on the Web site. It’s films and showing product. The sensual part of it isn’t there. It’s not the same as print. You put it on the Web site, and it lasts for a fraction of a second. It’s all so product-driven right now. Advertising was as entertaining as a film and a book. You don’t have that anymore”³¹.

Therefore, how do we attract people's attention? It has become much more difficult to capture the attention of the audience and impress people. Once, when advertising was present only in the magazines, people used to linger on advertisements, scanning and studying them, so that images and phrases remained imprinted in their minds and they were easier to remember. Nowadays, we look at everything on a screen and what we see lasts for a fraction of a second that makes us go right to the next news.

Arnell, the marketing and innovation specialist who is known for his work for clients such as Donna Karan, Chanel, Banana Republic and Hanes, expressed his opinion stating that “I think people use ads and photography today, especially in fashion, with the exception of a few, to not induce, provoke or create curiosity or to provide a perspective or point of view on something, but rather to present a product. The difference between presenting a product and presenting an idea *is like night and day*”³². Provocation is not synonymous of without clothes,

²⁹ L. Lockwood, C. Martens, L. McCarthy, “Fashion Advertising: Controversy — Where Has It Gone?”, WWD, 28th July 2014 (consultation date 13th May 2017)

³⁰ *Ibidem*

³¹ *Ibidem*

³² L. Lockwood, C. Martens, L. McCarthy, “Fashion Advertising: Controversy — Where Has It Gone?”, WWD, 28th July 2014 (consultation date 13th May 2017)

but it is rather about questioning common standards and false myths through a sincere mirroring of the brand culture and of the Company that is the protagonist. “It’s not about the product, it’s about the spirit, and the attitude, and the communications of the mission. It’s Kenny Cole at its best. It’s Benetton. The people who run these marketing groups have to encourage the communication. They have to narrate the story. They just can’t depict, they have to narrate. They have to be true. When a truth is found in an image, it lasts forever. Why do these great images stick in our minds forever? It’s not a season-by-season. Why? They stick in our minds forever because they’re timeless. Timeless pictures come from a platform of truth which is universal and forever. That’s what’s provocative. When people communicate what the soul of their brand is”³³.

On a different thought wave, we find Kirshenbaum, managing director of Nue Studio Group. He believes the controversial things are still going on, but it is the whole conversation that has changed from how it was. Kirshenbaum has noted three elements in fashion provocation advertising: “There are controversial brands that are more open to controversy, there are controversial things the brands do in terms of their platforms, and then there are controversial people behind the brands, people who are creative. I think the truth is, it’s not that controversial things aren’t happening. I believe the conversation is happening in different places. It may be happening in social media or an event, or in the news media. Their imagery is sexier and more provocative. It’s not that people aren’t doing it. But I do think there’s a level of immunity to a certain extent. I don’t think the Millennial generation is easily shocked at this point. A lot of Millennials in my office don’t seem very shockable. The imagery is so much more forward”³⁴.

Another opinion on this subject was given by Charles DeCaro, partner of Laspata DeCaro, who focuses his attention on the digital media by emphasizing how these are the protagonists of all the changes in people's lives. This obviously falls on advertising, as well. “Whatever we had done in the past, we had never done ads simply to provoke. There was always a narrative behind it, and a reason behind it”³⁵. Behind the advertising campaigns, there has always been a narrative and within it a thoughtful and concrete reason. He is convinced that consumers

³³ *Ibidem*

³⁴ *Ibidem*

³⁵ L. Lockwood, C. Martens, L. McCarthy, “Fashion Advertising: Controversy — Where Has It Gone?”, WWD, 28th July 2014 (consultation date 13th May 2017)

still want advertising to tell them stories, but brands need to approach differently. “It’s multilayered now. We do videos for every client we have. The life that lives behind the printed page and Web site is astounding. That obviously wasn’t the case 20 years ago. What was on your page was your narrative and it was simply a print voice. Now you have people who are your brand ambassadors or your consumers or following you on their Web site. The message is following you through their Web site. Now you’re able to learn so much behind the brand”³⁶. Therefore, if controversial advertising was a challenge thirty years ago, nowadays it seems even more. The Web 2.0 has multiplied communication channels but at the same time comments and commentators has multiplied, too. Sometimes, this can lead to give more importance to negative feedback even though the majority may have positive thoughts and appreciate the idea. This is because the digital field provides more power to consumers who see the controls of the situation, the results in their hands making them feel safer. That is why those who do marketing in the fashion industry and want to continue in the wave of provocation must carefully study the consumers and the channels in order to be able to succeed in their objectives.

³⁶ *Ibidem*

2. DIESEL

Diesel represents a strong reality that has established itself in the fashion world with conviction and creativity. Since the beginning, the Company has diversified itself from the rest of the industry's leading players thanks to its enthusiasm and passion. This brought the man behind everything, Renzo Rosso, to build a real denim empire. Through the Company's history, from the first steps until today, we will see how Diesel has positioned itself in the market with ripped jeans and audacious advertising. All the elements that are part of this brand find their starting point in the founder Renzo who was able to achieve everything he wished thanks to his passion and boldness.

2.1 History of the firm

Diesel was born in 1978 and today it is an international organization that operates and manages branches throughout Europe, Asia and America.

The Company's first headquarters, that it is still its main one, is in Molvena, a village in the province of Vicenza.

The Italian Company sees as its founder one of the most famous and discussed men in the world of fashion, Renzo Rosso. He has always been a supporter of Italy and Made in Italy production and this is the reason why he continues to manufacture most of the Diesel labeled products in the *Bel Paese*.

Thanks to his entrepreneurial skills and his ability to be constantly *avant-garde* and countercurrent in everything, Renzo Rosso has led his Company to be widespread and popular all around the world.

Diesel is mainly known for introducing into the market a new concept of denim jeans that have represented quality and originality.

Many people have expressed their opinion about the Italian brand. Among these, the quote that best highlights the successful story of Diesel is from the magazine *Business Week* that described it as "one of the world's greatest successful stories in fashion marketing"³⁷. Likewise,

³⁷ Hypersoft, Casi di successo, Diesel, <http://www.hypersoft.it/success/diesel> (consultation date 17th May 2017)

CUOA, the leading management school in Triveneto, with simple but efficient words defined Diesel as "the 90's phenomenon in the clothing industry"³⁸.

As mentioned above, everything started from the creativity and exuberance of Renzo Rosso, who has always shown a great propensity for the entrepreneurship and fashion worlds. The combination of the two led him to feel the desire to create a label, a precise name, easily pronounceable and to be known all over the world.

This is exactly what he will do during his life: Renzo Rosso is the figure of a man who has pursued his dreams since he was young and has achieved them successfully, giving Diesel international reputation and recognition. He introduced a revolution in the concept of wearing and using jeans. All this has allowed Diesel to become established on international markets, offering not only the sought-after items but also the famous *for successful living* lifestyle.

Another significant aspect that contributed to the worldwide spread of Diesel has to do with its advertising campaigns. In fact, these have always played an important role since the early 1990s. They caused, through the years, different stirrings as they are based on the events of contemporary society.

The purpose of the communication proposed by Diesel is to offer the market with provocative images and messages in order to create a significant reaction from consumers, no matter what it was.

Talking about the products that the brand offers to its consumers, the starting point was just the production of denim jeans. Through years, however, as the Company grew and spread, new product lines and categories have been added. In the front line, there is the casual premium clothing for both men and women, where you can find any type of clothing, from denim to leather, to cotton. There is also a collection dedicated to the youngest, *Diesel Kids*, which was introduced in order to conquer a slice of the market share that would grow over time. Additionally, Diesel has its own collection of accessories that include handbags, shoes and leather items that keep the style indistinct and unpredictable.

During its growth, the brand has also signed licensing contracts with several Companies in order to create collaborations to produce labeled Diesel products. Among these, there is the *Diesel Shades* collection, eyeglasses and sunglasses produced by Safilo, *Diesel Time Frames & Jewellery* that includes watches and jewels produced and distributed by Fossil. Moreover, since

³⁸ *Ibidem*

2007, a perfume has started been produced thanks to the agreement signed with L'ORÉAL. Finally, the latest brand development is the Diesel Intimate line, a collection of underwear and beachwear.

However, Diesel is not only distinguished for its work in the fashion market. The Company is, in fact, a promoter and supporter of various activities. Among the most significant ones, there is *Talent Support*, an annual competition for young designers, which takes place in Trieste. In this project, Diesel offers the *Diesel Award* as a prize and it gives the opportunity to outline a limited edition collection that is sold in Diesel stores around the world. Not only, Renzo Rosso also promotes music and, in particular, *Diesel: U: Music* is an international competition aiming at launching artists without a record contract in the market. In the art field are two main projects, as well. The first is *Diesel Wall*, which offers young artists and designers the opportunity to show their works in monumental vertical walls, located in the center of the most important cities in the world. The second one is *Diesel New Art*, a real competition that takes place in an online gallery in order to support emerging talents of art in all its forms.

Since 2002, Diesel is part of *Only the Brave*, an holding Company that includes several brands. Among these there is 55DSL, a brand linked to urban culture and street & urban clothing, Staff International, an important Italian company that produces and distributes brands such as Diesel Denim Gallery, Maison Martin Margiela, Sophia Kokosalaki, DSquared, Vivienne Westwood, and Neuf, the owner of the Maison Martin Margiela brand, of which Renzo Rosso is a majority shareholder.

Diesel's strength and success relies on its ability to see beyond the reality of things, to think of how they might be, through a brave, risky, open-minded approach to new ideas and possibilities, breaking the patterns of a world that wants people to be all the same.

2.1.1 Diesel S.r.l

Diesel was born in 1978, specifically, on October 25th of that year. On the contrary of what is common belief, at the beginning, Diesel was not exclusively held By Renzo Rosso. In fact, he deposited the first registration act together with Schiena Rossella. This one was the owner of *Moltex by Schiena Rosella*, a handicraft individual Company that represented a large Group of many firms. When Rossella decided to sell, she wanted to transfer part of her Company to

Renzo Rosso. Of course he agreed and decided to buy a hundredth of the Company's shares. The amount corresponded to Lire 90,000, and once the young Renzo Rosso paid for this slice of Moltex, he became the owner of it.

What is even more interesting to notice, it is that in the sale act there was a Company called Diesel, registered the year before, in 1977. This means that, at that time, Schiena Rossella possessed 99/100 of that business called Diesel, while Renzo Rosso owed the remaining 1/100.

The official name of the Company was *Diesel by Schiena Rossella & S.n.c* with its headquarter in Molvena. This new business had as object the manufacture and the trade of clothes and accessories for third account. According to the pre-agreed agreements, the Company would have lasted until December 31st, 2050. However, two months after its foundation, precisely on December 22nd, 1978, the Company passed from S.n.c³⁹ (Società in nome collettivo-Company in Collective Name) to S.r.l.⁴⁰ (Società responsabilità limitata-Limited Liability Company). In this way, it became a Capital Company with legal personality and social responsibility only with respect to its heritage⁴¹.

Therefore, on December 22nd 1978, Diesel was transformed into a S.r.l Company, and some changes took place as consequence. In fact, if the headquarter and duration of it were kept unchanged, as well as Renzo Rosso's role, on the other hand a new administrator came into

³⁹ "A Company in Collective Name also branded as S.n.c. It is a type of Company composed by several people in which all members firmly and unlimitedly respond to the social debts contracted by the company itself. Responsibility is therefore unlimited and the members meet the fullness of their personal assets for social debts. Therefore, the members are responsible for all the debts and the creditors can claim the payment of their credit from any partner, which, once the debt is extinguished, can rival the Company or other shareholders present in the capital itself"

Amministrazione aziendale, Società in nome collettivo, <http://www.amministrazioneaziendale.com/societa-in-nome-collettivo.php> (consultation date June 12th 2017)

⁴⁰ "The Limited Liability Company, also branded as S.r.l., belongs to one of the categories defining Capital Companies, therefore, it only replies to its social security obligations (art 2462 c.c.).

In this type of society, shareholder participation fees can not be represented by shares.

The company name must necessarily contain the name of a limited liability Company and the capital must be not less than 10,000 Euros.

For its establishment, it is necessary to draw up a constitution act that contains basic information about the society such as the amount of share capital, the denomination and the social object and the statute containing the social rules"

Amministrazione aziendale, Società a responsabilità limitata,

<http://www.amministrazioneaziendale.com/societa-a-responsabilita-limitata.php> (consultation date June 12th, 2017)

⁴¹ Camera di commercio industria artigianato e agricoltura di Vicenza, *Ufficio registro delle imprese, Diesel S.p.A*, enrollement date February 19th 1996 (00642650246)

play, Rossella Schiena's husband, Adriano Goldschmied⁴². In addition to the new actor, the social object of the Company is also altered: from that moment on, it was possible to produce and trade, including retail, clothing and accessories. At the same time, it was allowed to hire third-party processing as well as processing for third parties.

This meant that there was a need for an increase in capital that went from Lire 20 million to Lire 90 million⁴³.

At this point, Rosso suggested to Goldschmied a partnership based on the promotion of new design labels. Despite the unhappy past, Goldschmied decided to sell and Rosso obtained the acquisition of 40% of the new Genius Group, which was launched in 1978. The Genius Group was responsible for the creation of numerous brand names, including Goldie, Ten Big Boys, Martin Guy and Katherine Hamnett, and of course the Diesel Jeans brand⁴⁴.

The 1979 is the beginning of Diesel's own independence that wants to separate itself from the organization of the Moltex Group. This came with the aim of abandoning the packaging of clothing products and starting to produce clothing labeled with the name Diesel.

At the time, the fashion market was characterized by a strong competition, followed by higher costs for new entrants' investments. However, Renzo Rosso was convinced of his abilities and of the brand ones. Therefore, he decided to start this adventure.

As the Company's structure and organization took shape, the number of employees and the trend of overseas sales increased.

Finally, by the year 1979, Rosso introduces his first full menswear collection around the Diesel name.

Sales outside Italy recorded a constant increase in the following year. In fact, about one-third of the production of the time was sold overseas.

⁴² Adriano Goldschmied was born on November 23rd, 1943 in Vico Canavese. He is an Italian fashion designer who focuses on denim jeans. He is also known as "the Godfather of denim".

⁴³ Camera di commercio industria artigianato e agricoltura di Vicenza, *Ufficio registro delle imprese, Diesel S.p.A.*, enrollement date February 19th 1996 (00642650246)

⁴⁴ FundingUniverse, Diesel SpA History, <http://www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/diesel-spa-history/>, (consultation date 17th may 2017)

2.1.2 Diesel S.p.A

A significant step in the history of the Diesel Company took place in 1982. During this year an extraordinary meeting was convened in order to increase the capital equity and transform the Company into a S.p.A⁴⁵ (Società per azioni- Joint stock company). From that moment on, the firm took the name of Diesel S.p.A, while the location, duration and object of the business were confirmed. The capital increase was significantly higher than the one happened in 1978 and it amounted to Lire 300 million⁴⁶.

At the same time, in 1982, there was a further increase in sales, at both national and international level. Once the European market has been consolidated, it was time for Diesel to head to the United States and the Middle East. Nevertheless, the Company did not care about competition and decided to invest in countries that were not equally considered as Egypt, Israel, Kuwait and the Emirates, which, according to the *Vicentino* entrepreneur, represented the new frontier for denim jeans.

The move to expand the brand, both in Italy and abroad, took place through an agent trading organization.

Around 1983, Diesel's clothing and accessories advertisements also began to attract and gain more market share⁴⁷.

The following year confirmed the positive trend of the business even though, in 1984, Diesel ended the yearly statement with a loss that mainly depended on advertising and promotion costs. However, the goal was focused on giving the right importance to the right resources of the Company.

The first step was the introduction a new product category. Dieselito⁴⁸, belonging to *Diesel Kids*, was presented so to extend the jeans-based fashion to cover the entire range of

⁴⁵ "The S.p.A, a Joint Stock Company, is clearly a capital company, in which the shareholdings of the shareholders are expressed in shares with legal personality and with perfect capital autonomy. This means that the share capital is divided into securities, each of which involves a share of participation and the social rights associated with the share itself"

Amministrazione aziendale, Società per azioni, <http://www.amministrazioneaziendale.com/societa-per-azioni.php> (consultation date June 12th, 2017)

⁴⁶ Camera di commercio industria artigianato e agricoltura di Vicenza, *Ufficio registro delle imprese, Diesel S.p.A*, enrollement date February 19th 1996 (00642650246)

⁴⁷ FundingUniverse, Diesel SpA History, <http://www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/diesel-spa-history/>, (consultation date 17th May 2017)

⁴⁸ DIESELITO is a trademark owned by DIESEL S.p.A.
TradeMarkia, Dieselito trademark information,

younger markets. In fact, Rosso wanted to ensure a larger market share that he expected to grow over the years. Equally important, Diesel entered into a contract with New York's Wilson Mills, which had been granted the permission to use the label for a period, in order to promote and disseminate the brand in the United States.

At the end of 1985, Diesel's capital amounted to Lire 1 billion. The Company's success came alongside with basic organizational changes within it. In fact, there have been variations in the most important charges: Adriano Goldschmied resigns. This was happily taken by Renzo Rosso who praised his colleague by outlining him as his master as well as someone who had believed in him, more than once. Instead, Battista Ferro took Goldschmied place. The end of the relationship with Adriano Goldschmied ended the collaboration between Diesel and Genius Group, as well.

At this point, Ferro was appointed as the Director of the Diesel Spa, while Rosso as the Chairman of the Board of Directors.⁴⁹

However, Battista Ferro's assignment lasted shortly and on 21st May, 1987, he resigned.

At this point, a historic turning point took place in Diesel, where a single Administrator replaced the administrative organ of the entire firm: Renzo Rosso himself. With 100 percent control in his hands, Renzo Rosso would finally be able to express his way of doing fashion. There was an increase in recruitments and what Diesel was particularly looking for, it was a new generation of design staff. Young graduates in design were hired from all around the world with the aim to ignore what the rest of the world's fashion community was doing and create a brand new style in clothing that was able to reflect their personalities and that of their boss.

On same year, in July, the merger between Diesel S.p.A and Italgläubert S.p.A, the acquired and owner of the property in which Diesel operated in Molvena, took place. Because of this merger, Diesel could detect the property assets and gain more and more benefits. In addition, and because of this move, the Company's profit in 1985 doubled.

Three years later earnings were still rising and this constant growing underlined, once again, the positive performance of the business led by Renzo Rosso. Diesel entered into business

<https://www.trademarkia.com/dieselito-73491640.html> (consultation date 20th September 2017)

⁴⁹ FundingUniverse, Diesel SpA History,

<http://www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/diesel-spa-history/>, (consultation date 17th May 2017)

with Eliporth S.r.l.⁵⁰. From this acquisition Diesel's administrator acquired space for sale for Lire 220 million⁵¹.

The 1988 represented a brilliant year for the Company that is now established worldwide, and whose brand is demanded by the most well-known and qualified actors in the fashion industry. Given the success, a fundamental move is seen the acquisition of some shares from the laundry named Erredi S.r.l.⁵², which had state-of-the-art facilities and technologies that were indispensable to the production of Diesel's distinctive denim style.

The planning methods that distinguished Diesel designers quickly helped the Company to develop a nonconformist and offbeat reputation, just like the one of its leader. In addition, the avant-garde design has proved to be immensely attractive mainly for the European market and especially for the youngest slice of the society. In 1989, there was the debut of the Diesel Female collection, which further expanded and contributed to the achievement of market share⁵³.

April 21st, 1990, marks another important turning point in Diesel's administrative structure: Renzo Rosso is officially granted all the wisdom of ordinary and extraordinary administration. At the same time, Augusto Rosini is appointed full member of the Board of Directors with full powers, including the ability to "supervise the Company organization and its development with particular reference to the productive and commercial sectors"⁵⁴. Maria Tosin, a member of the Board of Directors, assumed all the powers provided by the relative position, including the use of credit and bank accounts. Therefore, she had to do administrative and fiscal duties. In order to manage direct sales in the American market, Diesel acquired Tandem S.r.l. This one was in charge of searching and buying real estate in the American territory. This move would

⁵⁰ It is a Company that deals with the retail of clothing articles, based in Padova iCRIBS, Compagnia Eliporth S.r.l., https://www.informazione-aziende.it/Azienda_COMPAGNIA-ELIPORTH-SRL (consultation date 20th September 2017)

⁵¹ Camera di commercio industria artigianato e agricoltura di Vicenza, *Ufficio registro delle imprese, Diesel S.p.A*, enrolment date February 19th 1996 (00642650246)

⁵² Erre.Di. S.r.l is an Italian firm founded in 1961, which is involved in the production of Camlock VR fittings and the assembly of flexible hoses Erredi S.r.l Official Website, Azienda, <http://www.erredisrl.it/index.php?lang=it> (consultation date 20th September 2017)

⁵³ FundingUniverse, Diesel SpA History, <http://www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/diesel-spa-history/>, (consultation date 17th May 2017)

⁵⁴ Note deposited by Renzo Rosso, director of Diesel S.p.A on April 21st, 1990.

have enabled the Company to handle the image oversea. At the same time, the retail distribution was entrusted to Soho Price CO, a New York-based Company.

The following year, 1991, represented a hallmark in Diesel's history as the firm decided to invest further in the advertising sector and to do so DDB Paradiset⁵⁵ was assumed. This was a Stockholm-based advertising firm known for its ability to produce state-of-the-art advertising, which was perfectly fitting Diesel's case. Once the relationship between the Swedish Company and Diesel creative team was established, the common goal was to convey both the image and soul of the Italian brand so that it could be widespread in all international markets. Despite the competitiveness of the jeans market, the controversy and ability to hit and attract attention through advertising, brought Diesel to sell denim clothes up to Dollars 200 and increase its growth worldwide⁵⁶.

Another major breakthrough took place in 1993 when Tosin was given more extensive powers of extraordinary and ordinary administration with unique and free signatures while Renzo Rosso powers were referred to only law and statute. Augusto Risini, on the other hand, was charged with managing the Company's development and organization. This role lasted until his resignation due to family reasons on December 23rd. At this point, the two directors were Rosso and Tosin⁵⁷.

The 1994 was a year mainly dedicated to the introduction of new product categories. Renzo Rosso, as a snowboarding enthusiast, wanted to develop extreme sports dedicated clothing. However, from this idea 55-DSL was born: category of sportswear bearing the name and style of Diesel. Not only that, the firm decided to undertake a licensing program in order to label a variety of different fashion objects. The first Company that accepted Diesel's proposal was Safilo that, in 1994, launched the Diesel Shades eyewear line. Given the success of the glasses, several production chains immediately began and they included perfumes, footwear, luggage and watches, all performed by equally skilled Companies⁵⁸.

⁵⁵ DDB promise "We stand accountable for the work we provide you. We are not just advertising people who strive for better results. (And if you don't believe us, you can make sure that your success is of mutually critical interest. We always include the option of a payment by results clause)"

DDB Stockholm, About, <http://www.ddb.se/about> (consultation date June 12th, 2017)

⁵⁶ FundingUniverse, Diesel SpA History,

<http://www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/diesel-spa-history/>, (consultation date 17th May 2017)

⁵⁷ Camera di commercio industria artigianato e agricoltura di Vicenza, *Ufficio registro delle imprese, Diesel S.p.A*, enrollement date February 19th 1996 (00642650246)

⁵⁸ FundingUniverse, Diesel SpA History,

<http://www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/diesel-spa-history/>, (consultation date 17th May 2017)

The capital increase in 1995 was around 10 billion euros and this brought the Company statutes to change once again, and it was stipulated a clause stating that it was possible to open subsidiaries, agencies and representative offices in any location in the country and abroad. In addition, Maria Tosin was appointed Vice President of the Company. This will have positive result in the business management⁵⁹.

The following year opened the need for qualified personnel to further improve. The quality breakthrough from a small Company to a multinational one took place in 1996, when Diesel decided to acquire importers and distributors placed abroad and turn them into branch offices directly run by the headquarter in Italy. Therefore, there has been a move towards the standardization of systems and procedures so as to make the whole set of firms a homogeneous reality. A striking example is the acquisition of direct product distribution through which Diesel could open a single-brand chain of stores. By doing so, the Company finally opened up the doors of the national and international retailers with a further strengthening of the brand and its image. New stores opened in Italy, France, Great Britain Denmark and the United States.

By doing so, in 1996, Diesel recorded a rise in turnover over the previous years⁶⁰.

The positive trend in the financial statement occurred also in 1997. Diesel was in constantly looking for both new materials and styles as well as for technologies and relationships. This year saw the opening of many and many stores such as those in Barcelona, Chicago, San Francisco, Las Vegas, Hong Kong and Glasgow, which implied a rise in staffing that, at the end of the year, counted more or less a thousand employees.

Greater satisfaction arrived with the award given to the Company as *Advertiser of the Year*, giving Diesel a brand new reputation and placing it among the world's largest labels. This award was interpreted as a suggestion for continuing to create quality and trend materials without the need to conform to the rest of the market. Investments in marketing and advertising increased in the following years in order to promote not only a pair of jeans but also a real lifestyle⁶¹.

⁵⁹ Camera di commercio industria artigianato e agricoltura di Vicenza, *Ufficio registro delle imprese, Diesel S.p.A*, enrollement date February 19th 1996 (00642650246)

⁶⁰ FundingUniverse, Diesel SpA History, <http://www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/diesel-spa-history/>, (consultation date 17th May 2017)

⁶¹ R. Gaiba, "Diesel – la comunicazione dirompente e trasgressiva di una azienda", *Trama e Ordito-il blog della moda*, 15th May 2017 (consultation date 13th May 2017)

The economic recovery from the crisis of the previous years began in 1999, when Diesel recorded a rise in net profit. This year represents the scenario for the transfer of part of the Company's assets to Red Circle S.r.l, a subsidiary of Diesel that was involved in the purchase, sale, exchange, construction and renovation of buildings and manufacturing areas. Additionally, technology advances pushed Diesel to adopt a new procedure with respect to orders via the Internet, by which it was able to standardize order inputs and reduce errors.

2.1.3 2000s

The European scenario at the beginning of the 2000 marks the entry into force of the Euro. The currency change increased both the cost and the value of production. In this year, Diesel recorded a net profit equal to Euro 1,411,563⁶².

The new millennium is also characterized by the purchase of Staff International as a whole. Despite the fact that the Company was very close to bankruptcy just before Diesel bought it. Renzo Rosso's goal was to remain in the casual wear market but to enter and grow in the luxury goods market as well. This move is the perfect representation of the path that Diesel wants to undertake.⁶³

The year 2001, it was the most profitable year ever since the birth of the Company. In addition, the share capital raised to Euro 10 million, and Andrea Rosso⁶⁴, Renzo Rosso's son, joined the Board of Directors.

Additionally, Diesel focused on corporate growth and tracked an expansion program. The main targets at the beginning of 2001 were the Spanish and Portuguese markets: Diesel replaced third-party distributors with its own domestic subsidiaries, as the objective was to consolidate retail sales⁶⁵.

⁶² Camera di commercio industria artigianato e agricoltura di Vicenza, *Ufficio registro delle imprese, Diesel S.p.A*, enrolment date February 19th 1996 (00642650246)

⁶³ FundingUniverse, Diesel SpA History, <http://www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/diesel-spa-history/>, (consultation date 17th May 2017)

⁶⁴ Andrea currently represents the 55-DSL line
The Wardarobe, "Andrea Rosso e 55DSL: quando carisma e personalità fanno la differenza", *The Wardarobe*, 26th April 2012 (consultation date 20th September 2017)

⁶⁵ FundingUniverse, Diesel SpA History, <http://www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/diesel-spa-history/>, (consultation date 17th May 2017)

Capital increased again in 2002 and reached Euro 25,000,000. Only the Brave (OTB) started to directly control Diesel, while the business continued to improve. The same could not be said about Staff International that reported serious losses, which were fortunately healed by the parent Company.

If 2003 represented a transition year, in 2004 the Diesel made various investments in the buildings and at the production level. In addition, 2004 saw the creation of prototypes for the jewelery line of the brand.

This year Renzo Rosso received honorary citizenship in Bronte, a place famous for pistachios but, for Diesel, it represents the place where more than a million denim jeans were produced every year.

In 2005, Renzo Rosso received the *Pitti Immagine Uomo* award, a prize addressed to Italian entrepreneurs who are able to emerge for their innovation work and the quality of their products.

Not only is Renzo Rosso a well-known fashion man but he is also involved in social works: in 2006, *Only the Brave Foundation* was born, a charity foundation created for humanitarian purposes and social solidarity.

Three years later, in 2008, part of the production was delegated to the K-Bit Morocco Company Sarl, located in Morocco. Diesel Kids also underwent OTB control, and a license agreement with the Californian Company Global Brand Marketing is signed⁶⁶.

Once the building in Breganze was finished, this was so successful that at the inauguration, Emma Marcegaglia and Luca Zaia were present and their words were no less than these: "This is the example of the Italy, in this case the Veneto, that works"⁶⁷. The headquarter was built to provide all the services needed by workers to facilitate their work and everyday life, at the same time.

In 2010, Renzo Rosso received another award, the *Rinaldo Mezzalira Award* for his commitment to various sectors of the society, giving himself and his place in the world of fashion even more prestigious.

⁶⁶ FundingUniverse, Diesel SpA History, <http://www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/diesel-spa-history/>, (consultation date 17th May 2017)

⁶⁷ "Questo è l'esempio dell'Italia, in questo caso il Veneto, che funziona"
A. Tich, "Rosso inaugura il suo "Village", la Marcegaglia bacchetta il governo", *bassanonet.it*, 15th September 2010 (consultation date 19th May 2017)

At this point, the Company is present around the world with more than 400 single-brand sales stores.

In 2011, Diesel S.p.A incorporated Diesel International B.V. Through a merger whose act specifies that, this merger has nothing to do with the failure of the latter but for other reasons⁶⁸.

Diesel incorporates the 55-DSL through fusion in October 2012 and in the same year, Renzo Rosso is quoted by the Forbes magazine and included in the list of the richest men in the world⁶⁹.

2.1.4 Diesel today

After the success of the realization of Diesel Farm, changes were made in terms of the Company's both internal and external structure.

The administrative management changed starting with the positioning of Alessandro Bogliolo as CEO and Nicola Formichetti as a new creative director. With respect to the external organization, on the other hand, Diesel has drastically reduced European branches by deciding to keep the showrooms alive. This decision was probably dictated by the not particularly favorable economic period for the Company but, at the same time, these moves found comfort in the new technologies and trends of the fashion market.

Diesel's goal for the upcoming future, as Renzo Rosso has said, is to create a wider range of Companies and brands that are characterized by a modern strategic vision. By trusting his own ideas and what has always driven him to grow, Rosso sees it as an automatic and proper pattern to create synergies and make acquisitions⁷⁰.

There is still no precise information regarding the Company's stock market listing. In fact, in times of restructuring and settling like this ones, getting into the stock market would not be a

⁶⁸ Camera di commercio industria artigianato e agricoltura di Vicenza, *Ufficio registro delle imprese, Diesel S.p.A*, enrollement date February 19th 1996 (00642650246)

⁶⁹ E.Vallin, "Diesel? È stanca-Rosso riorganizza e punta sui creativi", *Il Mattino di Padova*, 12th September 2014 (consultation date 13th May 2017)

⁷⁰ F. Spini, "Renzo Rosso: Ristrutturiamo Diesel e faremo acquisizioni", *La stampa*, 28th November 2016 (consultation date 13th May 2017)

pretty good move. Being quoted implies precise commitments that Diesel will probably undertake in the future⁷¹.

The economic crisis affecting Italy, but spreading more or less globally, has led to a perilous fall in sales in the clothing sector related to the brand for jeans and underwear, knitwear and accessories. In parallel, there has been an increase in the incidence of structural costs, resulting in a loss of operational efficiency and profitability. The situation gets its climax in the budget dating back to 2016, confirming a difficult year. Diesel's current turnover amounts to 960 million with a loss of 10 million. It is then, the time to rationalize and rearrange some activities by intervening in a structural way to reverse this overwhelming trend. That is why recently Diesel had to face a collective dismissal of 37 employees.

The CEO objectively declares that this is one of the worst period for the fashion world as consumers are changing their buying methods. The purchasing budget is directed towards other priorities, first of all, the physical and well-being ones. Therefore, the purchase power is centered on food and fitness. Then, there must be a continuous challenge in trying to convince the market to spend on clothing⁷².

However, Renzo Rosso continues to diversify his investments and, three years ago, he decided to enter the food world and buy shares of the NaturaSi Company. Probably this move has been taken for the reasons explained before: the tendency of consumers to spend more on food than clothing. Nevertheless, Rosso is passionate about this world and he declared: "Everything that is organic is of interest to me, to be able to eat well, today, for me, is the true luxury. I would like to be able to bring a lot of people to work the ground. Organic products allow you to pay normal wages and not be loan sharks, as we have read about Puglia, where people are enslaved. I am open to new investments in beautiful properties to be converted to organic, I have already converted my farm into that."⁷³

⁷¹ E.Vallin, "Diesel? È stanca-Rosso riorganizza e punta sui creativi", *Il Mattino di Padova*, 12th September 2014 (consultation date 13th May 2017)

⁷² R. B, "Calanole vendite Diesel annuncia 37 licenziamenti", *Il giornale di Vicenza*, 5th May 2017 (consultation date 13th May 2017)

⁷³ "Tutto ciò che è bio mi interessa moltissimo, poter mangiare bene per me oggi è il vero lusso. Mi piacerebbe riuscire a portare molta gente a lavorare la terra. I prodotti bio permettono di pagare salari normali e non di fare lo strozzinaggio di cui abbiamo letto in Puglia e in cui le persone vengono schiavizzate. Sono aperto a nuovi investimenti in belle proprietà da convertire a bio, ho già convertito in questo senso anche la mia fattoria"

M.S Sacchi, "Renzo Rosso: «Il bio è il nuovo lusso. Dopo NaturaSi, altri acquisti»", *Il Corriere della Sera*, 12th October 2015 (consultation date 4th June 2017)

What has been presented is therefore the general picture of Diesel, its trend and its investments. But, what should we expect from the future of the firm?

Diesel is reviewing both the market approach and the organizational model, organizational implementations are under scrutiny to find greater efficiency and speed in the distribution structures. The goal is to recalibrate relationships between department stores and stores. Also new hires are in place. In the "reboot" greater importance is given to people: new energies come from the artistic director Nicola Formichetti. Diesel today seeks quality to differentiate itself from the "cheap jeans". However, the future is not just denim, but complementary yet top secret categories⁷⁴.

⁷⁴ P. Bottelli, "Renzo Rosso: il risveglio di Diesel, Marni e Mariangela due perle. E puntiamo anche sul cibo bio", Il Mattino di Padova, 29th October 2015, (consultation date 13th May 2017)

2.2 Diesel main characters

Right now, the two people who best represent the brand Diesel are Renzo Rosso and Nicola Formichetti. The first, Company's founder and absolute soul of the brand, has always lived his life at one hundred percent, catching all the opportunities offered to him and making the most of his chances. Thanks to his character, he has been able to make Diesel, and not only, a world-renowned brand. Nicola Formichetti, on the other hand, recently added to Diesel's staff as creative director, is the genius behind the latest Diesel-launched advertising campaigns aimed at "rebooting" the brand and bringing it back to the shine of the past.

2.2.1 Renzo Rosso

Renzo Rosso, Diesel Founder and OTB Group Chairman, is one of the richest men in Italy who perfectly embodies the image of the Italian entrepreneur since he was a child. According to *Forbes* magazine, Renzo Rosso, a 60-year-old man with 7 children, owns a capital close to 3 billion euros.

He is a social networking star. On Twitter, where he posted 1,999 tweets, he has more than 48,000 followers, while on Facebook he can count over 88,000 likes. *Reputation Manager*, the online reputation monitoring service, crowned him as the third Company man in Italy for online presence⁷⁵.

Despite the fact that Renzo Rosso was born from a peasant family, he perfectly embodies the parable of the man who was able to make himself grow overtime. Today, he controls international brands such as Diesel, Maison Martin Margiela and Viktor & Rolf. Moreover, through Staff International, he is the producer and distributor of DSquared2, Just Cavalli, Vivienne Westwood and Marc Jacobs's male line.

He is part of the new Board of the National Chamber of Fashion and he is recognized as one of the most important entrepreneurs in the international fashion system. Renzo Rosso is literally a volcano. He overwhelms drags and changes the landscape⁷⁶.

⁷⁵ Redazione Millionaire, "Renzo Rosso, storia di un imprenditore che si è fatto da sé", *Redazione Millionaire*, 7th February 2017 (consultation date 13th May 2017)

⁷⁶ C. Morvillo, "Il welfare secondo Renzo Rosso: dall'azienda eco al microcredito", *Corriere della Sera*, 21st October 2014 (consultation date 15th May 2017)

His career began in the late 1970s when he became co-founder of Diesel next to Adriano Goldschmied. As we previously saw, Rosso will then take full control of the Company and make it to the top of the fashion world thanks to His exuberance, the provocative advertising campaigns and the ability to create significant networks.

Renzo Rosso was born in Brugine, in the Northeast of Italy, on September 15th 1955, from a family of farmers. Step by step, his propensity to entrepreneurship was clear: at the age of ten he began breeding rabbits: he passed from the first rabbit that was given to him as a present, to count more than 100 rabbits whose selling provided him with a significant profit⁷⁷. At the age of 15 he enrolled in Ruzza, a technical high school in Padua specialized in the training of technicians for the textile industry. "I did not like to study", Rosso admitted during an interview, "and the rumor about this new school that had just opened - the first fashion school in Italy- It would be very easy to graduate"⁷⁸. Therefore, despite his little passion for studying, he joined it. He graduated in 1975 and deepened his passion for fashion. Then he started producing his own clothes, first of all a pair of low-waisted elephant jeans from his mother's Singer sewing machine. Thanks to that Rosso immediately understood that being original is a value. Because his mother sews and wears his jeans, Renzo received a lot of requests from his friends and classmates, so he started packing others for sale. When the time came, he decided to enroll at the Cà Foscari University of Economics in Venice, but the university career lasted very little. Indeed, shortly after a job interview with Adriano Goldschmied, he left the University to start working within the Moltex Company. Here Rosso worked as a production manager. A position that was questioned by Goldschmied who accused the young man of being lazy and wanted to lay him off. Instead of surrendering, Renzo Rosso convinces him to give him a second chance by reducing his salary and giving him more challenging work in order to stimulate him. The experience is enlightening: Rosso still claims to have learned everything about the profession and the lesson of life from this challenge. In fact, this move worked, so that Renzo Rosso took the reins of the game and made a proposal to its leader: a partnership for the birth of a new brand. Adriano accepted and decided to sell to Renzo 40% of the Genius Group, founded in 1978.

⁷⁷ FundingUniverse, Diesel SpA History, <http://www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/diesel-spa-history/>, (consultation date 17th May 2017)

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*

For the name of the new brand, Rosso chooses Diesel, convinced by the international sound appeal. The brand was pronounced more or less in the same way around the world, creating a world concept and giving the idea of age and lifestyle associated with the label⁷⁹.

Starting in 1979, they launched the male brand collection and the first international sales were recorded in 1981. Rosso bought 100% of Diesel in 1985, with less than 20 people working mainly on jeans, alongside casual wear. Over the years, the Diesel brand grown fast, allowing Rosso to acquire other major brands, from Maison Margiela to Marni, passing through Viktor & Rolf and Staff, all now united under the holding Only the Brave.

In 2016, the holding recorded an equity of 1.58 billion euros, with an operating EBITDA of 68 million euros (68.5 million in 2015) and consolidated profit of 3.8 million euros (3.5 million in 2015). All these numbers make it possible to rank Rosso as the 12th richest man in Italy. In fact, according to *Forbes*, he has a fortune of Dollar 3 billion, and he is the world's 660th billionaire according to the American magazine's ranking.

The CEO of Diesel is passionate about fashion and well being, but not only. Renzo Rosso has always been interested in the world of football: in 1996 the entrepreneur bought the team of his city of origin, *Bassano Calcio*. Today the team is in *Lega Pro* and the management is entrusted to his son Stefano Rosso, now the President of the club. However, being a man who tries to do great things, Renzo Rosso has decided to tie the Diesel brand to one of the strongest teams in the Italian soccer championship, as well as the team he has been a fan of since he was a child. Although the intention was to take part in the transfer actions of Milan, Rosso said the team needs resources that he is not able to provide now because he prefers to focus on managing the Companies he already owns. Thus, he decided to start a sponsorship relationship that links the Milan team to his brand⁸⁰.

Renzo Rosso's commitment is also tied to the social field: it reminds us of the construction of a village in Mali and the actions he took more privately as for example his last trip to Burma. Not only, almost all the Companies he controls, they are engaged in social actions and he personally put five million euros available for the earthquake victims in Emilia Romagna in 2012. "From time to time, I have been trying to make myself socially useful. I never bragged,

⁷⁹ Redazione Millionaire, "Renzo Rosso, storia di un imprenditore che si è fatto da sé", *Redazione Millionaire*, 7th February 2017 (consultation date 13th May 2017)

⁸⁰ Redazione, "Quanto vale Renzo Rosso, il patron della Diesel accostato al Milan", *Calcio e Finanza*, 21st March 2017 (consultation date 13th May 2017)

but there are occasions when I like it"⁸¹. The more well-known public social events are for example the hosting, in the Diesel Italia headquarter, of the competition promoted by *Make a Change*, which aims at bringing together managers, entrepreneurs and graduates to give space to their socially innovative and useful start-up ideas.

There is attention to society and nature. It is not only about passion but it is a real attitude at living the world with others. This propensity in helping the environment has resulted in concrete actions such as the creation of an ecological headquarters, the rescue of an old vineyard, the creation of a business asylum and the restoration of the Rialto Bridge in Venice. Salvo Testa, a manager of fashion business management at Bocconi University in Milan speaks of the entrepreneur from Vicenza as an innovative man since the early years of his career. He managed to turn American jeans into a new one with cuts, abrasions and finishes, transforming it from a low-end product to a costly and sophisticated fashion product. However, innovation is not just in the product. He himself became the testimonial of his clothing, and he decided to focus his marketing campaigns on a decisive, provocative, transgressive register and he wanted to be able to convey to the consumer a lifestyle in which to identify themselves.

Renzo Rosso is very focused on the youth world, from the dynamics of his consumers, to the taste of the audience to which his Companies are addressed. He claims he does not pay too much attention to the statistics. In order to find his new ideas he prefers to talk to people, he carefully looks at what is around him and more and more often, he makes researches on the Web⁸².

When it comes to hire new personnel, Renzo Rosso seeks for specific skills in his employees. He does not pay attention only to the school education but what is evaluated as even more important is the heart and passion of people. In an interview at *Corriere della Sera*, Diesel's number one, explains what he wants to see in people working with him and for him. It is not enough to be good and capable, to be successful today, a person must own one of the most

⁸¹ C. Morvillo, "Il welfare secondo Renzo Rosso: dall'azienda eco al microcredito", *Corriere della Sera*, 21st October 2014 (consultation date 15th May 2017)

⁸² Redazione Millionaire, "Renzo Rosso, storia di un imprenditore che si è fatto da sé", *Redazione Millionaire*, 7th February 2017 (consultation date 13th May 2017)

difficult elements to teach and learn: the passion for what you are doing. Speed, heart, love and passion are the fundamental elements for Diesel's people.

The story of Renzo Rosso and how he manages his Company is an inspiration for all the entrepreneurs in the world, but above all for his children. He was asked how Diesel will proceed once he will decide to stop leading, and which role his children will play. He explains that he has always tried to transmit his passion and how important it is to work not only with the head but, above all, with the heart. He always explained to them that if a penny falls, you must gather it, and that nothing is free of charge. A demonstration of this is the moment when his son Stefano was expelled in fourth year of high school, Rosso sent him to work as a bricklayer. Today he is OTB CEO and he is conducting a very good job.

2.2.2 Nicola Formichetti

Creative director Nicola Formichetti has managed to position himself at the very center of industry thanks to his ability to get in touch with the Millennials generation, thanks to his ability to keep up to date with the times through the use of social media. Not only that, its aesthetic taste has been world-wide appreciated so that he was on everyone's mouth.

Nicola Formichetti, born in Tokyo, Japan, on 31st May 1977, is a Japanese designer and artistic director with Italian citizenship. His father is of Italian origin, while his mother is Japanese.

Right after teenager years, Formichetti decided to move to London to study architecture, or at least this was what he told his parents. However, instead of focusing on studies, the young Italian-Japanese man spent three years wandering around the nightlife scene of London clubs. During this period, Formichetti began to work at The Pinneal Eye, the leading retailer in the market and considered as one of the most prompted fashion institute in London's Soho. He spent two years working and looking for the right training in order to become the Buyer's chief and confirm himself as the best creative director.

During this time, Nicola Formichetti met Katy England, a very important contact, as she was the fashion editor of *Dazed* and *Confused*. In fact, Katy offered the young man to manage a page of his newspaper called *Eye Spy*, monthly. Not only that, thanks to the work at Dazed magazine, Formichetti was definitively launched into London's burgeoning new style scenes that the magazine was able to offer him. For example, he was hired for different projects from

several other city magazines including *V*, *V Man*, *Another*, *Another Man* and *Arena Homme*. All this well done work in London guaranteed Formichetti the opportunity to refine his talent in his readiness for his next role as Dazed's fashion editor, to which he was appointed in 2005. This role lasted until he was titled creative Director in 2008. In September of that same year, he was offered the role of Fashion Director of *Vogue Hommes Japan*, and he accepted⁸³.

Another significant breakthrough in the career of the artistic creator took place in 2009, during Lady Gaga's shooting for *V Magazine*. We can say that between the two, love at first sight happened. And this was so strong and disclosed that Formichetti became the singer's personal designer. The most memorable looks that can be remembered date back to the 2010 MTV Music Awards, with the meat-made dress, and the 53rd Grammy Awards where Gaga came with a dress from Hussein Chalayan egg. The collaborations with the American singer gave him a huge fame in the world of fashion, exactly what he was looking for. In November 2010, he was named one of the most influential creative forces in modern fashion. In addition, the following month he won the Isabella Award Blow in the category *Fashion Maker* during the British Fashion Awards⁸⁴.

After that, he became creative director of a fashion house based in France, Thierry Mulger, now rebranded as Mulger. The pledge lasted for more or less two years.

In 2013 Nicola Formichetti was called by Renzo Rosso who wanted him as the new creative director of the Diesel brand. The agreement between the two businessmen guaranteed success right away. Formichetti has emitted an electrifying energy to the famous brand thanks to collaborations, innovative campaigns, cool collections and a great tune with the latest forms of communication. "When Renzo asked me to collaborate with him," he said, "I remembered how Diesel and I share the same spirit. No rules! It is all about having the power to do something, to be free. It is a positive revolution. We are ready to reboot! Press the refresh key. This is our first project: we will destroy everything to rebuild something bigger. I want to involve creative young people around the world and make them part of the process"⁸⁵.

⁸³ L. Lanzoni, "Nicola Formichetti intervista "on the house" al direttore creativo di Diesel", *Elle*, 2nd February, 2016 (consultation date 19th May 2017)

⁸⁴ BOF (Business of Fashion), "Formichetti Nicola, artistic director Diesel", *BOF*, 22nd May 2017 (consultation date 19th may 2017)

⁸⁵ "Quando Renzo mi ha chiesto di collaborare con lui" ha dichiarato Nicola Formichetti "mi sono ricordato di come io e Diesel condividiamo lo stesso spirito. Niente regole! E' tutta una questione di avere il potere di fare qualcosa, di essere liberi. E' una rivoluzione positiva. Siamo pronti a un reboot! A premere il tasto refresh. Questo

Everything started with the viral image of a Papeon projected on historic buildings in Milan and Rome: Castello Sforzesco, the Navigli, Milvio Bridge and even the Colosseum were the scenarios of Diesel's call-to-action. His appointment as Diesel's creative director since has ensured fashion's most contemporary iconoclast has a commercial platform that is considerable enough to test just how much he can achieve.

In fact, in late 2016, after three years of collaboration with the brand, Diesel is going very well. For example, the first single-store shop was opened at Madison Avenue, New York. It is as if it was a real new beginning for the brand. As the new fashion store philosophy emphasizes, it was born from a "convesation" between Renzo and Formichetti, where the two came to the conclusion that Diesel Stores were already thought as real homes, with large sofas, a cozy living Room, a very cozy environment. Therefore, they wanted to go back to the basics and reformulate that concept in a modern way, creating a newer contemporary version. "I wanted to furnish just as I would have furnished my home"⁸⁶, said the artistic director, with the advice of Japanese architect Masamichi Katayama of Wonderwall.

The purpose is to revive the brand's features: freedom, creativity, originality and, above all, courage. That is why Diesel needs a new generation of brand ambassadors and fashion influencers who will create a new creative community around the brand.

è il nostro primo progetto: distruggeremo tutto per ricostruire qualcosa di più grande. Voglio coinvolgere i giovani creativi di tutto il mondo e renderli parte del processo"

N. Falco Simeone, "Diesel Reboot: la rinascita del brand con Nicola Formichetti", *Ninja Marketing*, 20th June 2013 (consultation date 18th May 2017)

⁸⁶"L'ho voluto arredare proprio come avrei arredato casa mia"

L. Lanzoni, "Nicola Formichetti intervista 'on the house' al direttore creativo di Diesel", *Elle*, 2nd February, 2016 (consultation date 19th May 2017)

3. THE PHILOSOPHY BEHIND THE BRAND

There are several elements that make of a brand emerge exactly for what it is. It is important and indispensable for each Company to be able to identify and develop these elements in such a way as to make their brand unique and irreplaceable. Especially in the fashion world, where imitation and copying is always around the corner, defining details, even the smaller ones, is fundamental. We will see how Diesel, by its side, had succeeded in developing its own brand philosophy and identity so that it was, and it still is, able to be different from the other firm in the market. Sometimes even a step ahead in the whole fashion system.

3.1 The brand

“A brand is a distinguishing symbol, mark, logo, name, word, sentence or a combination of these items that Companies use to distinguish their product from others in the market. Legal protection given to a brand name is called a trademark”⁸⁷. “In consumer marketing, brands often provide the primary points of differentiation between competitive offerings, and as such they can be critical to the success of companies”

Given this definition, it is spontaneous to identify the brand as one of the most precious assets a Company holds.

In fact, it represents the face, the visible and recognizable logo, the slogan, and so on.

However, the brand is not just something recognizable at sight. When the Company is listed, it brings with it a monetary value on the stock market, which affects the value of shareholders as it rises or falls. For these reasons, it is important to maintain the brand’s integrity. Likewise, when a Company decides to establish a brand, it must determine its identity and how it wants to be seen from the outside. The goal is to make the brand results as memorable and attractive as possible for the consumers. A brand is said to be successful when it is able to portray its message and convey what the Company is trying to cope and achieve.

In order to have a complete and clear definition of the brand concept we will try to distinguish it from other elements that could be interchanged. Brand and, what we call in Italian *marchio*

⁸⁷ What is a 'Brand' Investopedia, Brand, <http://www.investopedia.com/terms/b/brand.asp>, (consultation date 1st July 2017)

can be easily confused and simply Inter mistakenly exchanged. Indeed, if the *marchio* is considered to be a simple distinctive feature of the Company, the brand is not simply a symbol, but this substantive contains a number of elements that are constantly associated with it. In the Diesel case all these elements are represented by the so-called and famous lifestyle promoted by the Company. "The first identifies a simple collection, the second a real lifestyle"⁸⁸ said Renzo Rosso, referring respectively to *marchio* and brand definition and delineating the abysmal difference between the two.

Let us try to make a list of a substantial part of the elements that make up the brand and see how Diesel decided to exploit and adopt them to the best for itself. Among these elements, we can find the *name*, the *products*, the *logo*, the *shops*, the *philosophy*, the *price*, the *slogans* and the possible *collaboration with celebrities*.

A brand like Diesel needs a place within the market that can differentiate it from the other competitors, to be accepted and endorsed by consumers. The strategy Rosso had chosen started with the name. The name is "word(s) that identify not only a product but also its manufacture or producer, such as Apple, Coca Cola, IBM,..."⁸⁹.

Renzo Rosso chose the Diesel name especially for its international appeal pronounced more or less the same all over the world. This name fitted in with Rosso's concept of a single global market segmented not along national borders but along age and lifestyle lines. The entrepreneur himself imposed this name "because it is easy to understand and pronounced the same way around the world. At that time, Diesel was also considered an alternative energy, so the word stood for an alternative taste in fashion"⁹⁰.

Like the name, the functionality of the logo is a fundamental aspect for the brand, and like all the others, it should not be underestimated. It is, in fact, the main graphic representation of the Company, it is the visible part of the brand. The logo becomes the reference point in an ensemble of different brands and this is why the graphic representation has to be taken into account in the Company's marketing strategy.

⁸⁸ "Il primo identifica una semplice collezione, il secondo uno stile di vita", Pambianconews, "Renzo Rosso: Il ribelle ora sale in cattedra", estratto da Economy (Pambianconews), 30th July 2017 (consultation date 1st August 2017)

⁸⁹ Business Dictionary, brand name, <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/brand-name.html>, (consultation date 4th September 2017)

⁹⁰ Diesel Official Website, history, <http://fashiongear.fibre2fashion.com/brandstory/diesel/history.asp>, (consultation date 4th September 2017)

Diesel has become, over the years and internationally speaking, a brand which is synonymous of a way of life, a luxury emblem that has conquered both young and adult buyers with a pair of jeans.

The logo used by Diesel is basically represented by a red rectangle with the Diesel white word in uppercase letter. Due to the presence of this logo, it could be applied everywhere perfectly and still stand out. Ever since, despite the colorful pictures and images in advertising campaign, the logo was able to maintain its place and its white-red presence. However, there is not only the red rectangle, Diesel's mascot is represented by a Moycan. Diesel as the name and the Moycan as its logo represented a philosophy of life that simplifies the decision of that consumer who is now a hundred percent reflected in the uniqueness and totality of this brand.

Not only do the name and logo, the Company implemented different techniques and strategies to stand out from competitors, starting from the originality of the proposed products, which always appeared in advance of the current trends. "Product differentiation is a marketing process that showcases the differences between products. Differentiation looks to make a product more attractive by contrasting its unique qualities with other competing products. Successful product differentiation creates a competitive advantage for the product's seller, as customers view these products as being unique or superior"⁹¹. Diesel, in fact, has always been considered a pioneer brand in denim and casual fashion, it became rapidly famous because it refused market trends and because it followed its personal, irrational style. And the brand has always maintained his DNA since the early years.

Together with the product, it comes the price. Another element that is integrated part of the brand is pricing. Diesel has long been part of the luxury prêt-à-porter world market that has gained a *reputation brand*⁹² made of medium-high prices that the consumers are willing to pay for quality instead of quantity. Despite Rosso decided to sell his jeans at a price that was nearly \$200, he had managed to gain a fairly strong market share and open stores in the

⁹¹ Investopedia, what is product differentiation?,

http://www.investopedia.com/terms/p/product_differentiation.asp , (consultation date 4th September 2017)

⁹² "Brand reputation are the ideas and emotions that customers associate with a brand. It is the result of everything that a brand does including branding, promotion, pricing, product development, public relations, customer service and operations. As such, there is often a significant difference between how a firm wants customers to view a brand and how they actually view it"

Simplicable, Business Guide, What is Brand Reputation?, <http://simplicable.com/new/brand-reputation> (consultation date 1st July 2017)

most famous corners of the world's major Metropolis. All this was possible by wagering on quality at a time in the fashion world where store chains such as Zara and H&M were born and bet all about quantity⁹³. Stores are integrated part of a brand as well. In fact, it is important that stores, preferably located in the major fashion street all around the world, reflect the identity of the brand and its style. Anyway, we will talk about Diesel's retail stores further on.

Let us move to the philosophy aspect. Diesel philosophy has always remained the same since its founding in 1978, when Renzo Rosso had imagined a brand that would become synonymous of passion, individual style and self-expression. Passion is another indispensable element of this brand. When Rosso was asked to outline the level of passion in his firm, the CEO put particular attention to the importance of working with heart and enthusiasm. He has defined the passion for his work as "A line of conduct that fascinates. But, this passion could trigger panic if extended to other Companies. There are so many places in our country where words like *enthusiasm* or *passion* are far from reality"⁹⁴. Rosso stresses that this quality in people is fundamental to the growth of a business, to make sustainable differences within it and to the eyes of those who look from the outside.

Diesel's owner has based many of the brand's slogans and phrases in accordance with this way of managing his company and seeing the world. Elements such as slogans and mottos have a very powerful impact and are extremely efficient as they communicate and persuade the observer. Diesel has opted for phrases that tie their thoughts to a particular circumstance in the surrounding world. Some of the most memorable ones are *Diesel for successful living*, *Make love not walls*, *Be stupid*. These famous mottos are the protagonists of some of the most scandalous and recognized advertising campaigns by the brand all around the world. This is due to the effect and reaction that they have caused in the audience.

Celebrity endorsement is a factor that is good for the brand in the sense that it increases its general awareness. It is "A form of brand or advertising campaign that involves a well known person using their fame to help promote a product or service. Manufacturers of perfumes

⁹³ FundingUniverse, Diesel SpA History,

<http://www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/diesel-spa-history/>, (consultation date 17th May 2017)

⁹⁴ "Una linea di condotta che affascina. E che potrebbe generare il panico se estesa ad altre aziende. Sono davvero tanti i luoghi di lavoro nel nostro Paese in cui parole come *entusiasmo* o *passione* sono lontanissime dalla realtà" D. Grossi, "Cuore e passione: non li hai? Sei fuori. Con Rosso è rivoluzione in casa Diesel", *Bimag*, 20th March 2017 (consultation date 15th May 2017)

and clothing are some of the most common business users of classic celebrity endorsement techniques, such as television ads and launch event appearances, in the marketing of their products”⁹⁵. Although Diesel has never dedicated an ad to a specific celebrity or has undersigned exclusivity contracts with some Hollywood vip, many of the most famous people are wearing the clothes of Renzo Rosso. This definitively increases the value of the brand.

The set of all these elements is what makes the brand memorable, meaningful, likable and protectable and differentiates it from everyone else.

3.1.1 Brand identity

“A company’s brand identity is how that business wants to be perceived by consumers. The components of the brand (name, logo, tone, tagline, typeface) are created by the business to reflect the value the company is trying to bring to the market and to appeal to its customers. Brand identity is separate from brand image, the term for how consumers actually perceive the brand”⁹⁶.

Very often, in everyday life, communications are distorted and this happens because there is a lack of correspondence between intentions and perception: you think you said one thing, the person you spoke to thought you said something different. This situation is very common when arguing and the same can happen to Companies. In the business and branding context, brand identity identifies the product or service a firm offers, the quality it offers to its customers and the advantages over competitors. This is clearly distinguished from the *brand image* that, on the other hand, is how the brand is perceived by the public. The challenge that every business faces in trying to build a strong brand is to make sure its identity matches as much as possible with its image. A negative gap between the two means that a Company is in contradiction with the market perception and it can cause a loss of both monetary and non-monetary value.

⁹⁵ Business Dictionary, what is celebrity endorsement, <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/celebrity-endorsement.html> , (consultation date 4th September 2017)

⁹⁶ Investopedia, What is 'Brand Identity' , <http://www.investopedia.com/terms/b/brand-identity.asp>, (consultation date 1st July 2017)

Renzo Rosso, as mentioned earlier, focuses on the participation and involvement of its employees in creating and solidifying the identity of its brand. However, as the definition subscribes, brand identity lives of the way it is perceived by the consumer, as well. For this reason, Diesel boasted some of the most effective advertising campaigns that were, and are still bale to define the identity of the brand.

"I think it all depends on the nature of the brand. Yes, all advertising strives to get noticed and stand out, but it has to authentically reflect the personality of each brand"⁹⁷said Trey Laird, CEO and Chief Creative Officer of Laird + Partners. It is therefore important to be able to communicate the internal ideology of the Company to the outside world to ensure that the precise identity is established and, above all, that it corresponds to the desired one. As Rosso wanted, he managed to create a continuous cycle of transmission for the firm's values in order to gain consensus both towards the inside employees and the outside public.

Speaking of consumers, Diesel's target has been recognized, from the shrubs, in a global and international target, a customer who lives all over the world. However, it is not said that we need to reach the whole market but only that slice that can "afford", in terms of lifestyle, to wear Diesel denim. In fact, as stated by Jason Stein, founder and CEO of social media agency Laundry Service, "You still have to be authentic to what your brand is and who your brand is, so it's not fair to say that every brand will appeal to everyone"⁹⁸.

Since ever, we talk about Diesel not just as a pair of innovative jeans, but and especially of a proper lifestyle, a way of living your life. This is nothing more than demonstrating the effectiveness of the ideas put into practice by the CEO, along with his collaborators and employees who have done everything to make it a winning idea.

3.1.2 Customers

Many and many times Renzo Rosso has been directly asked how he would describe Diesel's consumer, and he recently answer that: "Nowadays, consumers are increasingly looking to

⁹⁷ L. Lockwood, Cynthia Martens, Lauren McCarthy, "Fashion Advertising: Controversy — Where Has It Gone?", *WWD*, 28th July 2014 (consultation date 13th May 2017)

⁹⁸ K. Monllos, "Brands Are Throwing Out Gender Norms to Reflect a More Fluid World: Stereotypes won't work on younger consumers", *Adweek*, 17th October 2016 (consultation date 15th May 2017)

comfort and luxury that is on the less flashy side"⁹⁹. This is how the entrepreneur vicentino responded in an interview with *The Fashion Network*¹⁰⁰ asking him to describe how the consumer of fashion has evolved. During the same interview, he continued saying that old-fashioned rules no longer exist and that what matters most today is comfort, to be able to live in a relaxed way, dressed in simple clothes that make us feel a hundred percent at ease.

The relationship Diesel has always wanted to establish with its target consumer is based on the ability of the brand to communicate and treat its offer so that the audience would be convinced that the proposals by Diesel are the bests on the market.

In this regard, Diesel deals with consumers as mind-blowing people who are able to appreciate a provocative message. Thanks to this relationship, Diesel has achieved with its consumers, the brand has managed to establish a strong and intimate dialogue with them.

Trying to identify the ideal consumer of this jeans brand, called *Persona*, we can outline some of its main characteristics. First of all, Diesel wants to dress up the new world people, that is the category of people who populate the big Cities of the world and who is constantly active in the world from all the points of view, including work, society, healthy and fun. We are talking about young, hedonistic and at the same time independent people who like to live in the Metropolis and who like to show themselves how they are. The lifestyle characteristic is another important one, but it is not necessary for this lifestyle to be a single one, it can be different every day as long as it is unique.

The age range of these people ideally goes from 20 to 30 years, they are people who wear Diesel as their fashion parameter and they are well educated from the fashion point of view. They know the quality of the products, the vision and the goal the brand wants to set for customers. Moreover, they know exactly that in case of Diesel products, quality and price are linear: the more you spend the better it will be. With respect to price, they are able to fulfill their needs by their own income, which means more income to spend on fashion.

Nowadays, what characterizes the most modern customers is the use of digital devices and new technologies. We are talking about *Consumer 2.0*, that consumer who is constantly online and up to date.

⁹⁹ D.Muret, Renzo Rosso:"Fashion consumers want comfort first", *The fashion network*, 5th August 2016 (consultation date 10th July 2017)

¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem*

The consumer has become the center of the commercial universe, becoming increasingly compliant with commercial communications and, at the same time, he has complete information control, more capacity and willingness to interact. This is precisely what leads to a greater awareness of consumption in this new generation of buyers.

In fact, the universe of new technologies is strongly focused on the individual, and we talk about *MY time*, that is the awareness of consumers' buying power, the possibility of shaping the internet space with their creativity and voice. In addition, the most important thing is that opinions are heard, making consumers take on the definitive role of protagonist¹⁰¹.

It is no coincidence that the internet allows you to customize services and products by virtue of its virtuality and promotes accessibility and speed in searching for information and in executing purchases and actions.

How Diesel is facing the consumer 2.0, it is responded directly by Renzo Rosso: "Diesel gets 15% of overall sales online. It is not important where you buy. Consumers can go to Amazon, Bloomingdale's or Macy's, or Instagram and Facebook. Today, you need to be everywhere as a brand, on all channels"¹⁰².

As a matter of fact, Diesel's worlds, online and offline, are completely merged. Nowadays, digital is becoming more and more real than reality. Today it is important to be directly connected to consumers, admitted Renzo Rosso on an interview. "Social networks have changed the way you do communication over the past few years. It is more important to be on social networks than to advertise in magazines.

Very soon, Instagram and Facebook will become an incredible source of where to buy from as well as becoming a platform for selling your products"¹⁰³.

An example of how to adapt to the evolution of the consumer has to do with the presence of the brand on some internet sites, so-called audacious. Diesel has bought advertising space on Pornhub and Grindr. "As the culturally relevant denim brand, it's important for Diesel to converse with audiences in a way that is both intimate and honest. Partnering with Grindr and Pornhub allows Diesel to connect without taboos where, at times, a great number of people

¹⁰¹ T. Nudd "Diesel Awkwardly Stuffs Every Online Obsession Into a New Global Ad Campaign: Targeting the 'post-digital generation", *Adweek*, 19th January 2016 (consultation date 15th May 2017)

¹⁰² S. Sharma, "The Economic times: Today, brands have to directly connect with its consumers: Diesel's Renzo Rosso", *TNN*, 12th December 2016 (consultation date 10th July 2017)

¹⁰³ *Ibidem*

spend their time in the digital age"¹⁰⁴, says Richard Welch, global head of strategy at Spring Studios. In fact, the brand wanted to find a way to speak to one's target using its own language, and this makes perfect sense, especially because it worked.

Nevertheless, Diesel boasts over half a million members of Diesel Cult, a web community. The Diesel Cult allows joining a program that is reflected as a loyalty scheme, which gives its members to accumulate *Style Miles* each time they shop in any Diesel Store. The subscription gives to the members the opportunity to redeem their accumulated *Miles* and have exclusivity on selected products that are not available in stores, such as limited edition Diesel articles, the collection of Diesel homes, 55DSL, olive oils Diesel and wines. Not only that, as cult members, they also have the right to benefit from loyalty, such as access to Diesel events to inviting and VIP shopping experiences¹⁰⁵.

The Company has received many awards for its own initiatives in the virtual world: the site www.diesel.com¹⁰⁶, launched in 1995, has created many revolutionary projects in the field of new media marketing, continuing to offer a real "interactive" dive into the Diesel Planet.

Nevertheless, what are we referring to talking about the Diesel Planet?

In order to understand what Diesel wanted to develop for its consumers, let us start with the concept of flagship store. "The designation of *flagship* is given to a retailer's primary location, a store in a prominent location, a chain's largest store, the store that holds or sells the highest volume of merchandise, a retailer's most well-known location, a chain's first retail outlet, a store location with decor or merchandise mix that is distinctly different from the rest of the chain, or the store location in a chain which carries the most high-priced merchandise catering to the most upscale customers"¹⁰⁷. In this sense, we can talk about Diesel Planet as an example of flagship store. The brand's proposal is to open the doors and welcome a direct entrance inside Diesel, giving customers the opportunity to plunge themselves and become one hundred percent part of the Company's philosophy and style. *Insider trends* defines the flagship store as though "it acts as a showcase for the brand or retailer. Its job is to draw

¹⁰⁴ D.Muret, "Renzo Rosso: Fashion consumers want comfort first", *The fashion network*, 5th August 2016 (consultation date 10th July 2017)

¹⁰⁵ Diesel Official website, Diesel is also...,

<http://fashiongear.fibre2fashion.com/brand-story/diesel/dieselisalso.asp> (consultation date 29th August 2017)

¹⁰⁶ Diesel official site, Diesel, <http://uk.diesel.com/en/> (consultation date 13th May 2017)

¹⁰⁷ The Balance, What is a flagship store?, <https://www.thebalance.com/definition-of-flagship-stores-retail-2892224>, (consultation date 2nd September 2017)

customers into the brand, over and above making sales. The focus is on experience and creating a destination store that people want to visit"¹⁰⁸.

Since ever, Diesel stores have been placed in the world major shopping streets, recognizing their success and success. "We came to the conclusion that the Diesel Store was originally designed as a real home, with large sofas, a cozy living room, a very cozy environment"¹⁰⁹ is Nicola Formichetti's description of how stores have always been designed by Diesel, all over the world. It is the ideal way to engage with the consumers and make them feel part of something, an experience that somehow makes them become one single element with the brand, not anyone who can only wear clothes. "A brand like Diesel has a huge global community that can reach millions of people around the world. The only use of this force to sell a product is not conceivable. As humans, we have the responsibility towards this community and we have to think about the world we live in. Of course, we are a Company and we must survive as such but at the same time, we want our products to carry a way of life, to think. I do not just want to sell a bag, a shoe, I want something behind it"¹¹⁰.

Here is how a further breakthrough takes place in the retailer's programme with the inauguration of the first, but not least, Diesel Planet in Milan, Piazza San Babila. This is surface of over 1,500 square meters distributed on three levels, where the space is fulfilled with many and many innovations created with the purpose of entertaining and make people staying in the flagship store as they were taking a trip into the Diesel experience. "Shops are the first place where we can interact with the customer and get him to get our message through the products. That is why we have incorporated a lot of interactive digital experiences so that the customer feels part of the Diesel world. My favorite space is the dressing rooms where you can bring the chosen product and just show it to the touch screen to have all the information you need, try it and decide whether to turn the cabin into New York or Los Angeles thanks to

¹⁰⁸ Insider trends, What is a flagship store?, <http://www.insider-trends.com/what-is-a-flagship-store/>, (consultation date 2nd September 2017)

¹⁰⁹ "Siamo arrivati alla conclusione che i Diesel Store già all'inizio erano pensati vera e propria casa, con grandi sofà, una accogliente living room, un ambiente molto cosy" L. Lanzoni, "Nicola Formichetti intervista "on the house" al direttore creativo di Diesel", *Elle*, 2nd February, 2016 (consultation date 19th May 2017)

¹¹⁰ "Un brand come Diesel ha una comunità globale enorme, che può raggiungere milioni di persone in tutto il mondo. Usare questa forza solo per vendere un prodotto non è pensabile. Come esseri umani abbiamo una responsabilità verso questa comunità e dobbiamo pensare al mondo in cui viviamo. Certo, siamo un'azienda e dobbiamo sopravvivere in quanto tale, ma allo stesso tempo vogliamo che i nostri prodotti portino con sé un modo di vivere, di pensare. Non voglio solo vendere una borsa, una scarpa, voglio che ci sia qualcosa dietro" S. Moschini, "Nicola Formichetti presenta il primo Diesel Planet interattivo a Milano", *Grazia*, 21st March 2017 (consultation date 2nd September 2017)

the screens inside it"¹¹¹ says Nicola Formichetti to Grazia. In fact, the vintage-style furnishings and the ultra-modern elements have led Diesel to develop one of the first examples of *digital retail* that through the application of state-of-the-art technologies developed in collaboration with H-Farm, is characterized by several touch-points drive the experience purchase, enriching it with interactive contents of product information.

Everything the brand develops is aimed at the loyalty of consumers, at making them feel part of the brand, as if it belonged to it and was a constant part of their life-style.

¹¹¹ "I negozi sono il primo posto dove possiamo interagire con il cliente e fargli arrivare il nostro messaggio tramite i prodotti. Per questo abbiamo incorporato un sacco di esperienze digitali interattive, così che il cliente si senta parte del mondo Diesel. Il mio spazio preferito sono i camerini, dove puoi portare il prodotto scelto e solo mostrandolo al touch screen avere tutte le informazioni necessarie, provarlo e decidere se trasformare la cabina in New York o Los Angeles grazie agli schermi presenti all'interno"
S. Moschini, "Nicola Formichetti presenta il primo Diesel Planet interattivo a Milano", *Grazia*, 21st March 2017 (consultation date 2nd September 2017)

4. DIESEL ADVERTISING CAMPAIGNS

The main feature that made the Diesel brand more and more famous all around the world is the use of a disruptive, ever-changing and fun communication that wants to arrive and settle into the mind of people.

The diversity of Diesel's advertising campaigns is not entirely referred to the artistic aspects that are conformed to many other fashion campaigns mainly characterized by lively colors and sexy poses. The real differentiating aspect lies in the several themes the Company faces on its ads, in the apparent complexity with which they are presented and in the use of radical irony. Thanks to this advertising strategy, Diesel has earned the name of *counter-current godfather's*, as being always in opposition to common norms and institutions. In fact, very often, the brand's advertisements are not immediate in terms of understanding, rather they require a deeper involvement to be completely understood and deciphered.

As an observer manages to enter and identify himself in the true meaning of the advertising campaigns, a consequent sense of complicity arises between him and the brand, an intuition that finally is created. In this way, Diesel has managed to conquer that market share that perfectly reflects the philosophy and the life style promised by the Company. We talk about wealthy young people who want to differentiate themselves from the crowd through their own way of dressing.

Diesel communications are always in English, and usually referred to an American background. Diesel advertising campaigns started in 1991 and received a lot of awards and prizes from all around the world. Some of the major examples are the Grand Prix of the Cannes SAWA Festival in 1995, 1996 and 1997, Epica in 1997, Eurobest in 1994, 1995, 1996 and 1997, the Clio awards, and the Advertiser of the Year award granted to Renzo Rosso at the Cannes Festival in 1998¹¹². "Our ironic tone sometimes initially shocks consumers. We often present what appears to be outrageously inappropriate messages, confusing references to such things as racial, sexual stereotypes, materialism, drug abuse, religious intolerance and political extremism. The viewer needs to think a bit in order to understand what our intention really is. But once they have taken the time, the viewer of a Diesel advertising usually picks up on a hidden order

¹¹² R. Gaiba, "Diesel – la comunicazione dirompente e trasgressiva di una azienda", *Trama e Ordito-il blog della moda*, 15th May 2017 (consultation date 13th May 2017)

behind the work, a meaning that is less an insensitive, subjective statement and more a balanced observation of the realities of the world we share"¹¹³.

4.1 The philosophy behind Diesel Ads

Communication, for Renzo Rosso, means walking on the border, until the risks to be misunderstood. In fact, even when an advertising campaign is blocked, Diesel seeks for a dialogue with the public.

Although every campaign lends itself to be interpreted in infinite ways, the objective that the Company from Vicenza has set since the beginning, it is the use of a publicity that is able to immediately stimulate the audience by using irony. This does not mean that the brand wants to shock with free violent images.

At the heart of every advertising campaign proposed by the brand, there has always been the surrounding society, with all its facets and changes. Since the early Nineties and early campaigns, the brand has decided to communicate its product by commenting on societies and cultures. It is as if the advertisement by Diesel claimed that "much of the advertising is based on lies, impious implicit lies"¹¹⁴. Which means that someone has to be brave enough to tell the truth about what is happening around us and about what scares us. "We need to have the balls to break down barriers in a moment where fear is making the world divided with more walls. The future is about opening up and giving a positive output. Diesel always had and will always be a cultural commentator tackling relevant issues"¹¹⁵ said Renzo Rosso. He wants to emphasize how Diesel stands out on the part of truth, on the part of love and positivity, how it understands the diversity that exists in the world that makes it so fascinating. Diesel wants to show everyone the world that everyone wants, to create a society where people are happy to live with the future that everyone deserves.

¹¹³ T. Polhemus, *Diesel: World Wide Wear*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1998, p. 44

¹¹⁴ E. Allwood, "Making the world's most controversial ad campaigns", *Dazed*, 2016 (consultation date 13th May 2017)

¹¹⁵ *Ibidem*

Likewise, the new Creative Director, Nicola Formichetti, expressed his opinion by saying “I love using advertising space or any place that we can use to express what we’re feeling. It is about creating Unusual or beautiful images. No one wants to see a catalogue shot with a bag and that is becoming more common in advertising [...]. It is my role, as creative director, to push boundaries and do something more inspiring. You want people to think, and to question things”¹¹⁶. Once again he is convinced that evocative images which capable of creating reactions in the public are more effective for the brand itself. Consumers “don’t just buy denim because it fits, rather, they also like to feel that they are part of the same energy and philosophy”¹¹⁷.

Advertising agencies that have collaborated with Diesel in the past, have had the precise task of leaving the realized publicity open to perceptions to let each observer to feel their own feelings and ideas. The purpose of the Company is, in fact, beyond the purely commercialization of products. Rather Diesel wishes to create a debate. Given this way of advertising, it has not been always easy to match what the brand wanted with how the receiver felt. More than once, images in advertising campaigns have been misunderstood. However, could this be the real purpose of Diesel? The brand focuses so much on the message it wants to convey, on the idea that it wants to value so much, that it almost leaves out the logo, segregating it in a corner. From this, we can easily deduce how Diesel has consistently put the creative idea at the center of his advertising campaign. Mainly for this reason, there is never the name of the agency or the photographer's campaign¹¹⁸.

Diesel target segment is a young audience from around the world who sometimes prefer to be hit by a cool image with cool people rather than reading or paying too much attention to something in particular. Face to face with this kind of trend, Diesel wanted to be different and to go countercurrent. As creator Joakim Jonason says, “We believe that young people, like everybody else, are interested in politics, in life, in discussing things. So, we challenged people’s minds. What we made was provocative, funny, but also intellectual. We more or less tried to pick up on the conversation that was going on in society around us and make art of it.

¹¹⁶ L. Lockwood, C. Martens, L. McCarthy, “Fashion Advertising: Controversy — Where Has It Gone?”, *WWD*, 28th July 2014 (consultation date 13th May 2017)

¹¹⁷ *Ibidem*

¹¹⁸ R. Gaiba, “Diesel – la comunicazione dirompente e trasgressiva di una azienda”, *Trama e Ordito-il blog della moda*, 15th May 2017 (consultation date 13th May 2017)

We knew that we were right, but in those days it was a risk. Still, it showed that, of course, everybody is interested in stuff that is serious, as long as it is presented in a fun and cool way. It does not have to be boring just because it is serious. I think in terms of advertising, it changed the ways you can communicate with younger people”¹¹⁹.

From this advertising goal, it can be declared the desire to expand the prospects of advertising itself and the way to do publicity. Through the marketing of provocative and osé images, Diesel wants to put attention on the product, too. In fact, creating such positive and evocative images around the brand, the firm hopes to encourage the consumer to be attached by its products. Like Diesel, many other Companies, such as Benetton and Abercrombie and Fitch, have adopted this type of advertising, violating common standards and throwing themselves into a provocative world. All of them, in this way, have been able to increase awareness around their brands. The use of provocative advertising has also contributed to the emergence of a serious debate on the role that publicity can play in society by raising questions about advertising and ethics.

The question that spontaneously arises at this point has to do with pushing it too far. Did Diesel ever think it was going too far?

If the initial idea could have the best reasons in the world, sometimes the resulting reaction was not the same. Sometimes public feedback has been so strong that, as Joakim Jonason has said, “next time we should take it a little bit more easy, talk about something that's a little bit more trivial [...]We have to take it a little easier next time because there's a big, big, big demonstration outside”¹²⁰.

In fact, Diesel never walked back and it has expressed itself in the best way it thought it could fit. The brand still keeps its values and messages high.

"Are you sick of hearing you say all of your good ideas are stupid? Well, there are great news for you: there is nothing stupid in being stupid. After all, Diesel was stupid enough to think of selling new jeans that look like to be used, and see what a result! When someone says, do not be stupid, what he really wants to say is, Do not have fun! Do not dare! Do not provoke! Bury your sense of humor! Do it seriously! Stupid is the liberating alternative to being boring to die.

¹¹⁹ E. Allwood, “Making the world’s most controversial ad campaigns”, *Dazed*, 2016 (consultation date 13th May 2017)

¹²⁰ *Ibidem*

Stupid is to have the courage to risk and believe in what is new and innovative, even if it can be dangerous"¹²¹.

4.1.1 DCT – Diesel Creative Team

Creativity has always been the driving force behind every element the Diesel brand is based on. Let us take a step back in time, in the 80's. These were the years when the brand crossed its greatest moment of popularity and this was accompanied by the success of big characters in the art world such as Andy Warhol, Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat. It is from these modern art important figures that Rosso drawn inspiration and made homage to them by printing them both on his clothing and advertising campaigns. Renzo Rosso decided to decorate Diesel products with images and words made by these great personalities in order to enrich and remind everyone of the importance of being constantly creative. Diesel CEO has always believed that the key elements that count and make the fashion world work are creativity, irreverence and revolution. "The secret is creativity"¹²² he said out loud in an interview with Klat Magazine in 2014¹²³.

Creativity is defined as "the mental characteristic that allows a person to think outside of the box, which results in innovative or different approaches to a particular task"¹²⁴. It is "the ability to transcend traditional ideas, rules, patterns, relationships, or the like, and to create meaningful ideas, forms, methods, interpretations"¹²⁵.

This creativity has been one of the main elements in Diesel's choices and it has brought the brand to be known and appreciated all over the world, not just by consumers but also by many

¹²¹ "Stufo di sentirti dire che tutte le tue buone idee sono stupide? Bene, ci sono grandi notizie per te: non c'è niente di stupido nell'essere stupido. Dopo tutto, Diesel è stato stupido abbastanza da pensare di vendere jeans nuovi che sembravano già usati, e guarda che risultato! Quando qualcuno dice non fare lo stupido, quello che vuole dire davvero è 'Non divertirti. Non osare. Non provocare. Seppellisci il tuo senso dell'umorismo. Fai il serio'. Stupido è l'alternativa liberatoria all'essere noioso da morire. Stupido è avere il coraggio di rischiare e credere nel nuovo e nell'innovativo, anche se può essere pericoloso".

R. Gaiba, "Diesel – la comunicazione dirompente e trasgressiva di una azienda", *Trama e Ordito-il blog della moda*, 15th May 2017 (consultation date 13th May 2017)

¹²² C. Cossalter, "Renzo Rosso: il segreto è la creatività", *Klat Magazine*, 18th November 2014 (consultation date 1st August 2017)

¹²³ *Ibidem*

¹²⁴ Dictionary.com, Creativity definition, <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/creativity>, (consultation date 1st August 2017)

¹²⁵ Business Dictionary, Creativity definition, <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/creativity.html>, (consultation date 1st August 2017)

competitors and protagonists in the fashion industry. This element is not only present in product development. The creativity we are dealing with has to do with the whole management of the Company, within the internal context as well as in the external one. It is a feature that is evidently present in the internal management, and the proof is given by the homeowner, Renzo Rosso, who has run all his life outside the schemes. At the same time, creativity in management is present when it comes to the external context. Diesel is always ready to meet the needs of the market, with a clear and outlined reading of the surrounding context that can meet the demands. Therefore, in order to be successful and maintain a market position, creativity and management must work simultaneously, in harmony.

Part of managerial creativity are both artistic creativity and commercial creativity. These two can be clearly distinct from each other. In fact, the first is a more intrinsic value, it is something prone to personal experiences and it has a partial view, independent from the judgment of others. On the other hand, the latter is aimed at creating a successful product or service that can meet specific needs whose value is always determined in relation to something else. Diesel is characterized by an almost perfect combination of these two¹²⁶.

Given the definition of creativity, it has been proved how this is an innate feature within people, it is a gift that is given to us. Renzo Rosso carefully looks for this gift in his staff. The CEO of Diesel decided to give birth to the so-called Creative Team. This in order to better manage his staff. This is the combination of several working teams where people rely on brainstorming, generating new ideas and proposals to make the brand grow. This idea raised from the need to link all different sectors of the Company in a homogeneous way in order to coordinate everything, from the proposal of a product to the communication of it. The main goal of the Creative Team is to share with the world the values that are at the heart of the Company, itself.

There is a team dedicated to the creative communication of Diesel. Diesel's communication is one of the best-known distinctive element of the brands, which has always been very observed, in both positive and negative terms, because of its ability to engage with to the public and its ability to establish a relationship with it. It is through to the Diesel Creative Team that the Company has been able to create a new and original advertising ideas. The DCT, led by the creative director, is composed not only by designers, but also by talents who deal with

¹²⁶ Hypersoft, Casi di successo, Diesel, <http://www.hypersoft.it/success/diesel> (consultation date 17th May 2017)

graphic design, advertising, events and shows, furnishings, showcases and the website. The Creative Team flies to the most remote corners of the planet, looking for inspiration from any element: ancient, modern or superfuturistic, there are no limits to what can be explored. Therefore, its activities are strictly related to the definition of advertising campaigns. The members are concerned with telling and enriching business history through targeted and effective advertising¹²⁷.

Since the beginning Diesel has undertaken a kind of communication designed to build a close and direct connection with the consumer. Irony, innovation, unpredictability, creative disruptive charge with the right lightness and dissection have traditionally been the basis of communication since the first campaign in 1991.

The Diesel Creative Team deals with the realization of this type of advertising, but not only. The group also contributes to the progress of the Company as a whole, providing its collaboration in revising the collections, paying attention and professionalism in identifying the right thread between the contents of the proposed collection and tools through which these are offered to the public.

What is the secret to doing so? "Never look at what others do, do not look at trends or what's around us, but rely on our instincts, first" ¹²⁸.

¹²⁷ A. Giancola, *La moda nel consumo giovanile. Strategie & immagini di fine millennio*, vol II, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 1999

¹²⁸ "Non guardare cosa fanno gli altri, non seguire i trend e non guardare ciò che ti circonda, ma prima di tutto basati sul tuo istinto"

C. Cossalter, "Renzo Rosso: il segreto è la creatività", *Klat Magazine*, 18th November 2014 (consultation date 1st August 2017)

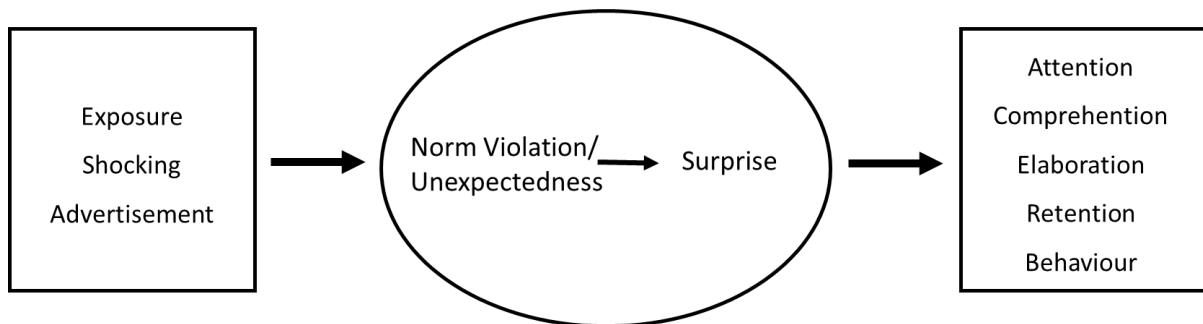
4.2 Provocation as Innovation

“Advertisers typically justify shock appeals in advertising for their ability to *[break] through the clutter, get noticed, and get people’s attention*”¹²⁹.

We previously described some of the characteristics of provocative advertising and after this analysis and definition, it is given for assorted that this is at the basis of the communication proposed by the Diesel brand. The next step is to determine how and why this type of strategy can be considered innovative.

There are several models in the literature that explain how shocking and provocative stimuli are able to attract people's attention in a fairly easy and superior way with respect to other communication techniques. In particular, the model proposed by Darren W. Dahl present in the Journal of Advertising Research in 2003 will be considered and analyzed.

Fig. 5.1 Model of consumer reactions to shock appeals



Source: personal elaboration of D.W Dahl, K. Frankenberger, R.V Manchanda model¹³⁰ (2003)

¹²⁹ D.W Dahl, K. Frankenberger, R.V Manchanda, “Does it pay to shock? Reactions to shocking and non-shocking ad content among University students”, *Journal of Advertising Research*, XLIII (2003), p. 269

¹³⁰ *Ivi* p.271

The above figure shows in a schematic way how Dahl affirms provocative advertising can easily capture cognitive elements, first of all the attention of the observer.

As you can see, the starting point of this model is defined by the Exposure Shocking Advertisement. The central part, on the other hand, it is the processing of information proposed by a determined factor, which results in a cognitive assessment that can determine whether the announcement violates a social norm or a personal norm. It also explains how any image or advertisement that looks unexpected can result in a surprise. The surprise, in turn, has the ability to attract attention to the proposed stimuli thus becoming a fundamental part of the process. As a matter of fact, when we focus our attention on each impulse we receive, the surprise factor pushes us to develop further processing of the content in the publicity.

Dahl wrote that “empirical findings in this area demonstrate that people seems to engage in a higher level of attributional thought for unexpected events that they do for expected stimuli. Further, since people try to understand the source of their surprise, this surprise will encourage further cognitive activities”¹³¹.

Therefore, attention comes first. After that, the cognitive processing of the observer continues and the attention towards advertising is transformed into the understanding of it, in all its elements. This is a literal understanding of the message. Further, “the additional processing of advertising information takes the form of comprehension, a literal understanding of the message, and elaboration, the production of product/message-related thoughts. Indeed, empirical research investigating unexpectedness, incongruity, and other dimensions of stimulus novelty indicates that these characteristics encourage cognitive processes that produce robust effects on memory”¹³².

In the end, after all these steps, stimuli should be able to influence the behavior of the receiver.

With this model, provocative advertising appears to be an innovative type of communication that has proven to be more effective and superior to other ways of attracting attention and remembering what people has been exposed to.

¹³¹ D.W Dahl, K. Frankenberger, R.V Manchanda, “Does it pay to shock? Reactions to shocking and non-shocking ad content among University students”, *Journal of Advertising Research*, XLIII (2003), p.271

¹³² *Ibidem*

However, it is important to note that there are also many risks to consider before using this strategy. We will see some sort of risk in the next section.

Let us now see how Diesel adopts this model in order to be an innovative brand in capturing the attention of the population.

Diesel mixes a blend of blurriness, self-confidence and fun with fashionable and avant-garde images, sometimes in line, sometimes not with the ideal fashion industry. The result of this melting pot of feelings is a well accepted proposed advertising by most of the audience, or at least the side of the market share, that can imagine themselves in the joke and context appreciating the products' quality at the same time.

Diesel's strategy has sometimes been so rich in character, and at the same time full of irony and honesty that numerous advertising agencies have had to face something completely disruptive and innovative in the industry. For example, we talk about the Spring team that, once hired by the brand, had to stop and reflect before getting into action. To get into the brand concept and start the creative process, the Spring team decided to look at Diesel's stock of provocative advertising that had been successful in the past. Andreas Neophytou, Spring's creative director, once face to face with the Diesel phenomenon, said: "It is interesting to look at Diesel's history. [...]. They have considered themselves to be rebels, *only the brave is their motto*. [...]. We knew moving forward if Diesel wanted to rekindle some of that energy, we had to redefine what being brave was today. It is not about one singular message any more, we are engaged in so many conversations at once. [...]. It felt like honesty was the new form of brave. [...]. Not honesty in a pious way, but 'let us just be honest about who we are'¹³³.

Here is the true essence of Diesel, a fashion brand that knows how to fashion, but at the same time has been able to make fashion laugh.

Innovation is present not only in the proposed images, but also in the endless ways and methods to promote them. "While the new language is entertaining and fun when used in traditional media such as press and poster, where it feels especially innovative is in its use on digital apps such as Tinder and Shazam, where the copy refers specifically to the setting the

¹³³ E. Williams, "Diesel shows how creative thinking can make programmatic ads fun", *Creative Reviews*, 30th October 2015 (consultation date 30th August 2017)

ads are in. For example, if Shazam cannot identify a song, a Diesel ad will appear saying *I didn't get it either*¹³⁴.

The success Diesel has acquired can be seen as a sign to the world of fashion advertising, announcing that it is time to use and exploit creative thinking. It is time to be no longer lazy and dare in their own choices because what people are looking for and expect nowadays is the ability to contextualize the world around us. "If you're in Tinder and your mindset is either of flirtation or excitement or ego boost then creating an experience that fits in with that is hopefully entertaining and not disruptive in a negative way"¹³⁵.

Diesel's real innovation is differentiation, which passes through the ironic language constantly used by the Company. "The word, the sound, the image turn into action. The same action that is realized at the moment when the consumer is forced to make certain path of meaning to get the correct message transmitted"¹³⁶. One example is the 1997 Cannes winner spot set in Little Rock in 1873. In this spot there is a handsome, young, sensitive and educated protagonist, and an ugly, vulgar and rude one. They both seem to behave in accordance with their appearance. The first kisses his beautiful and blond wife before leaving home, and helps an old lady to cross the street. The second is in the saloon, not even looking at the prostitute he spent some time with and splitting on the floor. Going down the stairs, he steals a lollipop from a little girl and kicks a dog. He is the caricature of vulgarity and malice. The two meet and challenge duel. Impossibly, the winner is the ugly and rude man. In this scene, there is the triumph of the evil rather than a happy ending. The advertisement reads: "Diesel for a successful living". The payoff is clearly ironic in pointing out how the concept of success can be laughable and questionable. In this way, Diesel wants to question all false promises of happiness and well-being dispensed by most of the advertisements. And what is more innovative and original than that?

It is no coincidence that Diesel has received many awards for its advertising campaigns. However, the merit and honor given by the authorities of the industry are not the only things that matter, the most important one for the brand is the public approval. "The long series of

¹³⁴ E. Williams, "Diesel shows how creative thinking can make programmatic ads fun", *Creative Reviews*, 30th October 2015 (consultation date 30th August 2017)

¹³⁵ *Ibidem*

¹³⁶ "La parola, il suono, l'immagine si trasformano in azione. Quella stessa che si realizza nel momento in cui il consumatore è costretto a compiere determinati percorsi di senso per arrivare a recepire correttamente il messaggio inviatogli"

M. Polesana, *La pubblicità intelligente: l'uso dell'ironia in pubblicità*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2005, p. 25

For Successful Living campaigns represents the how-to for a successful life with which Diesel establishes a continuous dialogue with its audience through irate and irreverent messages that, while channeling the lure of various categories of users, they let the brand gaining the primacy of indelible recognition and sympathy"¹³⁷

The smart listener to the head, the stupid listens to the heart, is the slogan of the *Be Stupid for a successful life* advertising campaign launched in 2010.

It is also the slogan that has been affixed on the walls and banners of the major metropolis of half-world for a long time, fulfilled with English phrases that contrast the clever, polite, rational and too smart behavior with the one of the naughty, passionate and imprudent braves. The campaign results have been amazing. Just a few days after the launch of it, the accesses to the site has doubled over a very short time, from 30,000 to 60,000 visits per day¹³⁸. The effectiveness of this action comes from the strong impact of Diesel's messages.

Samantha Skey, through her blog SheKnows, wrote: "We believe that advertisers and marketers, merchandisers, retailers have an obligation to understand the values they're shaping in society. [...]. It is our hope that marketers will continue to bust stereotypes and enable more options for all people. It is not only in the products you create and how you market them, but it's the images you use in that marketing. [...]. You can really address some of these stereotypes in a productive way through your marketing. [...]. Something exceptional is needed to attract people's attention, shocking and provocative appeals is an exceptional strategy to put in practice in order to achieve the wanted goals"¹³⁹.

¹³⁷ "La lunga serie di campagne "For Successful Living" rappresenta gli how-to a una vita di successo con i quali Diesel costituisce un dialogo continuo con i suoi pubblici attraverso messaggi ironici e irriverenti che, mentre canalizzano le ire di svariate categorie di utenza, fanno guadagnare al marchio il primato di riconoscibilità e simpatia indelebile"

A. Giancola, *La moda nel consumo giovanile. Strategie & immagini di fine millennio*, vol II, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 1999

¹³⁸ Marketing: the Day after, "Be stupid. Diesel provoca e il mondo risponde", *Marketing: the Day after*, 10th February 2010 (consultation date 30th August 2017)

¹³⁹ K. Monllos, "Brands Are Throwing Out Gender Norms to Reflect a More Fluid World: Stereotypes won't work on younger consumers", *Adweek*, 17th October 2016 (consultation date 15th May 2017)

4.2.1 The consequences of provocation

Adopting a type of advertising that has as its core element provocation can be considered a winning strategy. However, there are still some important things to consider. First of all, one has to consider the effects of such a strategy on individual consumers and understand the measurement of this type of communication strategy with respect to the other traditional ones. Indeed, while attempts to positively shock consumers may turn into a higher degree of awareness, on the other hand, a decline in the degree of acceptance of the brand itself or even a high level of disapproval can occur.

Barnes and Dotson have proposed a definition of constructive offensive advertising that consists of two distinct but connected dimensions. The first states that “the ads may be perceived as offensive due to the nature of the product (condoms, sanitary napkins, etc.) or the service (abortion, funeral direction) they depict”¹⁴⁰. However, it is known that what can be considered as offensive material today, it may not be considered the same tomorrow, as both products and man's opinion evolve over time. The second definition, instead, cites that “there are ads may be perceived as offensive due which to their creative execution. It does not just depend on the product and the service, but also on the type of appeal and the manner of presentation”¹⁴¹.

Numerous models aimed at explaining and identifying the possible cognitive, affective, and contagious reactions that the public faces in a provocative advertising campaign have been developed, in the years. A general, rather obvious, conclusion has been made, and it states that positive affective responses to advertising have a positive influence on the attitude towards the advertisement as well as towards the brand that markets it. There is therefore a simple, direct and positive relationship between the advertising campaign and the reaction towards the brand. From here, as an inevitable consequence, we can see that the more the ad is appreciated, the more the firm is welcomed, as well. However, it is important to know the role that negative emotions such as rage, fear, anguish, pity, etc. can play on the attitudes and behaviors of consumers. Can we say that provocative advertisements can be more effective than the neutral ones? According to Darren W. Dahl “shocking stimuli should

¹⁴⁰ J.H Barnes, M.J Dotson, “An Exploratory Investigation into the Nature of Offensive Television Advertising”, *Journal of Advertising*, XIX (1990), pp.61-69

¹⁴¹ *Ibidem*

facilitate message comprehension and elaboration, enhance message retention and influence behavior”¹⁴².

Advertising can be considered as a public and dynamic place where business interests, creativity, consumer needs and government regulation meet. Due to its nature, advertising has high visibility and it is particularly vulnerable to criticism. For this very reason, advertisers have been accused, more than once, of permeating every white hole of people’s personal space with offensive and irrelevant messages. However, the role of advertisers is not based exactly on what they are criticized for. Their work, in fact, is based on regular decision making related to ethical implications because they are aware that they have to create an appropriate and acceptable advertising to please audience. In line with this topic, it is fairly easy to define the concept of ethics as “the basic concepts and fundamental principles of decent human conduct; it includes study of universal values such as the essential equality of all men and women, human or natural insights, obedience to the law of land, concern for health and safety and, increasingly, also for the natural environment”¹⁴³.

On the other hand, it is not always easy to identify what is or what it is not delineated as an ethical behavior in the field of marketing communications.

Let us dedicate few more lines to the role of the advertiser's figure. As mentioned earlier, these workers have to take infinite decisions each day, and in this process, they must clearly understand the purpose of the advertising campaign, the attitude of the target audience, and the philosophy of the Company. However, despite advertisers considering all these aspects in decision-making, the results will not always be considered ethical among recipients. People are different and have different perceptions about what is ethically correct and what is not.

The use of provocation as an advertising strategy creates ongoing discussions, especially on media devices, questioning whether it is a correct ethical strategy to undertake or not. Efforts to provoke and shock can create a high degree of awareness, but they may also end up in a low level of acceptance or even a high level of disapproval. However, one has to take into account that tastes change over time and what has been considered offensive 50 years ago might not be perceived as the same today. In addition, we all have our ideas on what

¹⁴² D.W Dahl, K. Frankenberger, R.V Manchanda, “Does it pay to shock? Reactions to shocking and non-shocking ad content among University students”, *Journal of Advertising Research*, XLIII (2003), p. 269

¹⁴³ Business Dictionary, Ethics definition, <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/ethics.html> , (consultation date 30th August 2017)

constitutes a good taste and it end up in being very difficult to create a general guideline in advertising.

After this general introduction about how provocative advertising can be considered and judged, let us talk about the Diesel case. As previously mentioned, the brand has become increasingly popular thanks to its very pushy advertising campaigns and sometimes, according to some, even too much pushed images. In this context, there were both positive feedbacks as well as the negative ones for the Company based the north-east of Italy.

Starting from the positive ones, there is a series of events the brand can be proud of.

During its advertising career, which began to evolve since 1991, Diesel never stopped to receive awards for its advertising campaigns. From all over the world and from the highest authorities in the industry, in fact, acknowledgments for the originality and creativity of the brand's proposals arrived. Among the major awards, we can find the Eurobest, the world's pre-eminent celebration of European creativity, which saw Diesel winner for four years, from 1994 to 1997. In 1995, '96 and '97 Diesel won the prize At the Grand Prix of the SAWA Festival in Cannes, too. This is an international event aimed at professionals working in the field of advertising and related industries. Other examples of the prizes that the Company has received over the years there are: Epica in 1997, the Clio awards, and the Advertiser of the Year award awarded to Renzo Rosso himself at the Cannes Festival in 1998.

In addition, this year, Diesel could breathe a sigh at the Cannes Lions International Advertising Festival where it shared the first prize with *Andes*, a brand of Argentine beer. In fact, for the first time since the introduction of the radio advertising category in 2005, the judges at the event decided that no campaign was worthy of being awarded the Grand Prix status. Therefore, the jury awarded a new Gran Prix this time outdoors for traditional billboards and this included the "Be Stupid" campaign made by Diesel for Anomaly in New York¹⁴⁴.

However, as in all situations there are both positive and negative aspects. Mostly when we look at Diesel's advertising campaigns, it is easy to see how they can be misunderstood or considered some sort of offense against someone. We are able to divide the criticisms made to the brand in terms of advertising image in two macro groups that: on the one hand, we have the different cultures that do not accept certain attitudes and on the other the misunderstanding between the sender and the receiver of the message .

¹⁴⁴ R. Gaiba, "Diesel – la comunicazione dirompente e trasgressiva di una azienda", *Trama e Ordito-il blog della moda*, 15th May 2017 (consultation date 13th May 2017)

For what concerns the first aspect, countries are different among each other and cultural perceptions are present all the time. Given this kind of situation, a brand must be prepared for the possibility that advertising that may be successful and appropriate in a country can be perceived as provocative and far from appropriate in another. In fact, some countries have specific factors that influence people's perception and interpretation of advertising. These elements are mainly related to the nature of society in the country, to the values sustained by that society and the characteristics of culture. These may involve many factors such as body language, references, sense of humor, taboos, or religious aspects. With respect to this topic, Joakim Jonason affirmed, "In those days, if you take being gay for example, it's not even controversial any more in most countries. But, when we did the sailors with David LaChapelle in the mid-90s, the reaction in some countries...in some countries they can't even touch the subject. So of course we got big reactions, but I think they created more interesting discussions than what you would call reactions, particularly negative reactions, people getting angry.[...]. You will always have a couple of people who react in negative ways"¹⁴⁵.

With regard to the possibility of mismatch between sender and the receiver of the message in advertising, the question may be considered less delicate than the culture. In particular, in this sense, two types of misunderstanding can occur: misunderstanding and misinterpretation. "Misunderstanding happens when the receiver understands a message differently from what the sender intended. Misinterpretation happens when the message receiver interprets a message but has a differing understanding or definitions of words, terms, values, beliefs or instructions than that of the message sender"¹⁴⁶.

More than once Diesel has been criticized for dictating too much in his advertising campaigns. Two posters of the Clothing Company were banned from the advertising guard because they showed images of women who, according to the guard itself, could have caused serious offenses. Particularly, the two posters were depicted because they represented respectively a women exposing her breasts to a CCTV security camera at the top of a ladder, while on the other snap there is a girl photographing the inside of the under piece of her bikini. The Advertising Standards Authority has stated that these images were too openly sexual and

¹⁴⁵ E. Allwood, "Making the world's most controversial ad campaigns", *Dazed*, 2016 (consultation date 13th May 2017)

¹⁴⁶ Performance critical, *Effective Communication: 3 Types of Miscommunication*, <http://performancecritical.com/effective-communication-3-types-miscommunication/>, (consultation date 29th August 2017)

violate the rules of decency. The ASA also said that 33 people complained saying that those ads were unsuitable for children, offensive and condoned or encouraged anti-social behaviors. It added that both images were "likely to cause serious offence to many adults"¹⁴⁷ and that "We were further concerned that the images of young women photographing their genitalia and exposing their breasts to a camera in a public place were unsuitable to be displayed on posters, an untargeted medium that was likely to be seen by children, because of the overt sexualisation involved in the depicted acts"¹⁴⁸.

Diesel defended the campaigns saying that the images were showing a very strong and unexpected portrait of femininity, that the woman on the scale has been shown in an unusable way and that the message addresses the concern of modern society to have a camera of 24/7 surveillance on it, while tackling the topic clearly and not threatening. The Company said the content did not show any provocative nudity different from other many other advertisements concerning sports, bathing suits or lingerie. In any case, the following week, Diesel won the great prize in the category of publicity outside at the Cannes Lions International Advertising Festival just for that publicity that had been badly interpreted.

Another example of this type comes directly from the Bel Paese, precisely from Naples. A group of young university students decided to start a boycott against the Molvena Company. These young people accused the brand of wanting to transmit the subliminal message that says that you live better if you live stupid. That is why they decide to raise loudly the message "do not be stupid".

According to the Boycott Committee, "Diesel's latest campaign has lost any kind of ambiguity, screaming at the society we all should be stupid. An affront to all critical consciences, and above all to those who seek to raise the critical meaning and responsibility of individuals and society, daily"¹⁴⁹ explained some students.

The answer to the claim was not long waited and through Diesel's ironic and fearless tone, the firm replied: "there are great news for you: there is nothing stupid in being stupid. After all, Diesel was stupid enough to think of selling new jeans that look like to be used, and see what

¹⁴⁷ BBC, "Offensive Diesel Adverts banned", *BBC*, 30th June 2010 (consultation date 18th May 2017)

¹⁴⁸ *Ibidem*

¹⁴⁹ "L'ultima campagna della Diesel ha perso qualsiasi tipo di ambiguità urlando alla società tutta siate stupidi. Un affronto a tutte le coscienze critiche e soprattutto a tutti coloro che cercano quotidianamente di far crescere il senso critico e di responsabilità dei singoli e quindi della società" A.Ingegno, "Be stupid- a chi? Protesta studentesca Questa volta contro la pubblicità", *Corriere del mezzogiorno*, 5th February 2010 (consultation date 13th May 2017)

a result! When someone says, do not be stupid, what he really wants to say is, Do not have fun! Do not dare! Do not provoke! Bury your sense of humor! Do it seriously! Stupid is the liberating alternative to being boring to die. Stupid is to have the courage to risk and believe in what is new and innovative, even if it can be dangerous”¹⁵⁰.

In addition, the boycott campaign did not have the result hoped, on the contrary it turned out to be a boomerang, making so much viral advertising that has made nothing but increase in brand's audience.

For what concerns the theoretical consequences of provocative advertising, Vezina and Paul, they have deepened a study where they presented consumer's reactions to provocative advertising through the analysis of empirical evaluations. The preliminary results of this study have shown that when a person faces provocative advertising, he/she has a negative instant reaction that brings him/her to see the brand in a negative light and to despise not only the marketing object but the brand itself, too.

The same study has also shown that a moderate degree of provocation appeals can result in an equal, sometimes superior appreciation with respect to a type of communication considered properly conventional.

The same study gave a third conclusion. This has to do with the positive attitude of the population towards provocative advertising in general, but when directly exposed to it, people are more likely to react negatively.

Therefore, according to the authors, these results may indicate “to a distanced tolerance towards this kind of appeals in advertising”¹⁵¹.

It is also important to emphasize how these studies have shown that young people are more likely to have positive reactions to disruptive and provocative communications. From this, it is up to the brand intelligence to analyze its target market.

¹⁵⁰ “Bene, ci sono grandi notizie per te: non c'è niente di stupido nell'essere stupido. Dopo tutto, Diesel è stato stupido abbastanza da pensare di vendere jeans nuovi che sembravano già usati, e guarda che risultato! Quando qualcuno dice *non fare lo stupido*, quello che vuole dire davvero è ‘Non divertirti. Non osare. Non provocare. Seppellisci il tuo senso dell'umorismo. Fai il serio’. Stupido è l'alternativa liberatoria all'essere noioso da morire. Stupido è avere il coraggio di rischiare e credere nel nuovo e nell'innovativo, anche se può essere *pericoloso*”
R. Gaiba, “Diesel – la comunicazione dirompente e trasgressiva di una azienda”, *Trama e Ordito-il blog della moda*, 15th May 2017 (consultation date 13th May 2017)

¹⁵¹ R. Vezina, O. Paul, “Provocation in Advertising: a conceptualization and an empirical assessment”, *International Journal of research in Marketing*, XIV (1997), p. 192

We can say that all this theory goes hand in hand with the explanation given by Diesel on how it faces its own advertising strategy. "You will always have a couple of people who react in negative ways. In general, it is just a very boring time at the moment, I think. People are afraid, companies are afraid, everybody's into not taking risks instead of thinking about how to win. And that's a huge difference. I'd rather be somebody's shot of whiskey than everybody's cup of tea"¹⁵².

What Diesel really wants is to eliminate every misunderstandings, but not differences. It wishes to create the right approach and a new and better chain between cultures, including the one of advertising. "Let us enrich ourselves with mutual differences"¹⁵³.

¹⁵² E. Allwood, "Making the world's most controversial ad campaigns", *Dazed*, 2016 (consultation date 13th May 2017)

¹⁵³ "Arricchiamoci delle nostre reciproche differenze"

M.V. Tinti, "Diesel, Nike e l'Advertising Culture per fare la differenza", *Ninja Marketing*, 23rd February 2017 (consultation date 13th May 2017)

5. DIESEL ADVERTISING CAMPAIGNS STEP BY STEP

“Diesel rose to prominence and fame off the back of its clever advertising campaign that traded on controversy to say something important about society and culture (and sell some jeans along the way). Over the course of a decade, the ad men behind Diesel proved they weren’t afraid to use race, religion and sexuality to sell a brand, nor were they afraid to position themselves against both big corporate brands and the cheesy advertising that surrounded them. This anti-establishment attitude and tongue in cheek humour formed the backbone of the brand”¹⁵⁴.

Thanks to the kind of advertising Diesel has proposed over the years, the brand has been able to add a cultural component in the selling of clothes, and it goes beyond the aesthetic appearance and functionality of the products offered to the market.

Some of the themes that are constantly emphasized in the Company's advertisements are about those factors that characterize the modern society, such as sexuality, hedonism, legality, youth, suicide, religion and so on. That is why in front of such advertising proposals, the audience is divided on two fronts, those who erroneously interpret Diesel's work and messages and those that captures its true essence.

In order to guarantee faithful customers an ironic and constant update, the Company presents a collection every six months.

The real innovation lies in the fact that Diesel is innovative in all its aspects. The customer is looking forward to receive fresh news from the brand and, above all, in terms of advertising. After so many years of good campaigns, you can only wait for the new international advertisement to be surprising and impressive.

“How did Diesel go from a start up Company in 1978 to the hottest denim brand by 2000? Advertising. Diesel occupied dizzying heights of popularity and dominated the denim brand competition in the 1990s. Everything they touched seemed to sizzle”¹⁵⁵.

¹⁵⁴ L. Li, “A Retrospective Look at the Famous (and Controversial) Ad Campaign that Transformed Diesel”, *FIB (fashion industry broadcast)*, 29th November 2016 (consultation date 17th May 2017)

¹⁵⁵ *Ibidem*

5.1 80s & 90s: the very beginning of Diesel advertising campaigns

Diesel's first era, if we want to call it so, is perfectly mirrored in the name given to Renzo Rosso's holding Company that is nothing but the motto *Only the Brave*. In fact, those were the years in which the Company tried to make room for itself in a highly competitive environment, seeking for the differentiating factor that could make Diesel unique. And Diesel made it by selling new jeans that looked like they have already been used.

However, with respect to the advertising side, in the early years, there were no big moves. This is because big advertising campaigns will appear ahead when the brand will fully acknowledge the importance of communication with its consumer.

By the time of the 1990s, however, we have the launch of a series of advertising campaigns, which will have unparalleled results for the Company. In fact, combining the American jeans product with a series of deciphering messages about *how to do something*, Diesel managed to enter the mind of the audience, challenge them, create discussions to make people think and reflect in order to understand the ultimate meaning of the advertising proposed. From an advertising centered on simple models wearing branded clothes, Diesel shifted to a brand new type of advertising where the models were placed into a scenery designed to tell a story.

The combination of their ads, their great adorable jeans and their radical logo, soon had an impact on young people and the colorful shirts with the great Mohican became a must-have. We are talking about the several advertising campaigns that come under the name *Diesel for successful living*.

"It started because Diesel hadn't done any official advertising before. This was back in 1991. But what we could see as the future in communication and advertising, and what they had in terms of ideas for their Company, didn't exist then at all. The early 90s was quite a depressing time, the economy was bad and people were suffering. Then we came up with this happy-go-lucky, political, completely wrong campaign. There was only really one denim brand in Europe at the time, Levi's, which had about 75 per cent of the jean market, and then a couple of small brands. Diesel's advertising (and the product, of course) changed the game.

Suddenly it wasn't old America that mattered, all those kind of things became irrelevant after just a few seasons with this campaign"¹⁵⁶.

Starting in 1991, Maurizio Marchiori, Diesel's advertising director at the time, decided to engage with the Swedish advertising agency Paradiset to start a world-branded campaign with ads that could turn Diesel's advent. "This is type of advertising that stands for honesty, explains Maurizio Marchiori, a supporter of the *disruption* that states that in some situations it is more advantageous to overturn the rules of the game rather than channel into pre-established business logic. While fashion Companies ride creative strategies to say that through their products you can become someone else, Diesel's advertising does not smuggle this transformation but launches another concept, which sounds more or less like this: use our products, you'll stay who you are. And it deals with real stories with paradoxical treatment, stories of ordinary madness with hyper-realistic intent, always with a discretionary and sometimes iconoclastic will. [...].Today, the youth market cannot be understood by using the customary target group definitions as masterplan since for planetary young people elements other than age are more relevant, such as the way of being, the way of dressing, the way of thinking, how to take leisure are the real parameters for distinguish who is young (inside) from who is not"¹⁵⁷.

From these considerations, *Diesel for successful living* was born, inspired by the advertising campaign that had sprouted in the 1950s, "products make better living". Nevertheless, for Diesel, the consumer paradise needed a touch of irony, to set aside absurd ambitions, and to stop overestimating what was successful¹⁵⁸.

¹⁵⁶ E. Allwood, "Making the world's most controversial ad campaigns", *Dazed*, 2016 (consultation date 13th May 2017)

¹⁵⁷ "Si tratta di un advertising che dichiara la propria onestà, come spiega Maurizio Marchiori, sostenitore della *disruption*, ossia del fatto che in alcune situazioni è più vantaggioso ribaltare le regole del gioco piuttosto che canalizzarsi in logiche aziendali precostituite. Nel momento in cui le aziende di moda cavalcano le strategie creative per affermare che attraverso i propri prodotti si possa diventare qualcun altro, la pubblicità di Diesel non contrabbanda il trasformismo ma lancia un altro *concept* che suona pressappoco così: usa pure i nostri prodotti, resterai quello che sei. E tratta storie reali con un trattamento paradossale, storie di ordinaria follia con intento iperrealistico, sempre con volontà dissacratoria e a volte iconoclastica. [...]. Oggi il mercato giovanile non può essere compreso utilizzando le consuete definizione di target *group* in termini anagrafici giacché per i giovani planetari elementi diversi dall'età come il modo di essere, di vestire, di pensare, di occupare il tempo libero sono i veri parametri per distinguere chi è giovane (dentro), da chi non lo è"

A. Giancola, *La moda nel consumo giovanile. Strategie & immagini di fine millennio*, vol II, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 1999, p.133

¹⁵⁸ L. Li, "A Retrospective Look at the Famous (and Controversial) Ad Campaign that Transformed Diesel", *FIB (fashion industry broadcast)*, 29th November 2016 (consultation date 17th May 2017)

The collaboration between Renzo Rosso and Paradiset lasts for ten years and it was the bearer of a kind of advertising that has demonstrated to the world that the union between a powerful social message and a healthy absurd humor can exist. Not only this, it has the potential to show that there is always something important to say. Jason Jonason commented on what they did as it “was provocative, funny, but also intellectual. We more or less tried to pick up on the conversation that was going on in society around us and make art of it”¹⁵⁹.

Giving to the society something to reflect on, sometimes that was able to walk on the border, has made this advertising campaign vital both for the Company as for the advertising world in general.

Not only Diesel wanted to face the society, the firm also had a message for corporate brands that claimed to have a social conscience, while their sole purpose was focused on mass consumption and gaining profit.

A striking example of how Diesel has entered the provocative advertising scenario through *Diesel for a successful living* is the image of a nineties ItGirl in shorts denim at the center of an image that reproduces in the background the threefold images of a man pointing a gun directly to the observer. The slogan cites

*“How to teach your children to love and care. Modern children need to solve their own problems: teaching kids to KILL helps them deal directly with reality, imitating the slogans of major brands and suggesting debates on tangled problems on youth culture and violence”*¹⁶⁰

By doing so, the Company decided to undertake a publicity based on the criticism of the modern society, on satire, in order to socialize and entertain the consumer. For example, we can find an advertisement where there are a pair of young urbanities, stylishly dressed, looking on disgusted a group of overweight old men digging into their fine dining of McDonald's burger and fries.

Another example, even more pushed, represents a family who is attending a relative's funeral. They can only see the feet in the coffin, the dead man is not wearing the common funeral dress, but Diesel's sneakers. By doing so, the brand depicts the cultural clash between the new and old. It creates a real gap between generations and cultures.

¹⁵⁹ L. Li, “A Retrospective Look at the Famous (and Controversial) Ad Campaign that Transformed Diesel”, *FIB (fashion industry broadcast)*, 29th November 2016 (consultation date 17th May 2017)

¹⁶⁰ *Ibidem*

A further breakthrough takes place at the beginning of the new millennium in 2001. With the presentation of a subset of *Diesel advertising for successful living*, called *The Daily African*. In these advertisements Diesel wanted to represent the dummy ideal of everyday life. In fact, black models are shown wearing the brand's jeans, wandering in limousines, working in luxury offices, and having fun in doing so. These representations are a clear reversal of the reality of time, putting the question mark on the past and the present and openly challenging social norms and beliefs¹⁶¹.

However, Diesel does not just focus on sexual and racial aspects. The Company has the most diverse goals and among them, it decided to dedicate intersecting to religious aspects. In particular, the firm decided to concentrate on the role religions have played throughout history and in the conflicts and wars that have taken place. In one of its advertising campaigns, Diesel represents religious leaders wearing sunglasses, claiming they are "significant contribution to World Peace" and that they are "reality blockers" that "protect even the most sensitive eyes from harmful or unpleasant facts". The message you want to send instead has to do with the blindness and ignorance of these characters when it comes to conflicts¹⁶².

The series of advertising campaigns belonging to *Diesel for successful living* have traveled around the world, teaching a new way of advertising. The contemporary world is completely overturned and derided by highlighting the new generation of courageous people who want to question themes such as sex, race, history, and culture. Diesel questions the world as a society of people and values, but it also questions all the work done previously by other actors and consumers in the same fashion industry scenario.

"This appeal to the iconoclastic beliefs of a generation that was brand conscious, but also socially conscious and captured something bubbling under the surface. Although Diesel no longer has the dominant share of cultural cache it enjoyed in the 1990s and early 2000s, a look back at its advertising sheds an interesting light on how it rose to prominence. Perhaps in this culturally sensitive and tumultuous time, we can learn something from Diesel"¹⁶³.

¹⁶¹ K. Perez Guzman, "Diesel, finally it all makes sense", *Your Living Cities*, 6th December 2016 (consultation date 10th September 2017)

¹⁶² L. Li, "A Retrospective Look at the Famous (and Controversial) Ad Campaign that Transformed Diesel", *FIB (fashion industry broadcast)*, 29th November 2016 (consultation date 17th May 2017)

¹⁶³ *Ibidem*

Figure 5.1: Some of the described advertisements from Diesel for successful living



Source: Google Images, Diesel for successful living advertising¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ Google Images, Diesel for successful living advertising campaign, <http://bit.ly/2xPV4Gd> (consultation date 1st October 2017)

5.2 2000s

After the first advertising campaigns where Diesel was supposed to go against any kind of normality, criticizing society, politics, religion and attacking what had existed in the fashion industry and who had worked in it, the Company decided to turn the corner and focus on the individual, his passions, his personality, his desires, needs, and so on. Therefore, with the beginning of the new millennium, Diesel embraced a new theme, completely focused on the person itself. In addition, with the unstoppable progress of the digital world, the Company realized the role that the consumer was slowly assuming and decided to turn its advertising appeals to educated, individualist, emancipating and smart people. As a result, advertising became dedicated to a niche audience with which the brand succeeded in the establishment of a more intimate relationship.

In 2001, Diesel launched an advertising campaign characterized by a delicious surreality of the images and the extraordinarily ironic copy. *Save yourself, Be ironic* was created thanks to the contributions of the Dutch agency KesselsKramer and French photographer Jean-Pierre Khazem. The latter was the key to the realization of this advertising campaign. In particular, his obsession of the *youth* led him to realize an extremely provocative concept of the ideal of beauty and youth that has distributed on twenty-three subjects as portraits of phenomenal testimonials of absurd techniques to escape the advancement of time and age. Among these absurd techniques, we find: *avoiding the sun, not working, eating algae, drinking urine*, but also *abstaining from sex, cloning and reincarnating*¹⁶⁵. The success of these images has been so unexpected and productive that these have been disseminated on the pages of fashion and lifestyle magazines and posted on mid-planet roads but also, and above all, they have been collected in a hyper-experiential minisite and in a pamphlet for Diesel customers. In here, they have assumed the role of a true eternal youth recipe book, which wisely played on the apparent realism of suggestions and on the real existence of immortalized characters.

Every advice about *how to stay young* was given the name of the subject portrayed in the image and its date of birth. For example, let us talk about "Louise Kemp-Welch, born in 1893, who discovered the joys of cloning (according to his words is already in fourth) and to continue

¹⁶⁵Adland, Diesel-Save yourself, <http://adland.tv/ooh/diesel-save-yourself-drink-urine-eat-algae-dont-breathe> (consultation date 9th September 2017)

being young and attractive forever declares to clone as soon as he becomes aware of a new frustration"¹⁶⁶. Obviously, these surreal tips and methods to escape the signs of time are merely the parody of a society that is afraid to age and look prosperous in the future. However, despite the absurdity, Diesel found the right way, at least for the brand, to stay young and up to date. It has been able to combine art and marketing to build, since the dawn of the millennium, viral advertising campaigns with a high degree of irony and audacity.

In 2001, as we introduced earlier, the firm launched another campaign called *The Daily African*. These advertisements deserve special attention because of the boldness the brand has had in bringing up stories that completely dazzle the order of the contemporary society. Some quotes coming to mind are "Birthrate Booms in Italy and Spain", one of them reads, "Europe Set Back Even More", the sub-headline continues: "With an average of 8.7 children born to every Italian woman and an annual GNP per capita below AFRO 45, there is a high risk of looming tragedy in southern Europe". AU (African Union) agrees on" African Hostages Free After Being Holded 148 Days By Californian Rebels " financial aid to Europe "¹⁶⁷.

In a parallel Universe Diesel depicts the European nations as victims of a powerful Africa that is characterized by corruption, vices and decides to watch Europe from far away without any help. The world has then been inverted. "In this bizzarro world even the maps favor a global South perspective (flip a globe upside-down and you'll see what' I'm talking about), a completely alien view to our western eyes. Like all good speculative fiction, these tongue-in-cheek counterfactual photos attempt to tell us more about our own world than the fictional creation. If we find such images so startling when the global dynamics of race and power are reversed, do we find them equally as absurd and troubling as they actually exist? Or have these realities become so normal, that were it used as part of the ad campaign, we'd likely pass it by without a great deal of thought—like the oblivious cavorting Africans of the photos"¹⁶⁸.

¹⁶⁶ "Louise Kemp-Welch, nata nel 1893, che ha scoperto le gioie della clonazione (stando alle sue parole è già alla quarta) e per continuare ad essere giovane e attraente per sempre dichiara di clonarsi appena si accorge di una nuova rughetta"

F. Catalano, "Save Save yourself: Be Ironic!", *Gorgonia blog*, 22nd December 2013 (consultation date 13th May 2017)

¹⁶⁷ Coloribus, Advertising campaign: "Diesel (The Daily African)", <https://www.coloribus.com/adsarchive/commercials/diesel-the-daily-african/>, (consultation date 9th September 2017)

¹⁶⁸ Phenderson Djèlí Clark, Speculative Art: The Daily African- Diesel 2001, <https://pdjeliclarck.wordpress.com/2012/05/10/speculative-art-the-daily-african-diesel-2001/>, (consultation

The third world, Europe in Africa, suffers because the rest of the world decides to live a spoiled and decadent lifestyle rather than stopping and rolling on their sleeves in order to better the life in the rest of the world. Of course, the truth is much more complicated. These publicities have been very successful reaching a wide audience, once again challenging lifestyle and contemporary models.

The 2002 *Action!* was the advertising that, perhaps more than all, reflected the successful acclaimed by Diesel's living. This advertising campaign, entirely in black and white, was intended to spur young people from all over the world to live their lives actively, without just having ideas but not putting them into practice. The announced purpose was to denounce the passivity and, at the same time, to accentuate a kind of action aimed at expressing dynamically and actively people's own opinion. Diesel's message was able to materialize itself in the same brand jeans as in the entire collection, and it particularly encouraged young people to take those actions they took for granted. The most beautiful example is just to shake hands at your mom, show her you love her, actions like this that make life more beautiful and worth living¹⁶⁹. With the *Global Warming Ready* advertising campaign, Diesel has definitely raised the temperature. At the end of January 2007, in fact, the Company launched on newspapers, magazines and billboards a series of images, where models are living in a world that is drifting due to global warming.

"Marketing staff see the *Global Warming Ready* campaign as consistent with Diesel's tradition of generating attention and provoking discussion of serious societal issues with a tongue-in-cheek ironic voice"¹⁷⁰. "The shocking effects of Global Warming are not immediately noticeable but are subtly revealed through details in the ads depicting ordinary scenes in a surreal, post-Global Warming world"¹⁷¹.

Among these advertisements, we remember the one set in New York, where the City is completely submerged by water. We can also find tropical birds instead of the usual and characteristic pigeons populating Square San Marco, in Venice, and the cold Finland that has become a desert of dune. Therefore, if at first sight the purpose may seem the marketing of

date 9th September 2017))

¹⁶⁹ tomchancellor.com, Diesel - ACTION!, <http://www.tomchancellor.com/following/tomchancellor.com/Diesel-ACTION> (consultation date 16th September 2017)

¹⁷⁰ D. Macleod, "Diesel Global Warming Ready", *Share81*, 6th March 2007 (consultation date 12th September 2017)

¹⁷¹ *Ibidem*

jeans, actually, behind these advertisements there is the fear and concern of environmentalists. Diesel was not only concerned about this topic and decided to denounce the situation, it also supported the action by raising awareness in its customers. In fact, many initiatives could be found on the Company's website.

“The print ads are supported online with various consumer materials aimed at engaging with global warming. A tongue-in-cheek video raises issue relating to climate change. A map shows the world’s seaside regions completely under water. Diesel promises to provide a guide for dune buggy tours in Lapland and windsurfing on Fifth Avenue, New York. Diesel encourages customers to buy and watch Al Gore’s Oscar-winning documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* on DVD”¹⁷².

As usual, Diesel looked at the surrounding world to improve it and to make people reflect about what is happening around us.

¹⁷² D. Macleod, “Diesel Global Warming Ready”, *Share81*, 6th March 2007 (consultation date 12th September 2017)

Image 5.1: "Louise Kemp-Welch" from Save yourself, Be Ironic advertising campaign



Source: Google Images, Louisa Kemp Welch Diesel¹⁷³

Image 5.2: "African Hostages Free After Being Held 148 Days By Californian Rebels" from The Daily Africans advertising campaign



Source: Google Images, The daily Africans¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ Google Images, Louisa Kemp Welch Diesel, <http://bit.ly/2xL0AYT> (consultation date 1st October 2017)

¹⁷⁴ Google Images, The daily Africans, <http://bit.ly/2xSacDo> (consultation date 1st October 2017)

Image 5.3: “Hold more hands” from Action! advertising campaign



Source: Google Images, Diesel Action!¹⁷⁵

Image 5.4: Tropical birds in San Marco from Global Warming Ready advertising campaign



Source: Google Images, Global warming ready Diesel¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Google Images, Diesel Action!, <http://bit.ly/2fA57VY> (consultation date 1st October 2017)

¹⁷⁶ Google images, Global warming ready Diesel, <http://bit.ly/2x7iibU> (consultation date 1st October 2017)

5.3 From 2010

Over the last seventeen years, Diesel continued to produce successful provocative advertising campaigns, it has sometimes been denounced, but the brand never surrounded and it maintained the same attitude of denunciation and irony towards the society.

Be stupid is the slogan and the name of the advertising campaign Diesel launched in 2010. “The campaign claim promises the target they’ll be happier if they behave in ways that are considered stupid by more conformist others. They should do so in the most open ways, satisfying whatever sort of inner child they have, alone or in group. By acting stupid, they will assert their own singularity amongst their peers, a singularity that Diesel decides to turn into a social value (by committing to it). Therefore, by wearing Diesel clothing, the target will join the self-aware of stupid’s superiority community and will be likely identified by its members as one of them”¹⁷⁷.

As a matter of fact, the words *Be stupid* stand for those people who perfectly fit into the brand philosophy: those people who want and are able to diversify themselves from the mass by what they wear, by how they freely behave, by their creativity and indifference with respect to those that are considered normal behavioral codes. Obviously, not all the guys who are attracted and identify themselves in the words Diesel really behave like that, but this is what is amazing about advertising, it makes you think you can be someone else. With this respect, we can affirm that urge to be stupid is an exhortation to evaluate the meaning of the stupid word in its positive aspects, such as being more creative and having more unconventional but genius behaviors.

“Stupid is the relentless pursuit of a regret free life. Smart may have the brains... but stupid has the balls. The smart might recognize things for how they are. The stupid see things for how they could be. Smart critiques. Stupid creates. The fact is if we didnt have stupid thoughts wed have no interesting thoughts at all. Smart may have the plans... but stupid has the stories.

Smart may have the authority but stupid has one hell of a hangover. Its not smart to take risks... Its stupid.

¹⁷⁷ Tayebot, “A case study: new Diesel campaign”, *Writing for (y)EU*, 3rd February 2010 (consultation date 2nd September 2017)

To be stupid is to be brave. The stupid isn't afraid to fail. The stupid know there are worse things than failure... like not even trying.

Smart had one good idea, and that idea was stupid. You can't outsmart stupid. So don't even try. Remember only stupid can be truly brilliant"¹⁷⁸. With this consideration given by the *Be Stupid* Diesel campaign a new decade of thrilling and innovative advertising will begin.

In the same way as *Global Warming Ready*, a few years later Diesel launched another campaign based on the environmental context. In fact, face to face with rising pollution, unresolved wars in the world, carbon emissions and political disorganization, the Company decided to leave this corrupt world and head to *Diesel Island*. This is the name of the advertising campaign launched in 2011 by the brand, which, as it did the previous year, encouraged consumers to be more brave and less smart in order to proclaim their independence.

Thanks to the collaboration with the Holy Advertising Agency, the advertising campaign documented the actions of a group of pioneers who come to this island characterized by a tropical climate. In here, they have to solve a series of problems, from the more ancient in the world, and celebrate their achievements. They are facing the problems that include homeland security, Government management, several social issues, and sustainability and so on¹⁷⁹.

"This provocative campaign will appear in key fashion magazines including *Russh*, *Grazia*, *Harpers*, *GQ*, *Men's Style* and *Vogue*, after a hard push to get it over the line due to the language used.

The campaign was launched in Europe earlier this year and received an overwhelming response from media and consumers alike and not only generated discussions on Diesel Island but debate on real political and social issues in the World as well"¹⁸⁰.

In 2013, Nicola Formichetti arrived to Diesel headquarters and immediately started to work in order to achieve something that could leave a remarkable sign. At that time, the Company needed a boost for a sort of "rebirth" and this new start did not wait long after the launch of the *Diesel Reboot* advertising campaign in 2014. Everything started with the viral image of a pope projected on historic buildings in Milan and Rome: Castello Sforzesco, Navigli, Ponte

¹⁷⁸ D. Macleod, "Diesel Be Stupid", *Inspiration Room*, 18th January 2010 (consultation date 12th September 2017)

¹⁷⁹ Cecilia.com, Diesel-Land!, <http://cecylia.com/2011/07/diesel-land/>, (consultation date 9th September 2017)

¹⁸⁰ CB (CampaignBrief), "Diesel Island controversial: land of the stupid and the brave campaign nationally today", CampaignBrief, 14th July 2011 (consultation date 18th May 2017)

Milvio and even the Colosseum were the scenarios of Diesel's call-to-action. "I resurrect the destroyed" recited the headline. This motto perfectly resembled the rebirth of Diesel with Reboot since its "Second Life". This is how the reinvention of one of the most iconic brands ever happened and it was realized through the direct contribution of users¹⁸¹.

"The aim is to revive brand features: freedom, creativity, originality and, above all, courage. That's why Diesel needs a new generation of brand ambassadors and fashion influencers who will build a creative community around the brand"¹⁸². Formichetti added that "the idea for this campaign was to merge the classic portrait photographic style featuring the new heroes of today's generation: the digital influencers and creators. Visually, I wanted to highlight the individual beauty of our community. It was less about capturing fashion and more about getting an insight into these people's souls"¹⁸³.

The months right after the launch of Formichetti campaign, real challenges for the audience were put in place. Users were asked to contribute by expressing their own ideas through their blog, tumblr and using the *#dieselreboot* hashtag on Twitter, Instagram and Vine. The result was an active participation of Diesel consumers in the Company's rebranding. "When Renzo asked me to collaborate with him, I remembered how Diesel and I share the same spirit. No rules! It's all a matter of having the power to do something, to be free. It's a positive revolution. We're ready to reboot! Press the refresh key. This is our first project: we will destroy everything to rebuild something bigger. I want to involve creative young people around the world and make them part of the process"¹⁸⁴. What better way to make consumers participate than to make them active in the rebranding of the Company?

¹⁸¹ E. Marraro, "Diesel Reboot: Diesel AW13 AD Campaign", *Wonderland*, 23rd August 2013 (consultation date 9th September 2017)

¹⁸² "Lo scopo è ravvivare le caratteristiche del brand: libertà, creatività, originalità e, soprattutto, coraggio. Per questo Diesel ha bisogno di una nuova generazione di brand ambassador e fashion influencer, che andranno a creare una community di creativi attorno al brand"

N. Falco Simeone, "Diesel Reboot: la rinascita del brand con Nicola Formichetti", *Ninja Marketing*, 20th June 2013 (consultation date 18th May 2017)

¹⁸³ E. Marraro, "Diesel Reboot: Diesel AW13 AD Campaign", *Wonderland*, 23rd August 2013 (consultation date 9th September 2017)

¹⁸⁴ "Quando Renzo mi ha chiesto di collaborare con lui, mi sono ricordato di come io e Diesel condividiamo lo stesso spirito. Niente regole! E' tutta una questione di avere il potere di fare qualcosa, di essere liberi. E' una rivoluzione positiva. Siamo pronti a un reboot! A premere il tasto refresh. Questo è il nostro primo progetto: distruggeremo tutto per ricostruire qualcosa di più grande. Voglio coinvolgere i giovani creativi di tutto il mondo e renderli parte del processo"

N. Falco Simeone, "Diesel Reboot: la rinascita del brand con Nicola Formichetti", *Ninja Marketing*, 20th June 2013 (consultation date 18th May 2017)

Moreover, Alessandro Bogliolo, who was Diesel CEO at the time, said “Diesel’s reboot extends well beyond marketing and communications, going right to the core of the company’s business strategy. It’s a much wider concept than people may have perceived. It’s really the reboot of the entire brand,” said a fresh-faced Bogliolo in his first interview since taking the reins as Diesel’s chief executive. Of course, there are the communications, the advertising — but there is also the strategy behind everything: it’s an overall evolution towards more quality in every single expression of the brand. This is the way we want to move Diesel”¹⁸⁵.

The 2014 is the year of the *We are connected* advertising campaign. In the Spring / Summer collection of that year, the photos taken by Inez van Lamsweerde and Vinoodh Matadin pointed at the *diversity* factor. Not by chance, in fact, Diesel decided to give value to a model on a wheelchair. Diversity stands right in the disability elements. Even before the official launch, the campaign had generated great curiosity and interest, especially on the Web. This is because this specific Diesel campaign put aside the classical beautiful models with perfect body, so far from the common world. The brand, this time, wanted to enhance diversity by highlighting the rebellious, tattooed, crazy, young, unlearned faces that have been chosen directly by Formichetti¹⁸⁶.

In the front row, we could find Jillian Mercado, a wheelchair fashion blogger young women who lives in New York. She has beautiful blond hair and she is immortalized with a red lipstick that emphasizes her fleshy lips. The thing that makes this picture even more interesting and unique is Jillian herself saying she has entered the fashion world knowing that maybe nobody before her had done it and she liked the idea of being the first in something. The new Diesel advertising wheelchair model said "I feel that society is scared and does not want it to some extent, so a lot of people with disabilities are scared of criticism"¹⁸⁷. This courageous and brave girl launched an appeal to fashion advertising campaigns, to be more brave and dare more, just as she did. That is exactly what Diesel did, enhancing her disability in that alternative advertising.

¹⁸⁵ V. Kansara, “Inside Diesel’s ‘Reboot’”, *BOF*, 8th September 2014, (consultation date 9th September 2017)

¹⁸⁶ R. Forgione, P. Cardona, “Diesel, We are connected: la campagna pubblicitaria Primavera/Estate 2014. I creativi si connettono insieme”, *Huffingtonpost*, 20th May 2014 (consultation date 9th September 2017)

¹⁸⁷ “Sento che la società è spaventata e che in qualche misura non vuole che questo avvenga, di conseguenza un sacco di persone disabili hanno paura delle critiche”

S. De Rosa, “Diesel valorizza una modella in sedia a rotelle per la nuova pubblicità”, *Ultime notizie flash*, 11th February 2014 (consultation date 13th May 2017)

In 2015, *#DieselHigh* is launched as real message of unconditional love and tolerance. This is another Nicola Formichetti's innovative idea, who, as a consolidated creative director, decided to talk about his work saying "there are so many crazy things happening that no longer happens to see people who simply enjoy themselves. [...]. The challenge was to work with a cutting-edge photographer like Nick Knight and bring him to do something he never did: snap smiling people"¹⁸⁸. *#DieselHigh* represents at best the style and energy proper of the brand, showing young people models while they are having fun, jumping and smiling between themselves. Thus, the campaign exalted the talents of youth, simplicity and spontaneity, freedom from what surrounds us, away from studied and fixed poses. A positive energy spurt is launched by this advertising campaign that wants a better life in a better world for all. However, to do this, as Formichetti says, we have to improve ourselves, elevate everyone's spirit and be available to help others, respecting what surrounds us.

The latest advertising campaign launched by Diesel, which has traveled around the world displayed on billboards and in the most popular metropolitan areas, is the ultimate *Make love not wall*, 2016. In its idea, Diesel associated the prejudice of humanity with respect to the diversities with the creation of a real wall that hinder contact between people. The idea was born before the present debate about Brexit and the advent of Trump, probably because certain aspects already existed in the world. Renzo Rosso also admitted that he had to beat against his team to convince them to accept this proposal. However, confident of his own cultural baggage and past experiences, he has insisted and did persuade his coworkers to embark on the new adventure.

"I wanted to tie myself to something that was happening in the world, as always. We did a little research. Then, I remembered the words of my friend Dalai Lama. [...]. *See Renzo, if people were to speak, there would be no wars and conflicts, but people would isolate themselves behind the walls.* And it all started. The wall? Banal: the Pd that is besieging in the factions, the Brexit or Trump. Here it is. But also the technology that is between individuals. And they all talk only and only through it. But it is ok and it will be my next objective"¹⁸⁹.

¹⁸⁸ "Accadono così tante cose folli che non capita più di vedere gente che semplicemente si diverte. [...]. La sfida è stata quella di lavorare con un fotografo d'avanguardia, come Nick Knight e portarlo a fare qualcosa che lui non ha mai fatto: scattare persone sorridenti"

M. Sortino, "*#DieselHigh*: la campagna Diesel Primavera Estate 2015", *Vogue*, 2nd February 2015 (consultation date 18th May 2017)

¹⁸⁹ "Volevo legarmi a qualcosa che stava succedendo nel mondo, come sempre Abbiamo fatto un po' di ricerche. Poi, mi sono ricordata delle parole del mio amico Dalai Lama: *vedi Renzo se la gente si parlasse, non esisterebbero*

The wall theme is very contemporary, perfectly reflecting the political landscape of our days. In order to have the desired atmosphere and to make the best of the idea, photographer David LaChapelle, who was specifically chosen for the assignment, decided to select a group of young dancers, each of them representing a different type of culture or religious or sexual orientation. LaChapelle, along with Formichetti and Rosso, came to the conclusion that a melting pot of races, religions and beliefs was the secret weapon to break down any kind of prejudice, sending the general message that creating barriers builds only misunderstandings¹⁹⁰.

It is said *Go big or go home*, and Diesel decided, once again, not to limit itself in the advertising campaign. Instead, the brand created a special theme event in London, which has been very internationally successful. "To eliminate misunderstandings, but not differences, means the creation of a closer and better tune between cultures, also in the advertising context"¹⁹¹.

le guerre e conflitti, invece le persone si isolano dietro ai muri. E tutto è partito. Il muro? Banalmente: il Pd che si barrica nelle fazioni, la Brexit o Trump. Ecco. Ma anche la tecnologia che si frappone fra gli individui. E tutti parlano solo e soltanto attraverso di lei e non va bene e sarà il mio prossimo impegno"

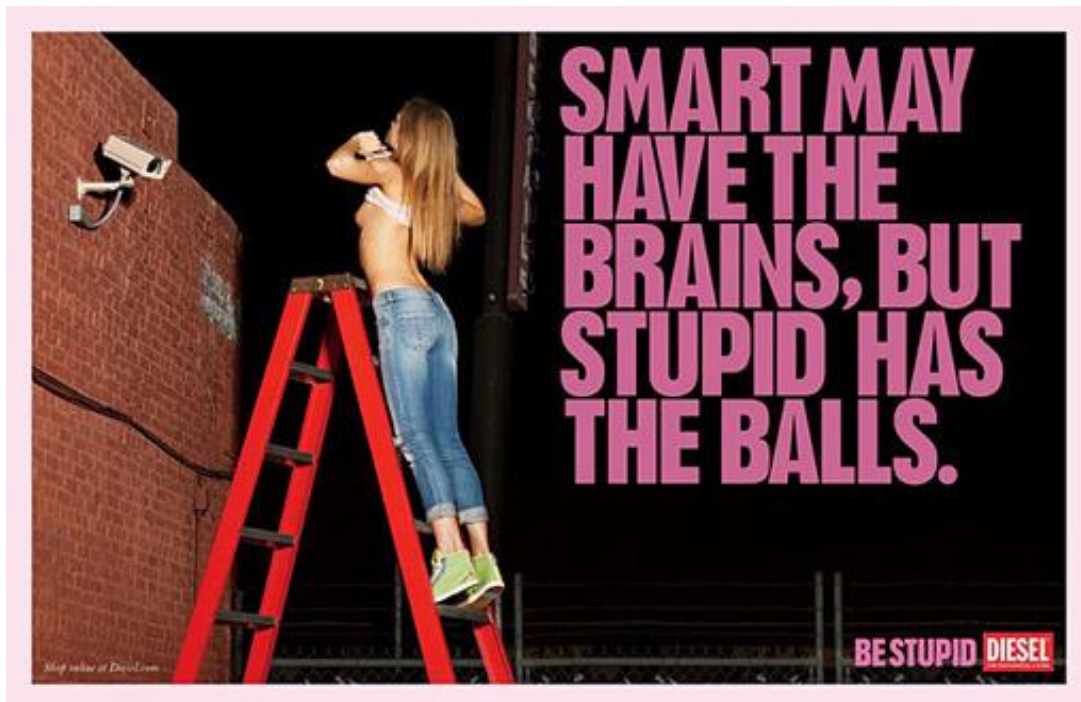
P. Pollo, "Renzo Rosso: la nuova campagna Diesel? Un'idea del Dalai Lama", *Il corriere della sera*, 20th March 2017 (consultation date 9th September 2017)

¹⁹⁰ E. Giovinazzo, David LaChapelle vi farà sognare ancora una volta con la danza dello spot Diesel: "Fate l'amore, non i muri", *Huffington Post*, 14th February 2017 (consultation date 9th September 2017)

¹⁹¹ "Eliminare le incomprensioni, ma non le differenze, vuol dire creare l'avvicinamento e una migliore sintonia tra culture, anche quella dell'advertising"

M.V. Tinti, "Diesel, Nike e l'Advertising Culture per fare la differenza", *Ninja Marketing*, 23rd February 2017 (consultation date 13th May 2017)

Image 5.5: “Smart may have the brain, but stupid has the balls” from Be stupid advertising campaign



Source: Google Images, Be Stupid Diesel¹⁹²

Image 5.5: Diesel Island jeans flag creation from Diesel Island advertising campaign



Source: Google Images, Diesel Island advertising campaign¹⁹³

¹⁹² Google Images, Be Stupid Diesel, <http://bit.ly/2xKxlpq> (consultation date 1st October 2017)

¹⁹³ Google Images, Diesel Island advertising campaign, <http://bit.ly/2kb86ck> (consultation date 1st October 2017)

Image 5.7: “I am not what I appear to be” from Diesel Reboot advertising campaign



Source: Google Images, Diesel reboot¹⁹⁴

Image 5.8: Jillian Mercado in the We are connected advertising campaign



Source: Google Images, Diesel we are connected advertising campaign¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ Google Images, Diesel reboot, <http://bit.ly/2hFH4Js> (consultation date 1st October 2017)

¹⁹⁵ Google Images, Diesel we are connected advertising campaign, <http://bit.ly/2g1wxoj> (consultation date 1st October 2017)

Image 5.9: Diesel High advertising campaign



Source: Google Images, Diesel High advertising campaign¹⁹⁶

Image 5.10: Make love not walls advertising campaign



Source: Google Images, Make love not walls¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ Google Images, Diesel High advertising campaign, <http://bit.ly/2xSpgRo> (consultation date 1st October 2017)

¹⁹⁷ Google Images, Make love not walls, <http://bit.ly/2wrw2do> (consultation date 1st October 2017)

6. THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

An empirical research is “where you conduct *hands on* experimentation. In other words, you get your results from actual experience rather than from a theory or belief. This type of research has three major characteristics: a research question is posed, the target behavior, population, or phenomena is defined, the process is described in detail so that the research can be verified and duplicated”¹⁹⁸.

The main purpose of this empirical research is to define, through an online questionnaire, whether if the theory proposed in the model by Darren W. Dahl¹⁹⁹ is representative of the population.

Let us briefly remember what the model says. According to Dahl, provocative advertising appears to be an innovative type of communication that seems to be more effective and superior to other ways of attracting attention and remembering what people have been exposed to. In particular, when a person is exposed to advertising characterized by provocative purposes, this person mind passes through three phases. The *Exposure Shocking Advertisement* defines the first step. After that, there is the *processing of information*, which results in a cognitive assessment and in the surprise factor that the observer feels in himself. The surprise turns into attention in the further *processing of the content*²⁰⁰.

In order to make this *ad hoc* created questionnaire as coherent as possible with the research question, the most frequent variables in advertising research have been taken into consideration, and analyzed. These variables constitute a sort of hierarchy, which posits that advertisement should be able to guide consumers through a series of steps before it can be said to have an impact on sales²⁰¹.

There exists, in fact, a processing of information transmitted by an advertising that passes through three main phases that we will classify as *cognitive*, *affective* and *conative*.

¹⁹⁸ Statistics How To, Empirical Research: Definition, <http://www.statisticshowto.com/empirical-research/>, (consultation date 16th September 2017)

¹⁹⁹ D.W Dahl, K. Frankenberger, R.V Manchanda, “Does it pay to shock? Reactions to shocking and non-shocking ad content among University students”, *Journal of Advertising Research*, XLIII (2003), pp. 268-280

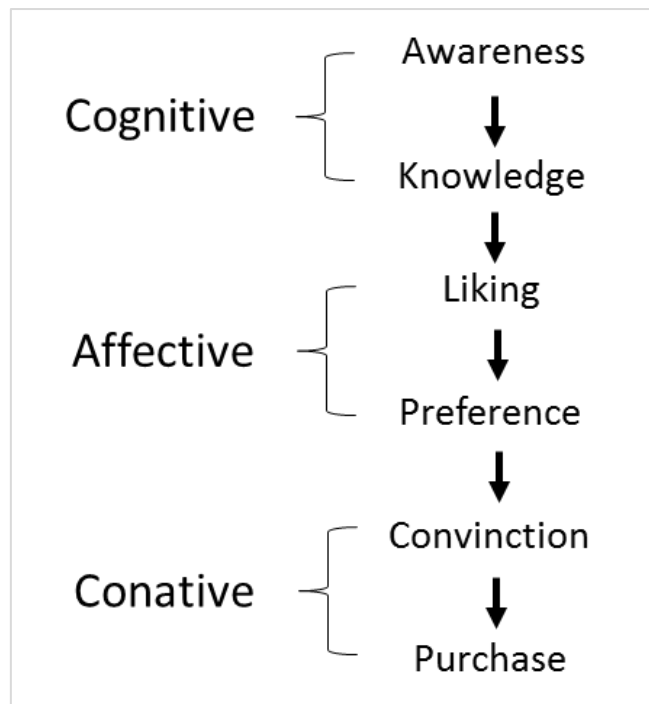
²⁰⁰ *Ibidem*

²⁰¹ R. Vezina, O. Paul, “Provocation in Advertising: a conceptualization and an empirical assessment”, *International Journal of research in Marketing*, XIV (1997), pp.177-192

“Cognitive refers to through processes and includes variables such as attention or awareness. The most commonly used measures for attention and awareness are recall and recognition. Affective refers to emotions. There is a vast spectrum of emotional variables that range from positive to negative and from personal to impersonal. The most common measures for them are liking, attitude, irritation, warmth and fear. Attitude refers to a consumer’s underlying predisposition to act. [...]. Conative refers to variables that are proximate to behavior, such as persuasion and purchase intention”²⁰².

Consumer attitudes are strongly taken into consideration by marketing professionals as they represent those factors that affect people's behavior. Indeed, in the figure below we can see the relationship that exists between attitudes and consumer behaviors.

Fig. 7.1: Attitude components and buying behavior



Source: personal elaboration of M. Easy model (2009)²⁰³

²⁰² G. Tellis, *Effective Advertising: Understanding When, How, and Why Advertising Works*, Thousand Oaks-California, SAGE Publications, 2003, pp. 43-51

²⁰³ *lvi*

Therefore, taking into account the above-mentioned measures of advertising impact, search questions that are consistent with the advertising sphere have been formulated. In particular, questions respond to the context of general advertising and then they go deeper toward provocative advertising.

The questions about cognitive variables are:

1. How much are you interested in Advertising?
2. How do you react in front of Provocative Advertisements?
3. Have an advertisement ever come to your mind after seeing it once? (food advertising, car advertising, websites advertising, and so on...)
4. Have a provocative advertisement ever come to your mind after seeing it once?

The questions about affective variables are:

5. Do you think you always understand the meaning of an advertisement?
6. Have you ever identified yourself in the character of an advertisement?
7. Do you think you always understand the meaning of a provocative advertisement?
8. Have you ever identified yourself in the character of a provocative advertisement?

The questions about conative variables are:

9. Do you usually buy something after seeing the respective advertisement?
10. Do you usually buy something after seeing the respective provocative advertising campaign?

The first group of questions, those that influence the cognitive sphere, wanted to analyze the level of knowledge and awareness of respondents. The second group, on the other hand, was meant to act on the sphere of understanding and appreciation, while the last group refers to the position and the attitude of the subject after being exposed to the advertising. Therefore, it asks questions about the purchasing action itself.

6.1 Methodology

The questionnaire survey has been conducted among a sample of 184 respondents.

In marketing terms, a sample is represented by “entities or observations randomly selected to represent the behavior and characteristics of the entire group they are associated with or from which they are drawn”²⁰⁴. The online survey was sent to the sample through the social networks *Facebook* and *WhatsApp*, without selecting a specific statistical sample, but accepting random responses from who was willing to compile it.

Despite the fact that the final sample is far from being representative of the total population, this sample is very similar, in many aspects, to the market segmentation that Companies in the fashion and clothing industry do in order to identify their target. Indeed, segmenting the market means identifying who is within your circle of potential consumers. On one side, we can find the children, which include all under eighteen years old population. They completely dependent on their parents because they do not have an income. Therefore, they are unable to buy their own clothes. Then, we can find young people. These are more independent, they study, work, or both and they have more particular tastes in fashion. Most of them are able to choose and to buy their own clothes. Finally, we find the oldest, who, according to the classification of generations, are more than forty years old, the so-called *Generation X*. However, “Fashion writing itself has traditionally ignored older people. [...] Fashion is strongly, perhaps inherently, youth oriented”²⁰⁵.

Of course, in the segmentation of its market, also Diesel aims at reaching that part of consumers that best fits and reflects the Company. “From the very beginning, Diesel’s designers let their own tastes lead them turning their backs on the style dictators and consumer forecasters of the fashion establishment. And from the very beginning these designs, as well as the outrageous Diesel advertising, appealed to the iconoclastic tastes of Generation Y”²⁰⁶. We are talking about the youngsters, the *Millennial Generation*, which represents all those people with an age that is between 17 or 18 and 35 years. Some studies describe the Millennials as less interested in political and civil issues, with respects to the

²⁰⁴ Business Dictionary, Sample, <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/sample.html>, (consultation date 16th September 2017)

²⁰⁵ J. Twigg, *Fashion and Age: Dress, the Body and Later Life*, London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2013, p. 11

²⁰⁶ G. Franzen, S. E. Moriarty, *The Science and Art of Branding*, London, Routledge, 2008

previous generations and more oriented towards material goods. At the same time, others describe them as more open-minded, proactive towards new ideas and more free to express themselves. Therefore, they are more tolerant in front of any kind of difference and they respect more the opinions that might be far from their own²⁰⁷. A description that not only fits perfectly the ideal consumer of Diesel, but also the philosophy behind the brand.

In the questionnaire, the respondents' ages were divided into four categories: under 18, from 18 to 25, from 26 to 35 and over 35.

Most of the answers came from those who represent the ages between 18 and 25, that is 51%. While the other age groups account for 22% respondents aged from 26 to 35, 16% over 35 and 11% those under 18.

As for gender, more than half of respondents are women, 64%, and the remaining 36% are men.

6.1.1 Limitations

One of the most challenging phases in carrying out a research is the identification and involvement of a representative sample of participants. In fact, the online compilation via social networks entails less accuracy in the answers because, as mentioned previously, respondents were not specifically pre-selected ad hoc.

Online searches limits are not few nor irrelevant, and they must be presented in order to justify the possible errors in the analysis of the collected data.

First, there is the impossibility of establishing with certainty the accuracy of the identities of the respondents. Then, there is the total lack of control over the context in which the detection takes place and the inability of the network to transfer verbal signals. These factors have consequences in terms of communication processes and sharing meanings.

In the foreground, it is quite difficult to keep the sample under control, which means difficulty in checking whether if the final responder pattern is truly representative of the total population.

²⁰⁷ F. Di Gaetano, "Le generazioni X, Y, Z e C. Dall'età anagrafica al behaviour: il tuo business è pronto?", *Argoserv*, 22nd October 2014 (consultation date 4th October 2017)

Through the web, we can have some coverage problems in the sense that there are currently no reliable lists of users of the online communication channels to refer to for the sample extraction. Therefore, “sampling errors can easily result since, as widely known, the Internet population profile does not completely resembles that of the general population. Finally, there can be non-response errors, whose impact on web questionnaires is quite variable and above all difficult to study”²⁰⁸.

In the online questionnaires, other factors can lead to data collection errors. In fact, subjects could be disturbed by various environmental factors around them, or they might ask others to answer or even replace them in the response compilation. Moreover, another relevant issue has to do with the fact that an empirical relationship can not be established with the interviewee. This could be a strong limit especially when dealing with more delicate or more complicated themes to understand²⁰⁹.

6.2 Measures

The data collection procedure was carried out by submitting to the sample a completely anonymous, and easy to compile questionnaire organized around the themes that will be presented onwards.

After that, that part of the sample that reflects the characteristics of Diesel's ideal consumer was selected. As we saw before, we are talking about young people who go from age 18 or older, to 35 years. So, let us only consider only the 73% between these age brackets, of those who answered the questionnaire without gender distinction, which corresponds to 135 individuals. It may be indeed more appropriate to analyze only the data of those people who fall into the Company's target.

²⁰⁸ “Inoltre, vi possono essere errori di campionamento dato che, come ampiamente risaputo, il profilo della popolazione Internet assomiglia ancora poco a quello della popolazione generale; infine errori di non risposta, la cui incidenza nei questionari web è piuttosto variabile, ma soprattutto poco studiabile”

L. Altieri, *Valutazione e partecipazione. Metodologia per una ricerca interattiva e negoziale*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2009, p. 279

²⁰⁹ *Ivi* pp. 261-295

The first question asked the level of involvement in the advertising field. Advertising is the core of everything that has been dealt with in this paper and it represents a topic that is currently being quite discussed, on which people may be more or less interested in. The question directly inquired how much the respondent was interested in this field on a scale from 1 to 5.

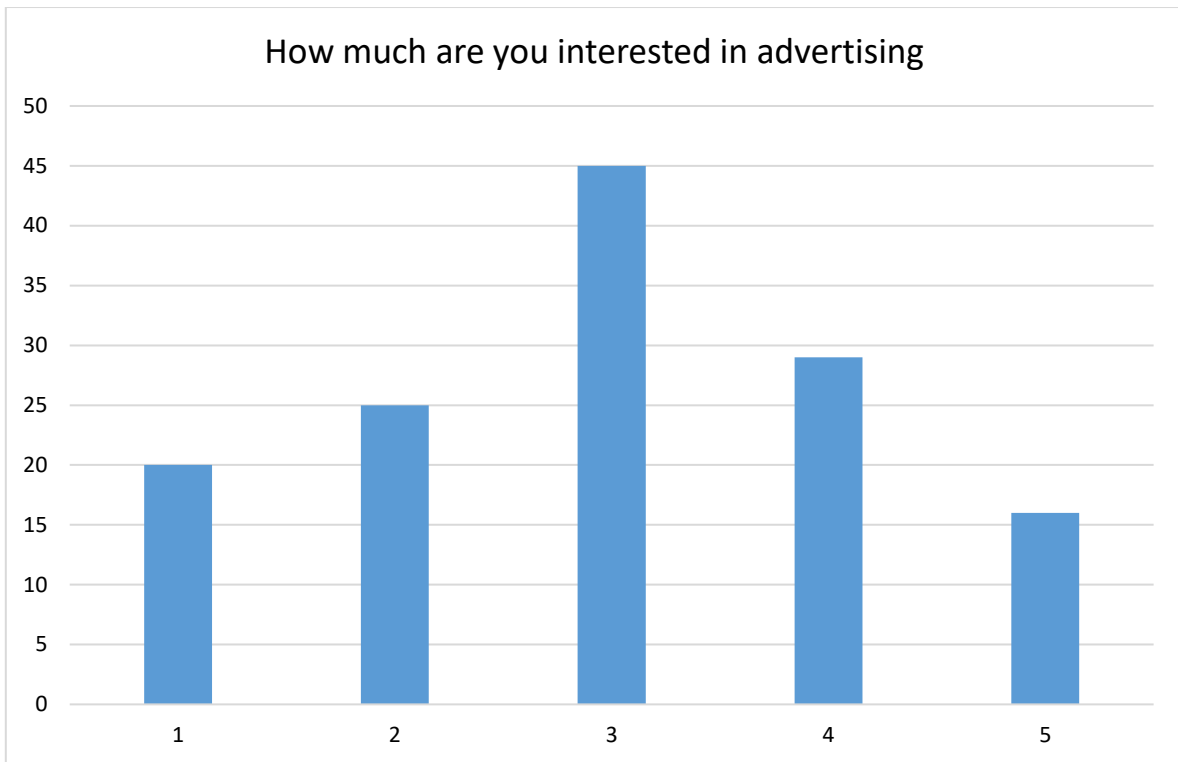
The results are:

- 33% answered 3, showing how the majority of respondents is, on average, interested in the field of advertising;
- 15% answered 1;
- 19% answered 2;
- 21% answered 4;
- the remaining 12% has marked 5.

Therefore, there is a balance between those who are very interested in the topic and those who are less involved.

Results can be seen in the graphic below.

Graphic 7.1: Degree of interest of respondents in advertising in a scale from 1 to 5



Source: Personal realization from the questionnaire data

After that, an assessment was made on the degree of knowledge and awareness of the respondent regarding the specific case of the Diesel brand.

Starting from the general, the first question was about the knowledge of the Diesel brand and then, switching questions to the specific advertising of the brand, itself. In particular, in this second phase, it was asked whether or not respondents have ever seen a Diesel advertising campaign and how they would define these ads, whether if they seem provocative, non-provocative or neutral. These questions were asked without giving any kind of information on the meaning of the adjective provocative in advertising. Only to know the idea that the audience has about the brand. Questions included are:

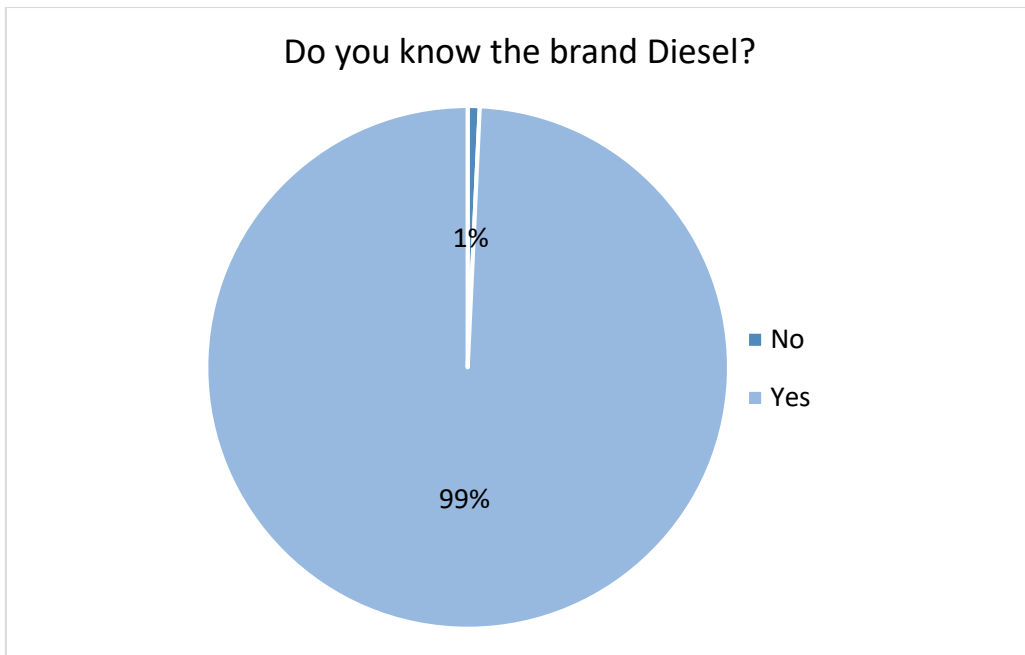
- Do you know the brand Diesel?
- Have you ever seen Diesel Advertising Campaigns?
- How many?
- How would you define Diesel Advertising Campaigns?

The results show how 99% of respondents know the Diesel brand. In fact, only one out of 135 people said he did not know the brand (Graphic 7.2).

Unlike all those who know about Diesel, not everyone has seen its advertising campaigns. As we can see in Graphic 7.3, 13% have never seen an institutional campaign proposed by the Company, while the remaining 87% claim that they did. Among these, those who claim they have been in front of at least one Diesel's ad are about 7%, while 19% they say they have seen only one. The remaining 74% affirm to have seen more than one advertisements launched by the brand (Graphic 7.4).

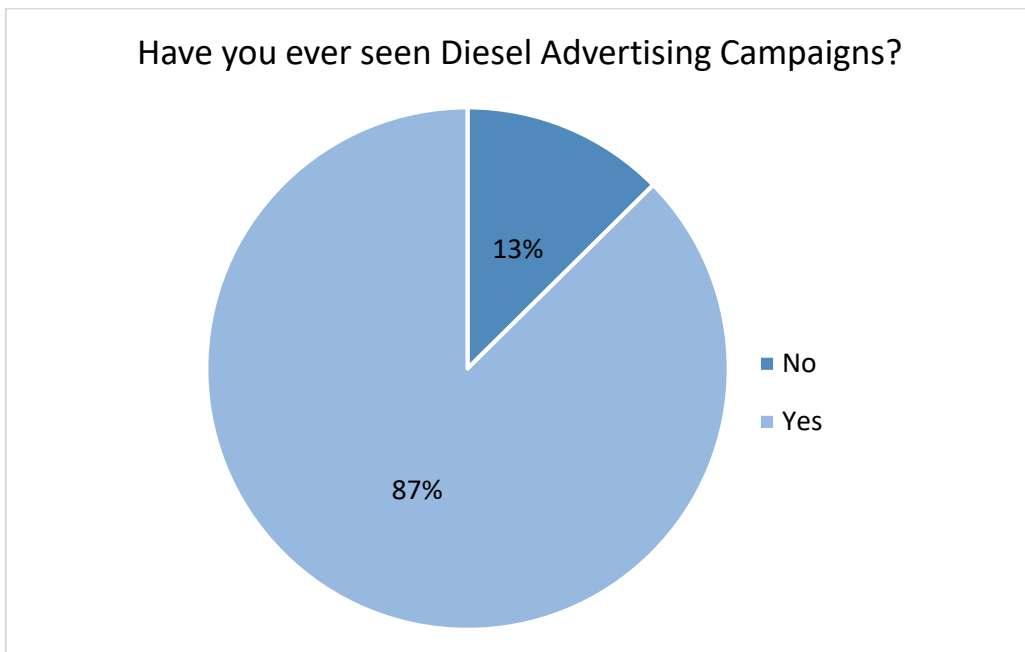
Facing the question of how to define Diesel Advertising Campaigns, the respondents had three options to choose from. They could define them as provocative, non-provocative or neutral. Most of them (49%), though not having the definition of provocation in advertising, responded Diesel's advertising as provocative. On the other hand, only 11% said it was non-provocative. Those who consider it neutral, so those that do not hang from any extreme count for the remaining 40% (Graphic 7.5).

Graphic 7.2: Degree of knowledge of the brand Diesel



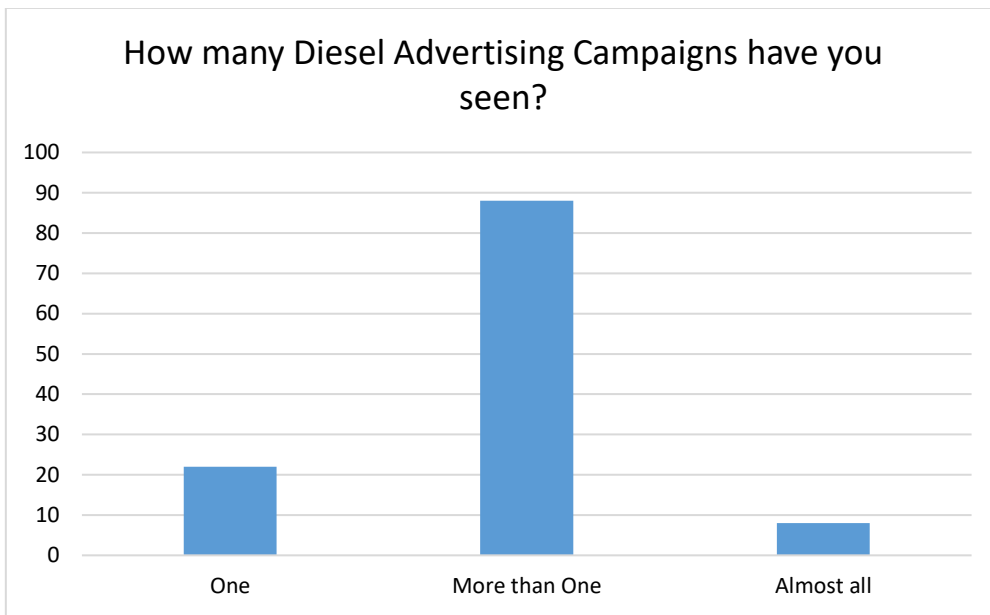
Source: Personal realization from the questionnaire data

Graphic 7.3: Respondents answers to question - have you ever seen Diesel Advertising Campaigns?



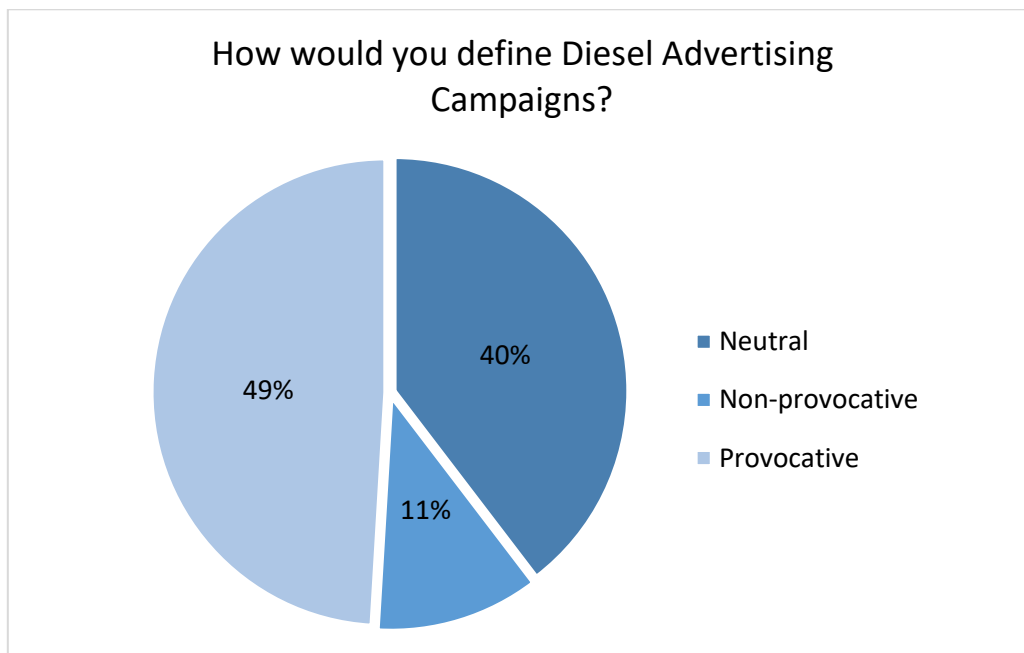
Source: Personal realization from the questionnaire data

Graphic 7.4: Respondents answers to question - How many Diesel Advertising Campaigns have you seen?



Source: Personal realization from the questionnaire data

Graphic 7.5: Respondents answers to question - How would you define Diesel Advertising Campaigns?



Source: Personal realization from the questionnaire data

After these specific questions about Diesel, the focus moved on the aspects of advertising in general, which include every kind of goods. Therefore, the definition of advertising was provided, specifically:

Advertising is a means of communication with the users of a product or service. Advertisements are messages paid for by those who send them and are intended to inform or influence people who receive them.

The definition was aimed at informing respondents about the meaning of advertising, its features and functionalities. As said before, questions were listed in order to be able to touch the salient points of advertising *cognitive*, *affective* and *conative* variable. The questions were:

- Have an advertisement ever come to your mind after seeing it once? (food advertising, car advertising, websites advertising, and so on...)
- Do you think you always understand the meaning of an advertisement?
- Have you ever identified yourself in the character of an advertisement?
- Do you usually buy something after seeing the respective advertisement?

76% of respondents answered that they *sometimes* think of an advertisement after seeing it at least once; the remainder is divided between the ones that *always* recall it in their minds and those that *never* have ever thought of it.

With regard to the understanding of a message within an advertisement, in general, 63% claim to be able to understand its true meaning more than once, while 35%, more confident, say they are *always* able to understand what it wants to be transmitted. Only three respondents *never* understand the meaning of an advertisement.

The action a person undertakes after being exposed to an advertisement is identified in the purchase of the advertised product. In facing an advertisement, 35% of respondents *always* buy the Company's product, while the most 63%, does it only *occasionally*.

When a brand hits through its advertising, this means it has been able to get the attention of the exposed subject. This can lead the person to identify himself or herself in the character of the same advertisement. This is less frequent than when purchasing. In fact, only 2 people have claimed to *always* identify themselves in the character of an advertisement after seeing it. 63% are on the *never* side, while the remaining 47% do it *sometimes*.

Next, the same advertising variables on the specific branch of provocative advertising have been tested. As previously did, before questions, the definition of provocation in advertising was provided. It is outlined *as a deliberate appeal, within the content of an advertisement, to stimuli that are expected to shock at least a portion of the audience, both because they are associated with values, norms or taboos That are habitually not challenged or transgressed in advertising, and because of their distinctiveness and ambiguity.*

Once again, the definition intended to inform respondents about the meaning of provocative advertising. In particular, however, this time it was important for the respondent to properly analyze this definition in order not to fall into misunderstandings, which are quite easy when it comes to topics like this.

The proposed questions were:

- How do you react in front of Provocative Advertisements?
- Have a provocative advertisement ever come to your mind after seeing it once?
- Do you think you always understand the meaning of a provocative advertisement?
- Have you ever identified yourself in the character of a provocative advertisement?
- Do you usually buy something after seeing the respective provocative advertising campaign?

Given the definition of what provocative advertising is, respondents have been asked about how they react in front of a campaign that has these features. The same 9% represents both those who *remain disgusted* and those who *remain positively shocked*. The majority, on the other hand, claims that their attention is caught by this kind of publicity: 77% of them stand for it, while 9% *avoid it*.

When it comes to provocative advertising, 80% of respondents claim to rethink about this advertising *sometimes*, 16% *always*, while 4% *never* does.

Regarding the understanding of the message of advertising for provocative purposes, only one/quarter of the respondents claim to *always* understand the meaning of it. 73% understands true intention only *sometimes* and 3% say they *never* understand it.

Intention about *always* buying a product after seeing a provocative advertising campaign affects only 3 people. Most buy only *sometimes*, exactly 61%, while those that *never* buy after being exposed to these ads represent 37% of respondents.

The last question about provocative advertising was to identify yourself in the character of the advertisement itself. Here there is almost parity between those who *sometimes* identify themselves and those who *never* do. Only 1% claim to do so *always*.

The last pair of questions compares, two to two, advertising campaigns and state which of the two had a provocative meaning. The name of the brands that have realized the ads were covered in the picture. In each pair, there is a Diesel provocative advertisement, while the other has another meaning. In particular, I chose a Diesel *Action!* advertisement where two people shake hands with the slogan *shake more hands*, which is an invitation to people to do more of common and underestimate good actions. This was compared with a publicity from Burger King launched in Singapore in 2010 that did not take long to fuel a debate about whether it was acceptable. This advertising campaign lasted a total of three weeks before it was removed from the restaurants featuring it because of its offensive and vulgar meaning²¹⁰. “Regarding vulgarity in advertising, it contains crude or distasteful acts by humans or animals”²¹¹. When an advertisement is defined as vulgar or sexist, it is categorized as stereotyped and non-respectful of human dignity and integrity. Therefore, it does nothing but to produce a disadvantaged media impact, especially taking into account the advertiser’s consumer target. In fact, an advertisement must always take into account the recipients themselves, which in the case of Burger King correspond to that market share which includes also children.

The other pair of images is represented, on one hand, from Diesel *Global Warming Ready* which sees a girl on a boat pretending all will be fine when London will be a mere island and no longer the powerful City that it is now. On the other hand, we find an advertisement, called *Leaves*, made by Pagu Propaganda advertising agencies for Casa de Euripedes in Brazil a 2013 and is an advertisement that informs people of the consequences of smoking. The picture

²¹⁰ Beading Beat, “12 Offensive Advertisements You Shouldn’t Mimic Under Any Circumstances”, *Beading Beat*, (consultation date 12th September 2017)

²¹¹ S. Anderson, A. Patterson, *Provocative Advertising: The Swedish Youth’s Response*, Master’s Thesis, Lulea University of Technology, Department of Business Administration and Social Sciences, International Business and Economics Programme, a.y. 2004, Supervisor Lars Backstrom

represents the fragility of the lungs in front of the cigarettes and urges the public to stop smoking for their own health²¹².

The results show that it is not always easy to identify the meaning of an advertisement and it becomes even more difficult to distinguish between a provocative advertising from one that has a different meaning. The first pair of images compare Burger King and Diesel Action! gave these results: 91% of respondents identified the fast food chain ad as provocative, leaving only to 12 people the correct answer from the standpoint of the definition of “provocative advertising”.

The second pair of images also emphasizes the same aspects as the previous one, once again it is thin and difficult to identify the meaning of what is provocation in advertising. Here nearly 20% gave the correct answer while the remaining 80% selected the first anti-smoking option.

6.3 Results

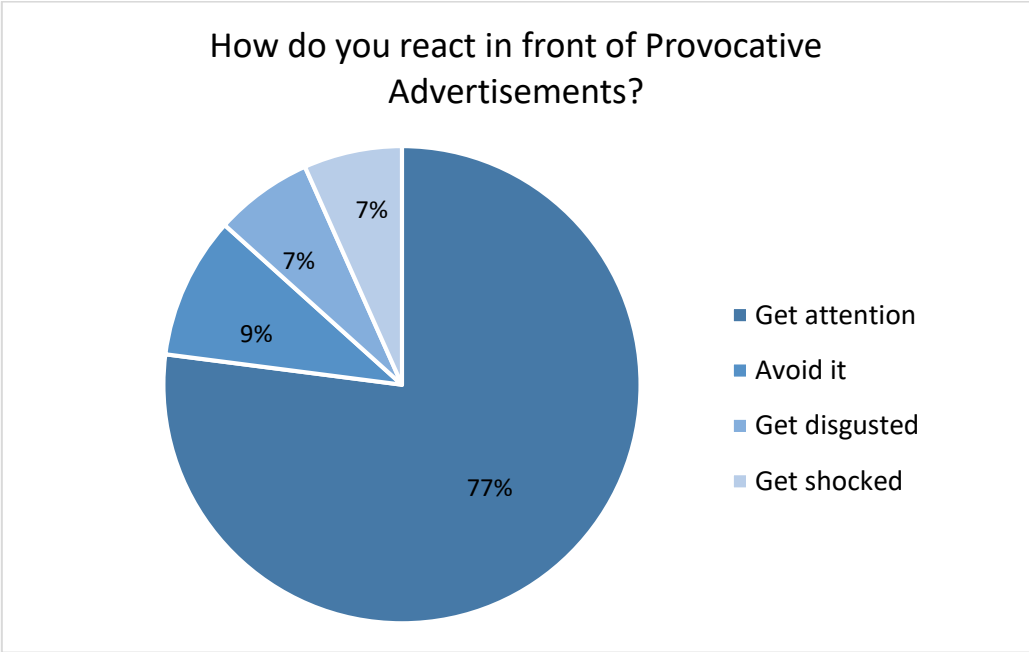
The main purpose of this research was to verify whether the theory proposed by Darren Dahl's literature can be considered true. In this respect, questions about advertising in general and questions about provocative advertising are directly compared.

Let us start by analyzing responses to people's reaction to provocative advertising. In this case the question was:

- How do you react in front of Provocative Advertisements?

²¹² Ads of the World, Casa de Eurípedes-Leaves, https://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/casa_de_euripedes_leaves (consultation date 12th September 2017)

Graphic 7.6: Question - How do you react in front of Provocative Advertisements?



Source: Personal realization from the questionnaire data

As Graphic 7.6 shows, in front of this question, most respondents, precisely 77%, said that provocative advertising catch their attention. In addition, 7% said they are positively shocked. Those who look at this type of advertising in a negative way are, instead, represents 16%, and they are divided between those who remain disgusted and those who simply avoid it.

This result already tests the first point introduced by Dahl, that is provocative advertising can easily capture cognitive elements, first of all the attention of the observer. Infact, “advertisers typically justify shock appeals in advertising for their ability to *[break] through the clutter, get noticed, and get people’s attention*”²¹³.

After that, part of the questions in the questionnaire has been structured to test the advertising variables in the two aspects of advertising that are taken into consideration.

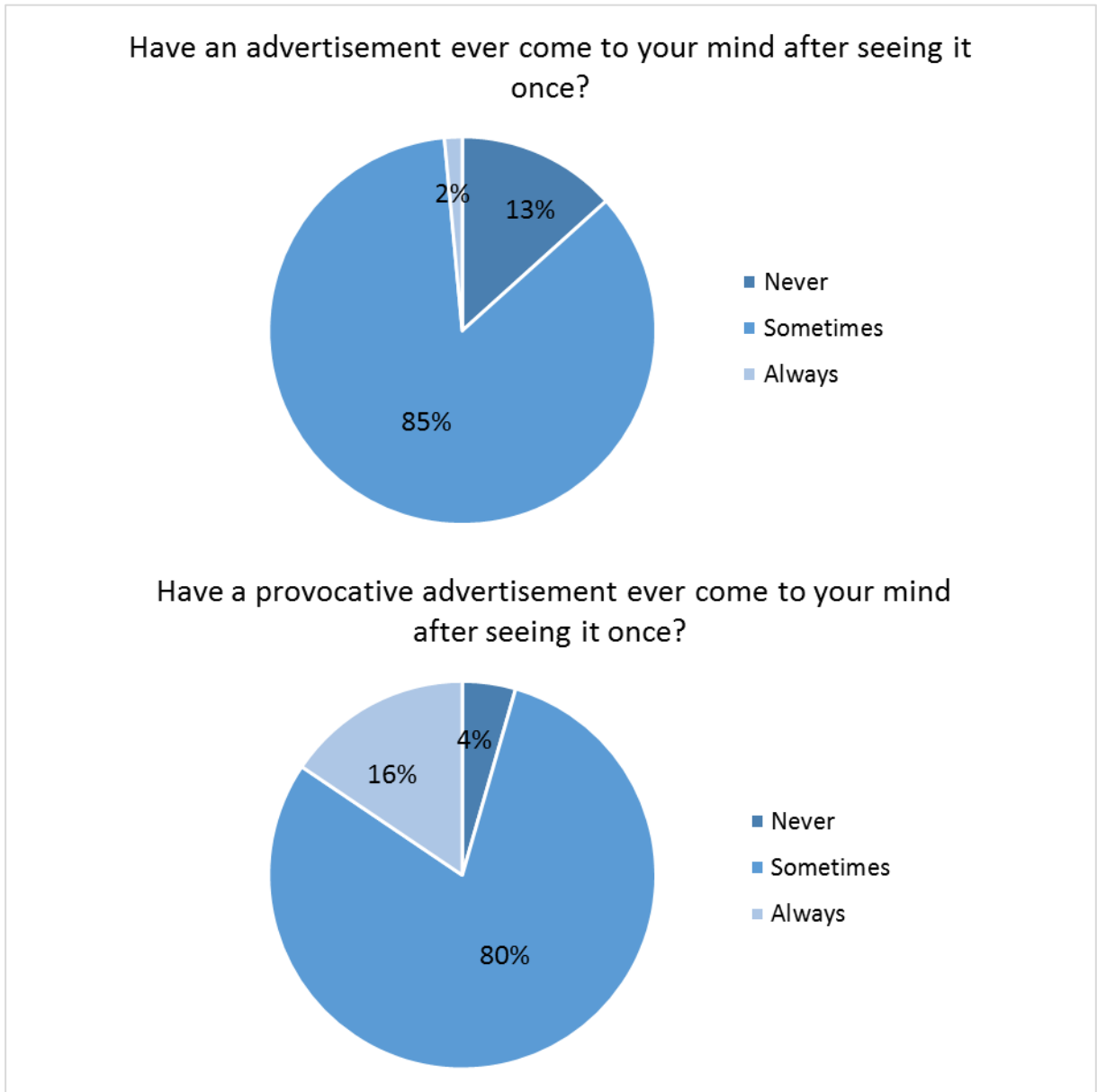
In fact, two to two, questions will now be analyzed in such a way as to directly compare those relating to advertising in general and those related to the specific provocative case.

Let us start by analyzing the pair of questions referring to the cognitive variable:

- Have an advertisement ever come to your mind after seeing it once? (food advertising, car advertising, websites advertising, and so on...)
- Have a provocative advertisement ever come to your mind after seeing it once?

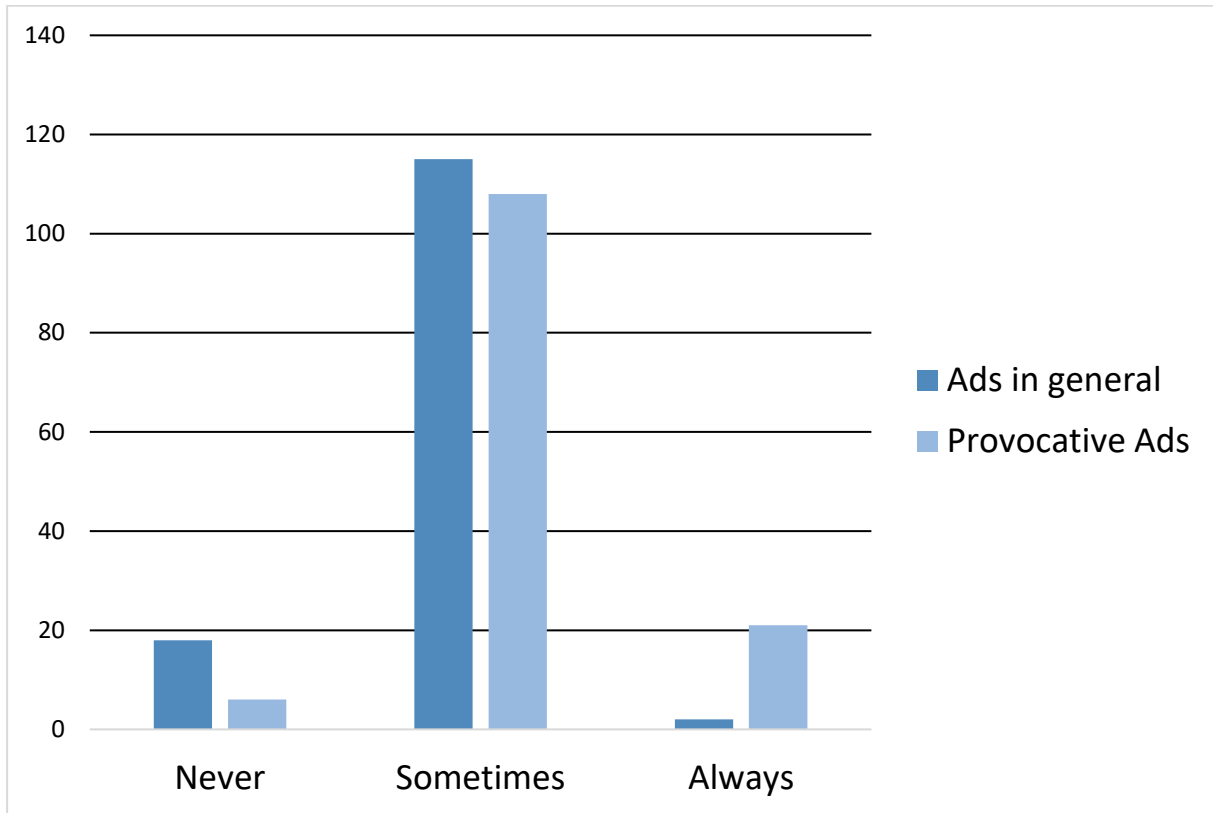
²¹³ D.W Dahl, K. Frankenberger, R.V Manchanda, “Does it pay to shock? Reactions to shocking and non-shocking ad content among University students”, *Journal of Advertising Research*, XLIII (2003), p. 269

Graphic 7.7: Have an advertisement/ provocative advertisement ever come to your mind after seeing it once? (Percentage data)



Source: Personal realization from the questionnaire data

Graphic 7.8: Direct comparison between advertising and provocative advertising for the question - Have an advertisement/ provocative advertisement ever come to your mind after seeing it once?



Source: Personal realization from the questionnaire data

We start from the responses on general advertisement. From the above graphs, most respondents claim to have reconsidered an advertisement after seeing it. Very few, 2% say they *always* think about it while 18% *never* did. On the other hand, most important data is always about those who, after seeing provocative advertising, *sometimes* recall it. The other two results are inverted: there are more people to whom has *always* come to mind (16%) than those who *never* think of it (4%). The significant data we can extract from these results is therefore the entry *always*. While on one hand there is 2%, on the side of provocation advertising we find instead 16% of respondents who always come back to a campaign. This still underlines how this type of advertisement can affect the sphere of attention and awareness of the observer. Following Dahl's theory, we therefore confirm that studies “in this area demonstrate that individuals engage in higher levels of attributional thought for

unexpected (surprising) compared to expected events. Surprise, therefore, encourages further cognitive activity as individuals seek to understand the source of their surprise”²¹⁴.

Let us now move to the affective variable, which is the one that concerns emotions and the degree of liking of an individual when he is exposed to advertising stimuli.

The first couple of questions have to do with the understanding of the message and the meaning of the advertisements:

- Do you think you always understand the meaning of an advertisement?
- Do you think you always understand the meaning of a provocative advertisement?

Analyzing the data for these two requests, the results appear almost similar for both types of advertising. Indeed, in both cases, most people claim to understand the meaning of advertising *sometimes*, it follow those who claim to be able to *always* do it, and at the bottom we find those people who *never* understand it (Graph 7.10).

Remaining in the affection sphere, there is another pair of questions that ask if people ever be identified themselves in the character of an advertisement.

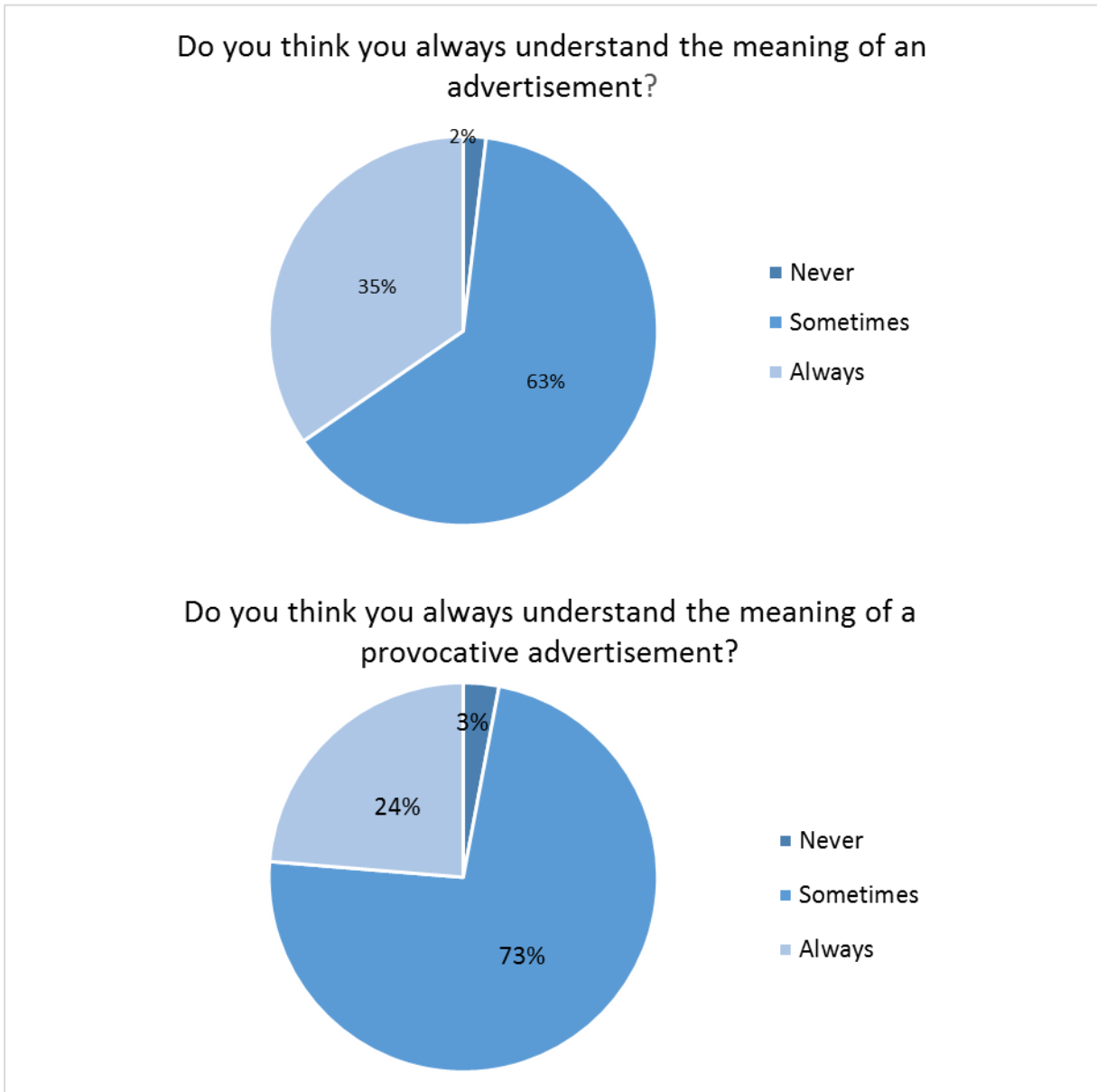
- Have you ever identified yourself in the character of an advertisement?
- Have you ever identified yourself in the character of a provocative advertisement?

Again, the responses appear similar in both situations. In this case, in facing an advertisement, whether it is provocative or not, respondents react in the same way. We have at the same level those who *sometimes* identify themselves in a character and those who *never* do. A tiny percentage, however, tends to do so *always* (Graph 7.12).

Therefore, from these data, we can not find great differences of appreciation between provocative and non-provocative advertising campaigns.

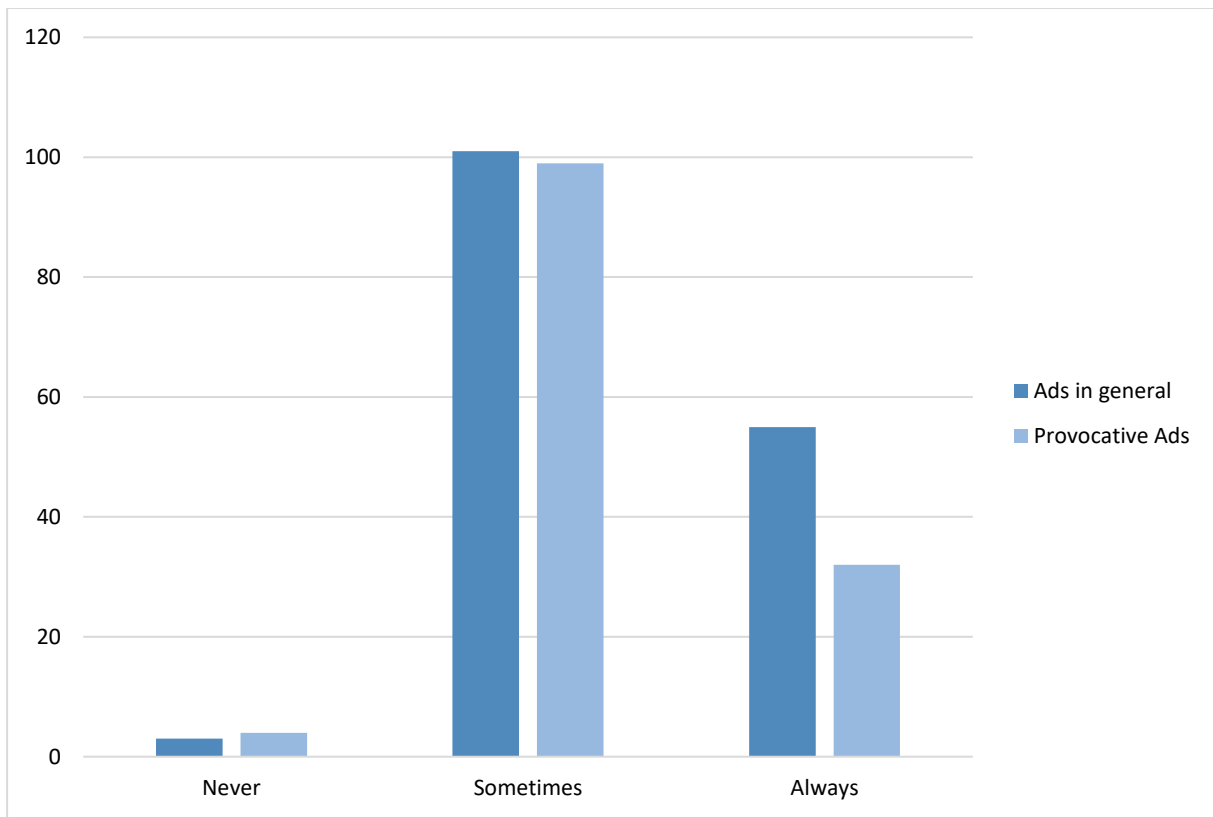
²¹⁴ D.W Dahl, K. Frankenberger, R.V Manchanda, “Does it pay to shock? Reactions to shocking and non-shocking ad content among University students”, *Journal of Advertising Research*, XLIII (2003), p. 271

Graphic 7.9: Do you think you always understand the meaning of an advertisement/
provocative advertisement?



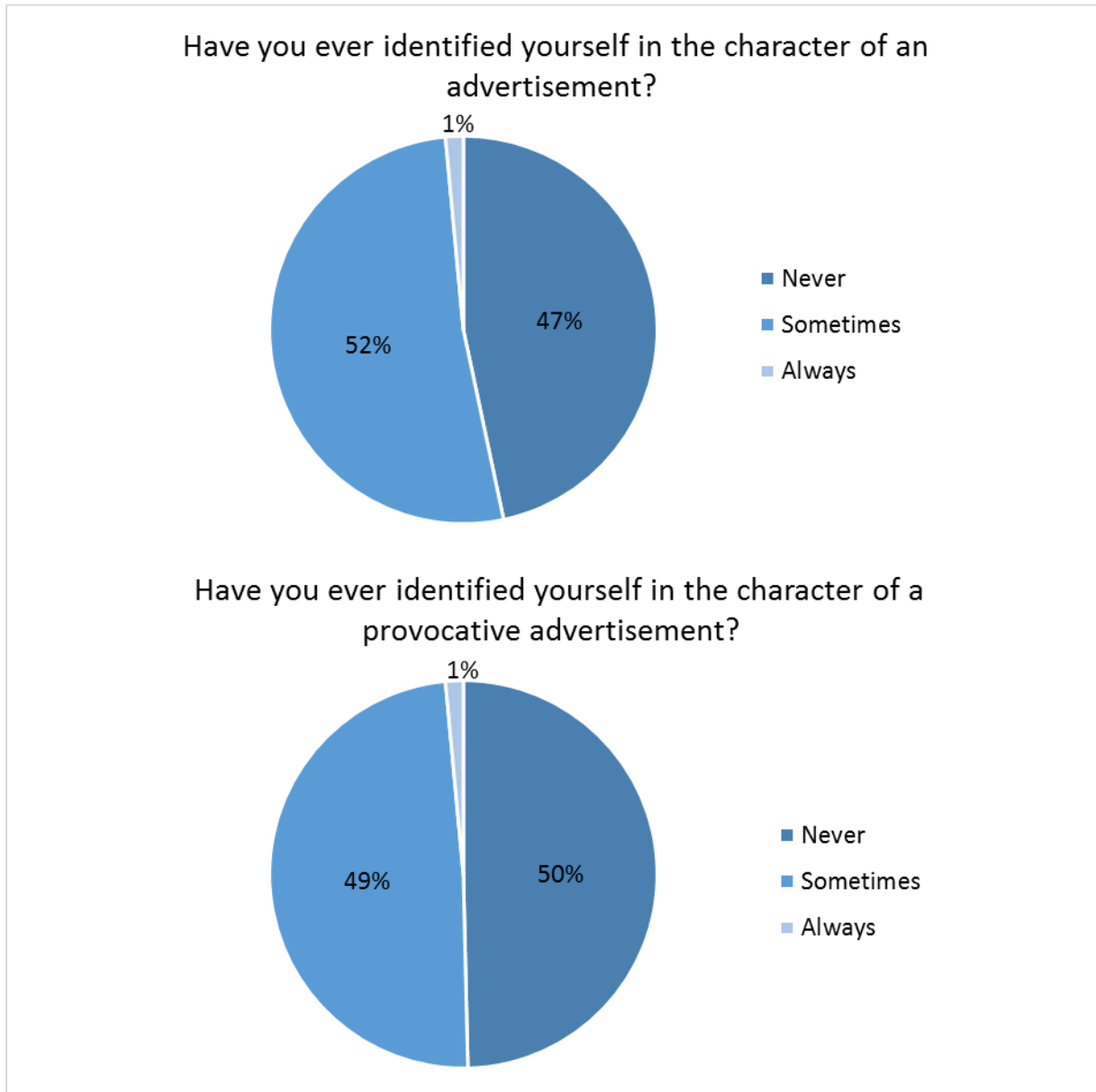
Source: Personal realization from the questionnaire data

Graphic 7.10: Direct comparison between advertising and provocative advertising for the question - Do you think you always understand the meaning of an advertisement/ provocative advertisement?



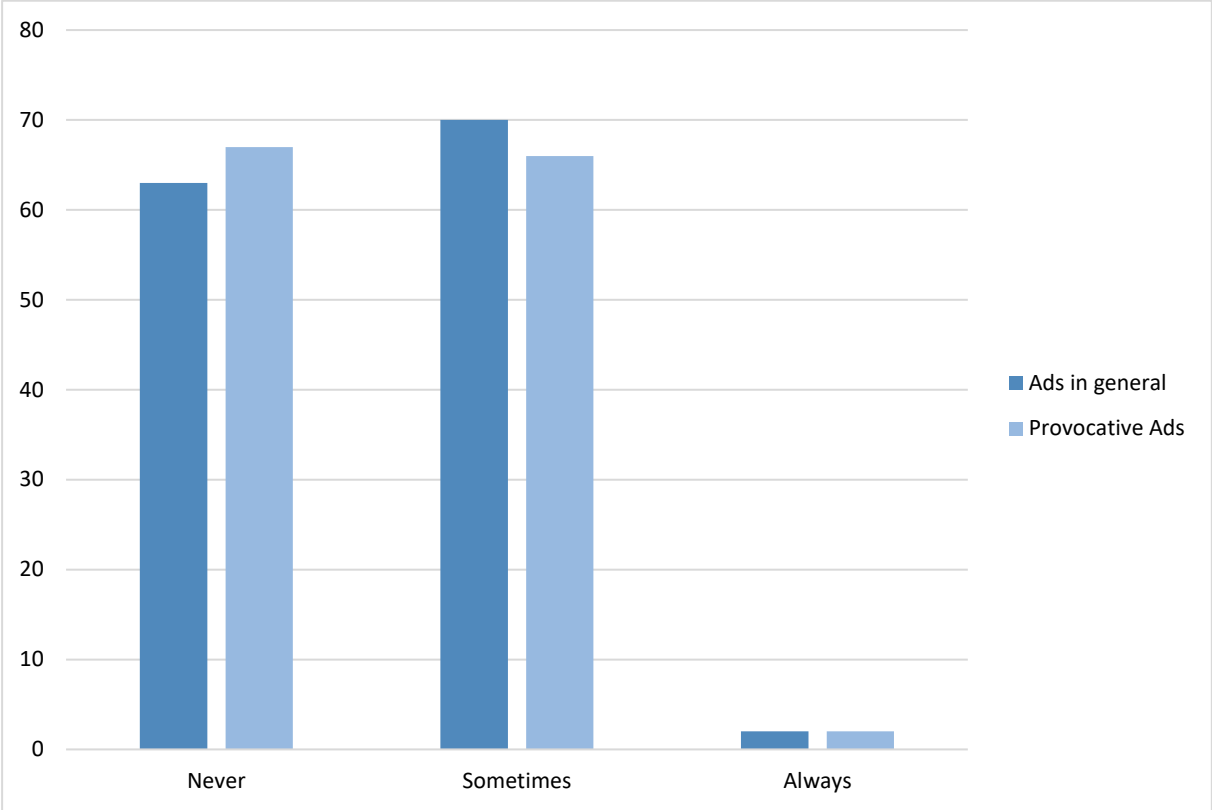
Source: Personal realization from the questionnaire data

Graphic 7.11: Have you ever identified yourself in the character of an advertisement/
provocative advertisement?



Source: Personal realization from the questionnaire data

Graphic 7.12: Direct comparison between advertising and provocative advertising for the question - Have you ever identified yourself in the character of an advertisement/ provocative advertisement?



Source: Personal realization from the questionnaire data

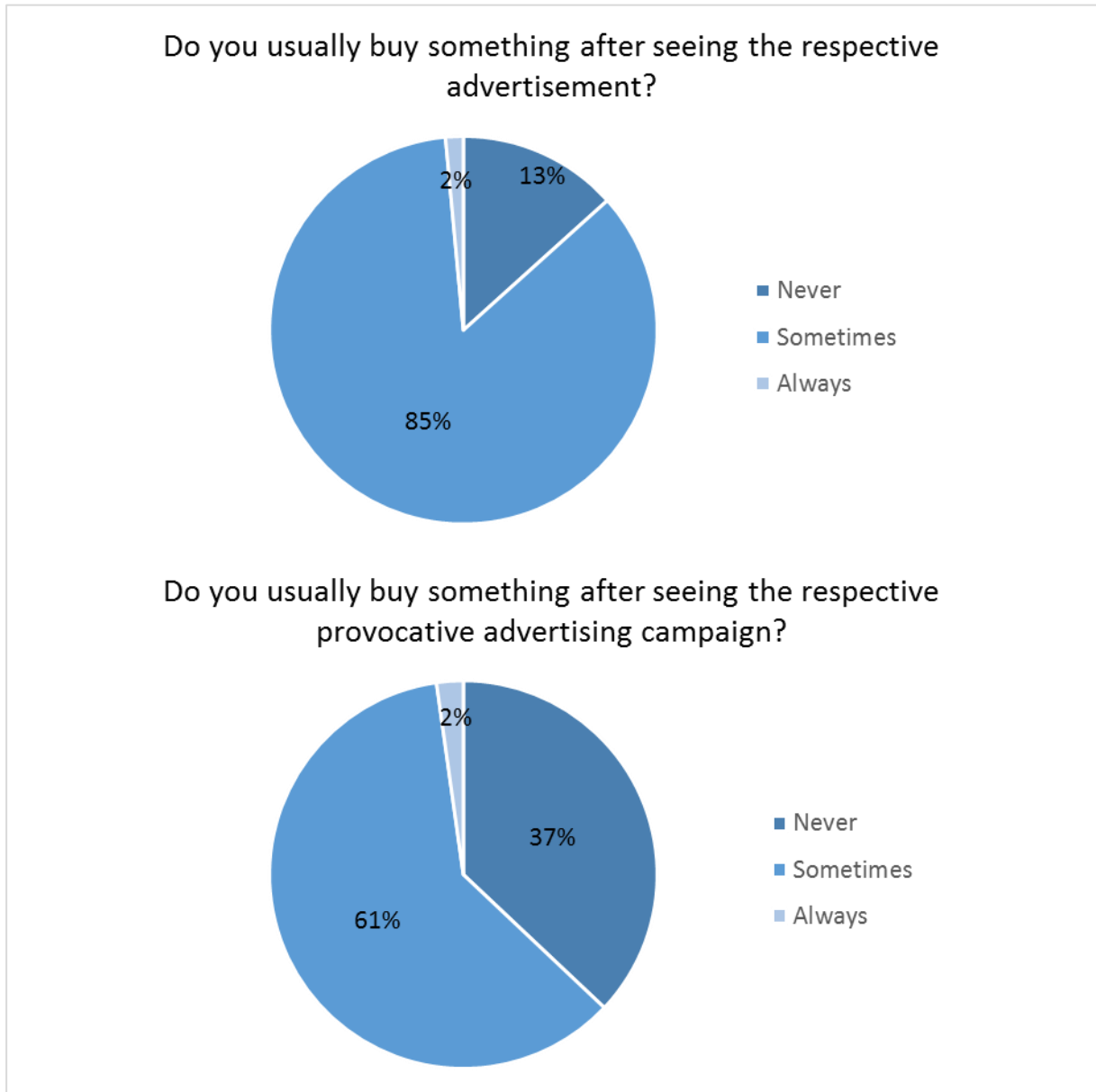
Now, let us shift to the conative variables, that is, those that affect the behavior of the individual and thus play on persuasion and purchase intentions. In this case, the direct question is stated:

- Do you usually buy something after seeing the respective advertisement?
- Do you usually buy something after seeing the respective provocative advertising campaign?

With regard to the purchase after seeing an advertisement, it is more successful when we talk about advertising in general and less when it is about advertising specific to provocation. In both cases, people are reluctant to buy *always* a product after seeing its advertising campaign. Keeping into consideration that most respondents have picked up the voice *sometimes* when it comes to buy of a product after seeing the relative provocative advertising or not, those who *never* do are more when we talk about advertising with provocative stimuli, and in terms of number, we can clearly see the results in the graphs below.

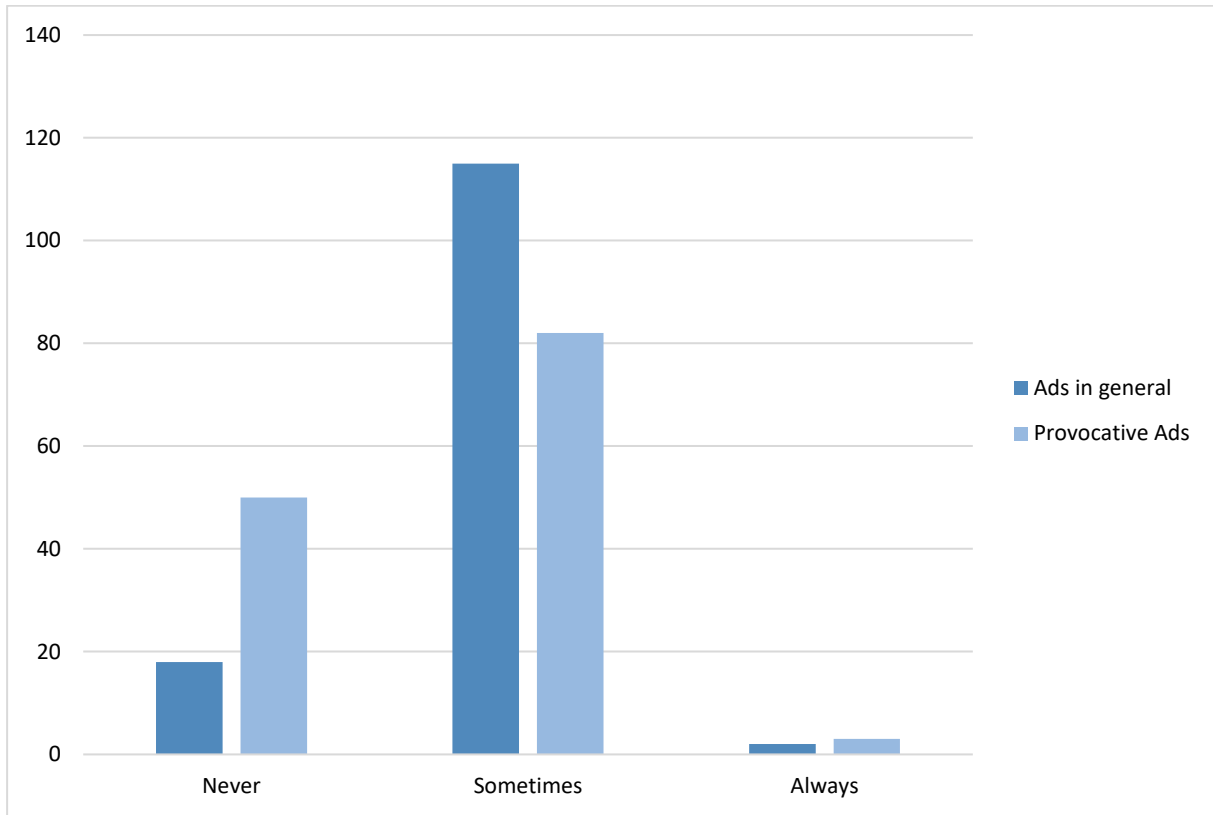
Therefore, if people tend, at the beginning, to rework more about provocative advertisements, they are not as well oriented towards the same brands when it is time to purchase.

Graphic 7.13: Do you usually buy something after seeing the respective advertisement/
provocative advertisement?



Source: Personal realization from the questionnaire data

Graphic 7.14: Direct comparison between advertising and provocative advertising for the question - Do you usually buy something after seeing the respective advertisement/provocative advertisement?



Source: Personal realization from the questionnaire data

Thanks to the data collected, we can only partially test the theory proposed by Dahl.

We started with a lot of aligned feedback in the answers, especially those concerning the attraction of attention due to provocation. However, this can be justified by the fact that provocative advertising raises issues inside people, making them think and process about less-treated and less common themes in advertising. “Shocking advertising content is that which attempts to surprise an audience by *deliberately violating norms* for societal values and personal ideals. It is the norm violation aspect of the shock appeal that is assumed to underlie its ability to break through advertising clutter and capture the attention of a target audience who then listens and acts on the related message”²¹⁵.

Unfortunately, however, the positive attitude that occurs at the time of observation and re-elaboration of contents does not happen in subsequent reactions, as well. There is therefore no particular interest in having the full appreciation of a provocative advertising, nor in identifying its true meaning. This is all about buying intentions. While reiterating the significant percentage of those who buy more than once a product after seeing the respective provocative advertising, there is no significance for those who do it habitually. Indeed, in comparison with all the other advertisements, people that never buy after being in front of a provocative advertising are more.

At this point, a spontaneous question arises. Why does Diesel continue on this wavelength about advertising? Why does it decide to keep on offering a kind of provocative advertising to the public if this does not have a significant impact on the brand appreciation or sales increase?

We can find plausible answers in the history and philosophy of the brand and the founder himself, Renzo Rosso. “When Renzo Rosso founded the Company in 1978, he wanted it to be a leader, a Company that took chances and carved out a *niche* for itself in its field. He surrounded himself with creative, talented people, innovators who, like him, rejected the slavish trend-following typical of the fashion industry. Rosso wanted to come up with a more dynamic and imaginative line of clothing than was available anywhere. He gave his open-minded new designers broad stylistic freedom, hoping they could create a line of clothing

²¹⁵ D.W Dahl, K. Frankenberger, R.V Manchanda, “Does it pay to shock? Reactions to shocking and non-shocking ad content among University students”, *Journal of Advertising Research*, XLIII (2003), p. 269

perfect for people who follow their own independent path in life, particularly for those who decide to express their individuality also by the way they dress"²¹⁶.

Therefore, from the beginning, the target market included young people who represent the independent and rebellious spirit of Diesel. However, we are not talking about all the young people around the world but those who are able to really understand the concept that relies behind the brand.

"Building brands for a new breed of consumers, fostering creativity, challenging the rules"²¹⁷ is the slogan of Renzo Rosso's OTB Holding Company.

Renzo Rosso has always printed the Diesel's products consumer as a person with a strong character, someone that aspires to be the reference and the determinant for his own group.

"Diesel consumer is a person who wants to assert his personality, *he is certainly not an average consumer*, someone who is dragged, but he is the leader of the group, a person who has charisma as our products, our advertising, our Company and all of us"²¹⁸.

"It may look crazy but I'm ashamed to be big. [...]. Because big is synonymous with non-exclusive, this means you are no longer a so-called status and people are not coming to you. Today, we need to be more cult, more lenient, more individualistic. That's why we do the dyeing jeans or a store other than the other"²¹⁹.

We are talking about a brand that does not want to stand out for its popularity and the number of items it sells, but a brand that wants to diversify itself for the exclusivity of its products and of the people who decide to dress up and be addicted to Diesel.

The advertising campaigns developed by the DCT do not create communication strategies that want to aggressively convince the audience to buy the product, but they are aimed at creating and telling ironic stories that induce the consumer to become interested in the brand and in what it does. "For me it was something violent to tell a customer to buy a thing, and I preferred to create a dialogue with the consumer himself, even without showing the

²¹⁶ G. Franzen, S. E. Moriarty, *The Science and Art of Branding*, London, Routledge, 2008, pp. 3-4

²¹⁷ OTB Official Website, OTB, <https://www.otb.net/> (consultation date 4th October 2017)

²¹⁸ "Il consumatore Diesel è una persona che vuole far valere la sua personalità, non è certamente un consumatore medio, uno che si fa trascinare, ma è un leader della compagnia, una persona che ha del carisma come del resto il nostro prodotto, la nostra pubblicità, la nostra azienda e un po' tutti noi"
R. Micheletti, *Redvolution*, Venezia, Marcianum Press, 2013, p.27

²¹⁹ "Potrà sembrare pazzesco ma io mi vergogno ad essere grande [...]. Perché grande è sinonimo di non esclusivo E allora non sei più uno status e la gente non ti viene a cercare. Oggi bisogna essere più cult, più fighi, più individualistici. Ecco perché facciamo i jeans a tintura limitata o un negozio diverso dall'altro"
lvi p.130

product. [...]. We launch a message. We do not say buy this or that. Let us say who we are and what we believe in. But at the end, it is always the consumer to choose. If he appreciates us, he will buy. Those who buy Diesel embrace a lifestyle, enter a world, a community of belonging"²²⁰. Diesel does not seek to convince the whole market, but it rather wants to attract the attention and engage with those who know how to appreciate the spirit and humor of the brand. Moreover, consumers are also those who are willing to be part of a community that is not only a circle of consumers, but it could be defined as a group of friends. Friends that share the same passion for Diesel.

Diesel has always excelled in advertising, and we have already demonstrated this by presenting the many prizes the firm received. This advertising has always targeted “an audience of young, sceptical and acutely media-literate consumers.[...]. Often intriguing, occasionally confusing, Diesel ads required audience wit and involvement to be deciphered, so that those who understood the Company’s wry sense of humour could feel a sense of complicity between themselves and the brand.[...]. Diesel’s attempts to target a range of differentiated consumer groups meanwhile shift from mass to *niche marketing*”²²¹. By definition, niche marketing means “concentrating all marketing efforts on a small but specific and well defined segment of the population. Niches do not 'exist' but are 'created' by identifying needs, wants, and requirements that are being addressed poorly or not at all by other firms, and developing and delivering goods or services to satisfy them. As a strategy, niche marketing is aimed at being a big fish in a small pond instead of being a small fish in a big pond”²²².

The exclusivity that Diesel wants to promote can be noticed in other aspects of the brand, as well. For example, let us look at the locations. Renzo admitted, more than once, that the environment in which the products are sold is crucial because it is representative of the identity and message of the brand. If we look at the places where Diesel products are sold, we will notice that they are positioned according to the brand's climb, progressively entering

²²⁰ “Per me era violento dire ad un cliente compra questa cosa ed ho preferito creare un dialogo con il consumatore, anche senza mostrare il prodotto. [...]. Noi lanciamo un messaggio. Non diciamo compra questo o quello, diciamo chi siamo e quello in cui crediamo, ma è sempre il consumatore a scegliere. Se ci apprezza ci compra. Chi compra Diesel abbraccia uno stile di vita, entra in un mondo, in una comunità di appartenenza” Micheletti, *Redvolution*, Venezia, Marcianum Press, 2013, p. 135

²²¹ B. Osgerby, “Youth Media”, Oxford, Taylor & Francis Ltd, 2004, pp. 3-4

²²² Business Dictionary, Niche Marketing Definition, <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/niche-marketing.html> (consultation date 4th October 2017)

the most prestigious locations in the world: from the Soho district in New York, to Capri or Saint Tropez.

Another example of Diesel's intention to address a niche audience was provided by Renzo Rosso himself at the *Fashionmagazine* interview where he stated that "true high fashion needs regular patterns. The only concession for high-end brands is to fine-tune the small proposals: a few pieces, as in the case of the capsules we presented at the recently organized show in Tokyo for the 30th anniversary in Japan"²²³. The several capsule collections Diesel have realized during these years, let us name the more recent as the co-branding with Ducati Motors and Diesel Tribute idealized by Nicola Formichetti, they represent special and unique products aimed at being a tribute to the history and identity of the firm.

Moreover, Renzo Rosso has always agreed with the fact that in order to do business, there should be no interest in money as such. He has become one of the richest entrepreneurs in the world who paradoxically has never considered money as his main purpose. Rosso has been confident and faithful to himself, to his passion, he has never been seduced by the easy gain or financial shortcuts. Thanks to this attitude he has always protected his identity and Diesel's identity, as well.

²²³ "La vera alta moda ha bisogno dei normali schemi

Unica concessione, per i brand alto di gamma, ha aggiunto Renzo Rosso, «è mettere a punto delle piccole proposte: pochi pezzi, come nel caso della capsule che abbiamo presentato in occasione della sfilata organizzata di recente a Tokyo, per il 30esimo anniversario in Giappone"

Fashionmagazine.it, "Renzo Rosso: Il see now buy now non fa per noi. Le sfilate uniche sì", *Fashionmagazine.it*, 23rd September 2016 (consultation date 4th October 2017)

CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation has the aim to describe and improve the knowledge on the advertising strategies of one of the most well-known, innovative and worldwide distributed Italian brand in the fashion industry: Diesel. Since its foundation, Diesel represented an upstream and innovative brand, following the leading of the owner Renzo Rosso.

First of all, a general analysis on all the characteristics proper of the fashion industry was presented, in order to show the scenario in which the firm was born. Significant attention was placed on the marketing and advertising context, explaining how fashion publicity evolved and changed in the last decades. In particular, the focus was on the advertising flow made by provocative and dumb images that can find its starting point in Benetton Campaigns by Oliviero Toscani at the beginning of the 80s. Then, the history of the Company itself was presented, focusing on its international evolution from a local small firm to a multinational one.

Diesel was born from the willingness of a man who wanted to do something innovative to shock the world of fashion. Renzo Rosso owes much of his learning of entrepreneurial skills to Adriano Goldschmied who was his mentor in the early years of work. We are talking about a man who build an empire that sees its beginning in 1978 with the birth of Diesel. Diesel is the crown jewel for Rosso. However, also other important names such as Maison Martin Margiela, Marni, Viktor & Rolf and Staff International are part of its heritage as well as the most recent Only the Brave Foundation. In these past years, not only he has managed these companies, but also he received a significant number of awards. Among the most important we can mention the *Millennium Development Goals Global Leader* in New York in 2010, the appointment to *Cavaliere dell'Ordine al merito del lavoro* conferred to him in Rome in 2011, the *Laurea Honoris Causa* both at Verona University and at the CUOA Foundation of Altavilla Vicentina and the *Pitti Immagine Uomo Award* in 2004 in Florence. In addition to these, there are many other prizes received for the advertising campaigns proposed by Diesel over the years. From 1992 to 2010, the brand won seven *Grand Prix* at the Cannes Lions International Awards, also in 1998 Renzo Rosso was named *Advertiser of the Year* during the same event.

All this makes Renzo Rosso and his Company an international phenomenon. However, what are the aspects that have made all this possible?

What distinguishes Diesel, and obviously its founder, is the passion that is invested in each activity within the Company.

"It is not enough, therefore, to be good and capable, right in behavior and punctual in deliveries. To succeed, or at least to contribute to the success of your Company, today, one must know one of the most difficult elements to teach and learn: the passion for what you are doing"²²⁴. Passion is in the DNA of this brand because Renzo Rosso has been able to convey the love for its job and turn it into a final product, creating a worldwide recognized brand.

As we have extensively discussed, the element that distinguishes Diesel is undoubtedly its advertising campaigns. However, before going into details, let us take a step back in history and take a look at who has set the foundation for the type of advertising so called provocative.

As we saw, the very first pioneer of provocative advertising can be identified in the Benetton's brand. The Company, through the collaboration with Oliviero Toscani, has realized, from the early 1980s, a series of advertising campaigns that have disrupted the way of doing advertising.

The images that came out from this collaboration brought Benetton to success, although those photos were often censored and banned. Also today, those pictures are still considered controversial and shocking, terms with which Toscani completely disagree. "I do not make shocking photographs. Some stupid people say they are shocking but I do not even take them into consideration. The exact definition is Provocative"²²⁵. "Conformism is the worst enemy of creativity. Anyone who is incapable of taking risks can not be creative"²²⁶, said Toscani himself to *Vogue Italia* in order to communicate the added value of his work.

²²⁴"Non basta dunque essere bravi e capaci, inappuntabili nei comportamenti e puntuali nelle consegne. Per avere successo, o perlomeno per contribuire al successo della propria azienda, oggi bisogna saper aggiungere uno degli elementi forse più difficili da insegnare e apprendere: la passione per quello che si sta facendo"
D. Grossi, "Cuore e passione: non li hai? Sei fuori. Con Rosso è rivoluzione in casa Diesel", *Bimag*, 20th March 2017 (consultation date 15th May 2017)

²²⁵ "Io non faccio fotografie scioccanti. Alcune persone stupide dicono che sono scioccanti ma non le prendo nemmeno in considerazione. La definizione esatta? Provocanti"
E. Manning, "Ecco come Oliviero Toscani e Benetton hanno cambiato il modo di fare pubblicità", *Vice*, 17th November 2015 (consultation date 4th October 2017)

²²⁶ "Il conformismo è il peggior nemico della creatività. Chiunque sia incapace di prendersi dei rischi non può essere creativo"

From that point on, many brands, especially in the fashion world, have adopted provocative advertising in order to attract more the attention of the market.

Among these Companies, we find Diesel, which started to produce provocative advertising campaigns only from the beginning of the 1990s. Despite this late introduction of this typology of advertising, great success was reached firstly regarding the consumers and the public in general, and secondly also for what regards the communication and marketing experts community who rewarded the Company many times.

We have seen how the Company, from the beginning of this provocative attitude, has immediately chosen a type of advertising compliant with the brand identity. It was based on nonconformity. This meaning the violation of common standards and the irony over modern society. Diesel's advertising campaigns perfectly fit into the definition of provocative advertising that is identified as “a deliberate appeal, within the content of an advertisement, to stimulate that they are expected to shock at least a portion of the audience, both because they are associated with values, norms or taboos that are not habitually challenged or transgressed in advertising, and because of their distinctiveness and ambiguity”²²⁷.

Despite the fact that many other Companies still now choose this type of advertising, Diesel was and is able to emerge among all because of its anti-fashion label. The Creative Team always wants to communicate aspects of the society in an original, ironic and sometimes satirical way, just to highlight that it is possible to deal with more critical issues also in advertising.

“The problem that might occur when using provocative advertising is that the receiver might misinterpret the intended message and find the Company being offensive and unethical. Due to this, Companies are hardly willing to admit that they use provocation in their advertisement and they might even avoid using it. In addition, as we mentioned earlier people are different and react in different ways to advertisement depending on personality, attitudes and perceptions”²²⁸.

Vogue Italia Encyclo, Oliviero Toscani, <http://www.vogue.it/news/encyclo/fotografia/t/oliviero-toscani> (consultation date 4th October 2017)

²²⁷ Vezina Richard and Paul Olivia. (1997), « Provocation in advertising: a conceptualization and an empirical assessment», *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 14, p. 179

²²⁸ S. Anderson, A. Patterson, *Provocative Advertising: The Swedish Youth's Response*, Master's Thesis, Lulea University of Technology, Department of Business Administration and Social Sciences, International Business and Economics Programme, a.y. 2004, Supervisor Lars Backstrom, p. 4

Diesel never disguised that the purpose of its advertising goes beyond common advertising. However, as in all situations, there are pros and cons. Indeed, while on the one hand many awards and prizes were acknowledged for the realization of original and avant-garde advertising, on the other hand Diesel does not find the same popularity among consumers, in terms of quantity of sales. In this regard, the empirical analysis was conducted in order to better explain this phenomena.

The empirical research was carried out taking into account the theory of provocative advertising introduced by Darren Dahl. Dahl states that “shocking advertising content is that which attempts to surprise an audience by deliberately violating norms for societal values and personal ideals. It is the norm violation aspect of the shock appeal that is assumed to underlie its ability to break through advertising clutter and capture the attention of a target audience who then listens and acts on the related message”²²⁹.

A questionnaire was created *ad hoc* for the purpose of testing this theory. Although the sample’s numbers are not enough and statistically weighted in order to be representative of the overall population, interesting results were carried out.

In the questionnaire, the variables that define the process of information that are transmitted by an advertisement were tested. These are the cognitive, affective and conative variables. The point was to understand in which degree these variables are affected according to the type of advertisement a person is exposed to. In order to get the information needed, provocative advertising and the rest of the more traditional and common advertisements were compared.

Results of the survey show that Dahl's theory is only partially demonstrated. In fact, in the first part of the questionnaire answers are perfectly in line with the theory and they show how provocative advertisements are able to attract people's attention in a more efficient way with respect to other traditional advertising.

However, moving beyond the first impact things change. In the subsequent parts, there is no difference between provocative advertising answer results and the counterpart traditional advertising, for what regards the appreciation and the purchase of the products.

Although the study was not conducted on a weighted sample, the results are interesting.

This because they reflect that Diesel constantly proposes this type of advertising regardless

²²⁹ D.W Dahl, K. Frankenberger, R.V Manchanda, “Does it pay to shock? Reactions to shocking and non-shocking ad content among University students”, *Journal of Advertising Research*, XLIII (2003), p.269

the fact that it does not necessarily increase the audience of the brand. This suggests that Diesel is not much concerned on increasing market power, but it prefers to reach only a niche clientele. This is demonstrated by various aspects. As we have seen by investigating the history and philosophy behind the brand, it was clear how Renzo Rosso set up the management in Diesel. He did this by selecting creatives and designers who could produce new, more dynamic and imaginative products than those already offered by the market, and starting from a simple product such as jeans. This was made to attract a niche of customers who identify themselves in the brand and its values. Therefore, mainly attracting youngsters and nowadays Millennials. They not only buy Diesel products, but also, and above all, they are able to represent the brand and be independent testimonials for it. Because, for Mr. Rosso it is not necessary that everyone wears Diesel, but he only needs the right people to wear his products. "Diesel consumer is a person who wants to assert his personality, *he is certainly not an average consumer*, someone who is dragged, but he is the leader of the group, a person who has charisma as our products, our advertising, our Company and all of us"²³⁰ affirmed Mr. Rosso.

The fact that Diesel points to a niche clientele is seen from various actions that the brand has done over the years. For example, first of all by considering the locations of Diesel stores. Exclusive locations in major cities such as New York and Milan, Capri and Saint Tropez. Then, for what regards the product collections, Diesel has proposed many co-branding or special launches. For instance, the Ducati capsule collection or the latest Diesel Tribute. These are small and precious collections that Diesel wants to dedicate to those who want to tribute its history and identity.

It is exactly for these reasons that Diesel has developed this niche marketing, although not for everyone. The provocative campaigns are mainly the institutional ones. Those are used as a tool to communicate the identity of Diesel, they do not have, in general, the purpose of persuading the consumers to buy the products. Also, it is interesting to note that the brand logo is always positioned lower in the image, almost hidden. Diesel's aim is to tell stories and especially to narrate about truths of everyday life. Diesel decides to address in these campaigns peculiar issues concerning religion, politics, distorted beauty and education. This,

²³⁰ "Il consumatore Diesel è una persona che vuole far valere la sua personalità, non è certamente un consumatore medio, uno che si fa trascinare, ma è un leader della compagnia, una persona che ha del carisma come del resto il nostro prodotto, la nostra pubblicità, la nostra azienda e un po' tutti noi"
R. Micheletti, *Redvolution*, Venezia, Marcianum Press, 2013, p. 127

with the purpose of challenging the observer and capture the attention of those who can really understand the meaning.

By doing this, Diesel does not chase the consumer, but wants the consumer to follow the brand. Diesel has managed to conquer that slice of the market that perfectly reflects its philosophy and style. This is because Renzo Rosso and his Creative Team are firmly convinced that evocative images, capable of creating reactions in the public, are more effective for the brand itself.

"I encourage them, I invite them to be brave, be kind, to do things out of their mind. If you dare, I support, because only in this way you attract attention. [...]. I do not care if this season is appreciated, I want the next one to be different"²³¹ said Rosso about his collaborators, stressing, once again, how important it is to take risks and to be bold for Diesel brand.

In general, Diesel first and most important feature is passion. Passion in what it does and in how it communicates itself. The passion was inspired, from the very beginning, by the founder Renzo Rosso. Without his directions and his courage to risk, all innovation brought out by Diesel would not have been realized. Above all, what Renzo Rosso teaches is that you always have to be yourself, and everything else will come as a result.

²³¹ "Faccio da stimolo, li invito ad aver coraggio, essere brave, a fare cose fuori di testa. Dovete osare, sostengo, perché solo così potete attirare l'attenzione. [...]. Non mi interessa se quella stagione piace, voglio che la prossima sia diversa"

R. Micheletti, *Redvolution*, Venezia, Marcianum Press, 2013, p. 141

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