

힙합 패션에서 티셔츠의 커뮤니케이션기능에 관한 연구

- 오바마 티셔츠를 중심으로 -

The Communication Function of T-Shirts in Hip-Hop Fashion

- Focusing on the Obama T-Shirt -

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Abstract

본 연구의 목적은 커뮤니케이션 특성을 오바마(Obama) 티셔츠를 중심으로 비교 연구해 봄으로써, 과거 기록의 분석이 아닌 동시대를 빠르게 분석한다는 의미와 함께, 현 시대 트렌드 속에서의 상징적 생산물로서 급격히 변화하는 힙합 패션 속 티셔츠를 통해 상징적 커뮤니케이션을 통한 상품성 파악에 기여한다는 데 있다. 연구 방법은 문헌 연구로서 국내외의 관련 서적과 논문 등의 선행 연구 자료를 토대로 분류, 분석하고, 현 시점의 특성을 중심으로 한 연구인 점을 감안하여 뉴욕을 중심으로 한 인터넷과 신문과 같은 보도 자료와 미국 내 유명 힙합 셀렉트 스토어(hip-hop select store) 웹사이트 등의 이미지를 참고하였다. 또한 패션 아이템으로 가장 보편적이고 대중적인 티셔츠를 중심으로 힙합 문화 속 많은 영향력을 지닌 마틴 루터 킹(Martin Luther King Jr), 말콤 X(Malcom X), 그리고 버락 오바마(Barack Obama)가 표현된 티셔츠를 비교한 후, 오바마 티셔츠가 가진 커뮤니케이션의 특징을 살펴보았다. 본 연구의 결과는 다음과 같다. 첫째, 힙합 패션 안에서 티셔츠는 커뮤니케이션의 역할을 하는 상징적인 생산물로서 특히 비언어적인 측면의 커뮤니케이션에서 매우 직접적인 전달력을 지닌다. 둘째, 버락 오바마를 주제로 한 티셔츠는 저항과 개혁의 상징으로써의 슬로건과 메시지를 전달하는 커뮤니케이션의 설득성을 지닌다. 셋째, 버락 오바마를 주제로 한 티셔츠는 힙합 문화 속 그들의 슬로건을 따른다는 동일 정체성에 대하여 연대감과 동조성을 가진다. 넷째, 오바마 티셔츠의 경우 다른 비교 대상들과 다르게 디자인적인 요소를 어필하며 많은 디자이너들에게 오바마의 슬로건과 함께 오바마 그 자체로서 디자인 주제로 사용되었으며, 이는 커뮤니케이션의 패션성을 보여주며 패션성으로 인하여 발생하는 디자인 상품성으로까지 발전을 이루고 있다. 다섯째, 오바마 티셔츠는 예술 사조 중 대중적이고 이해가 쉬우며 특수한 이미지가 일상적으로 것으로 바뀌게 하는 팝 아트와 그래피티 등으로 디자인되어지며 커뮤니케이션의 예술성을 보인다.

Key Words : hip-hop fashion, T-shirt, Barack Obama, symbolic communication, subculture

I. Introduction

The culture of modern society is highly pluralistic, and it is constantly being re-formed and turned toward unique directions by various atomistic forces. At the same time, culture is becoming more extensively compartmentalized than ever before. The unique characteristics, forms, meanings, ideas, and values of its various subcultures have formed and developed differently from the “dominant” culture, and these subcultures have become the subsets that comprise modern society.

One of these subcultures is hip-hop, which originated in the U.S. in the 1970s and became popular across the globe in the 1980s through hip-hop music. In modern times, hip-hop culture has come to tear down the boundaries of popular culture, as it transcends socio-cultural boundaries while asserting its importance as a part of the larger world culture.

Hip-hop fashions that defined the culture’s visual identity had their origins in the fashion of African-Americans, and were developed through a combination of factors, such as the historically suppressed inner consciousness of African-Americans and their resistance to their social isolation and their departure from general notions. Hip-hop fashion began as a nonverbal communication solution in the context of an oppressive environment filled with social contradictions. However, the fashion now comprises many variations, integrating the latest trends. In the hip-hop fashion of this age, t-shirts are practical, comfortable, and expressive of the personality and intention of the wearer. In this way, t-shirts have become a form of symbolic communication.

Although preceding studies on the t-shirt as a measure of communication exist, such as those by Cheol Joo Jung (1988)¹⁾, Youn Hee Kim (1992)²⁾, Kwang Jin Lee (2001)³⁾ and Seung Hee Gwak (2006)⁴⁾, a more segmented scope of study through the approach of very comprehensive contents is needed.

Therefore, this study seeks to examine the status and characteristics of a hip-hop fashion that falls under the category of the hip-hop subculture and developed in a modern setting. It also examines the communication characteristics of the Obama t-shirt by comparing the hip-hop t-shirts that depict the three people of greatest influence in hip-hop culture: Martin Luther King Jr., Malcom X, and Barack Obama. The study will relate the thematic diversity of various unpredictable fashions and the communication characteristics of the t-shirt in subculture fashions, and analyzes the Obama t-shirt in particular because such an analysis might expand on the themes of future hip-hop fashion and help form a predictable index of fashion.

The purpose of this comparative study is to analyze the current trends of hip-hop fashion, rather than discussing past trends. The symbolic communication of t-shirts in the fast-changing hip-hop fashion culture contributes to the understanding of marketability as a symbolic product of the trend of the current time. Also, this study will provide a quicker and more accurate information analysis because it focuses on New York, which is the Mecca of current ready-made clothes fashion.

This study uses a literary research method which classifies and analyzes the information provided in related literatures, both domestic and abroad, in preceding studies, on the Internet, and in newspaper reports that focus on New York. It also uses images from famous hip-hop clothing stores in the U.S., which were referenced to investigate the communication characteristics of Obama t-shirts in order to seek patterns in new themes of modern hip-hop fashion.

II. Theoretical Background

1. Fashion as a Function of Communication

1) Communication

The dictionary defines communication as: “to share, convey, allow to participate, participate and share” in the giving and taking of meaning between individuals through a common symbolic system⁵). In general, communication is also defined as “social interaction through message,” but various scholars understand it in subtly different ways.

Two commonly known models of communication are: 1) communication as a process and 2) semiology or structural communication. The former signifies the process of saying something to someone using one or more media as an intentional action with the purpose of expressing oneself with the purpose of conveying certain ideas to the recipient without expecting a response. This theory tends to explain communication as a “mechanical transfer process” which simply transfers a message from one place to the other.⁶ In “communication as process,” the element of communication cut off and failure exists only in the sense that it must understand the virtue that arises from the heart of the recipient as a given.

The latter model defines communication as a “social interaction that constitutes a certain culture or individuals as the constituents of society,” and focuses on how people interact with messages or texts to derive meaning. This model is characterized by concern over whether the recipient understands the point one seeks to convey and whether the interaction brings about the expected response.⁷⁾⁸ Semiology (or structural communication) is more applicable to the process of social communication. Such communication is a vital medium for psychological conveyance of meaning to others especially in the setting of a communal society.

2) Communication and T-shirts

There are two main methods of communication: 1) those that are linguistic in nature (texts and speech, primarily); and 2) those that are characterized by non-linguistic features, such as visual messages. Comprehension and utilization of the linguistic delivery system requires more formal training than the non-linguistic form, and the meaning can not be comprehended on its own. The non-linguistic system, on the other hand, can be understood without formal training. In the world of t-shirt design, non-linguistic communication is preferable because such a design is accessible to a greater number of users. In this case, the act of creating communication is emphasized as a characteristic of design, rather than the act of creating a symbol.⁹

In modern times, various costumes are worn according to the wearer’s personal choice. Therefore, modern costumes, through symbolic communication, reveal personal information about individuals. Design aside, costumes are a form of non-verbal communication because of their function as a kind of symbolic communication.¹⁰ The clothing of modern society is an important communication tool, and one of the staples of modern fashion is the t-shirt.

T-shirts have been used as work clothes for laborers, as military uniform for soldiers, as an undergarment for a dress suit in the 1920s, and as practical sportswear for wrestlers and gymnasts in the late 19th century. The first

t-shirt created with a picture printed on it appeared in 1969, and words/phrases were inserted on the front and back sides of t-shirts by the 1970s.¹¹⁾

As costumes, through symbolic meaning, are a vital part of communication in modern culture, and t-shirts are one of the most popular costume items, it can be assumed that t-shirts play an important communicative role in modern society and culture. The symbolic expressions revealed in the patterns displayed on t-shirts play a particularly vital role.

2. Subculture Characteristics and Hip-Hop Fashion

1) Hip-Hop as a Subculture

A culture is a form of commonality revealed through the integration of human knowledge, actions, and various experiences. Modern society exhibits a post-modernistic plurality through the dissolution and amalgamation of various subcultures and super cultures. Subcultures provide a unique sense of independence within a mass culture by restricting their own boundaries according to region, social status, and ideals. The clothing and body decorations of members of a subculture are generally the most visual symbol of their exclusion from the world and loyalty to like-minded individuals. To some extent, clothing styles are the focus of a subculture's identity.¹²⁾

The most important differentiators of a subculture's style are food, clothing, slang, and music.¹³⁾ A subculture's culturally significant objects are stylized through unique composition, through the active selection of materials and products. This composition is a process of destroying and modifying the existing meanings and purposes into different meanings and purposes. In spite of its visibility, a style is not created simply through the wearing of certain materials what makes a style is the act of stylization. In other words, style is a product of the systematization of actions of an object through which systematic group identity is formed.¹⁴⁾ Although the members of a subculture are free to intentionally and publicly express their identity in the U.S., there are more instances of identity being indirectly expressed in styles rather than through speech or writing.

Hip-hop is currently the most popular subculture among the youths of the world, and it has been shared by all ages and generations, especially in the U.S., although different ethnic groups show somewhat different responses. Hip-hop appeared in the 1970s in the U.S. as a genre of music that became popular throughout the world after the 1980s. The music and the style that accompanied it blossomed into a world-wide cultural phenomenon. Hip-hop has been such a success because its birth and development combined various cultural aspects of many races and regions.¹⁵⁾

Hip-hop continued to thrive through the 1990s upon its emergence in the form of the subculture of the African-Americans of New York neighborhoods in the 1980s. Based on resistance, it has become the main current of subculture throughout music, fashion, dance, art, and graffiti.

2) Hip-Hop as Popular Culture

Popular culture can be defined according to one of two possible perspectives, depending on whether you understand "public" to be descriptive of "mass" or "popular." Those who see popular culture as mass culture refer to the culture formed after the establishment of the modern society of Europe. Mass culture as applies to a classed

society, in which there was no contact between the public (the masses) and the elite. On the other hand, popular culture holds more positive and neutral position than mass culture. The differences between the two lie in their views of the public.

Although hip-hop originated from subcultures expressed in music, fashion, dance, art, and graffiti, stylistic elements of hip-hop are currently expanding into popular culture with the image of the new generation. In 2006, the National Museum of American History opened a “Hip-hop culture” collection that recognized the unprecedented cultural influence of hip-hop with the slogan: “Hip-Hop Won’t Stop; The Beat, The Rhymes, The Life.” Brent D. Glass, Museum Director, stated that the purpose of opening the exhibition hall was to recognize hip-hop as the most influential cultural thread in the history of the U.S. for the past 30 years.¹⁶⁾ Additionally, the Bronx Borough of New York provided funds of \$1.5 million to establish a hip-hop museum in July 2006. Mr. Seabrook, a person related in this regard, emphasized that hip-hop is not simply about the incorrectly perceived “gangster culture” and emphasized that the hip-hop museum would be built for the hip-hop culture of the next generation. The Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. also officially announced a permanent hip-hop exhibit hall. This recognition shows how hip-hop has begun to be accepted as part of mainstream culture, rather than just a subcultural phenomenon.¹⁷⁾

After the 1990s, it came to the point where 75% of non-African-American children in the U.S. as well as countless children from Detroit to Hong Kong, were speaking with the slang of hip-hop culture, while the youths of New York, L.A., Paris, Milan, and Tokyo were wearing the same clothing and listening to the same music. In other words, hip-hop became a lifestyle for people around the world in a way that transcended the music.¹⁸⁾

Hip-hop’s rise in popularity was secured by the massive culture consumption industry, which has hugely affected popular culture in its mass commercialization of elements of subculture in order to meet and create demand for certain saleable items, like clothing and music.

3) Modern Characteristics of Hip-Hop Fashion

The clothing and bodily decoration of subcultures like hip-hop are generally the visual symbols of the wearer’s exclusion from the rest of the world and his loyalty to like-minded individuals. Thus, style is arguably the center of subcultural identification.¹⁹⁾

Subcultures are formed in resistance to the central dominating culture, and they are made of groups of people who oppose the dominant culture through shared style and actions, but do not seek to be defined as a discrete cultural identity. Hip-hop fashion is the result of active resistance to social discrimination and negligence and a sense of isolation. Modern hip-hop fashion is generally youthful and personal, trendy and rebellious, and its most popular and representative item is the T-shirt.

Hip-hop fashion became popular among the youth of the world, stemming from the fashions of African-American youth subculture when the hip-hop group Run-DMC appeared in 1984. Run-DMC’s signature look was a simple track suit, hooded sweatshirt, and sneakers. The trademark Adidas logo that was printed on their clothes and shoes become an internationally-known sportswear brand through this use.²⁰⁾



<Figure 1> Run-DMC
(source: <http://images.google.com>)

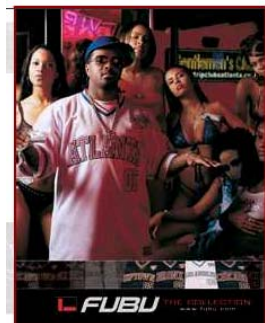


<Figure 2> Adidas leather track suit
(source: <http://sneakernews.com>)

Other cultural elements of hip-hop, such as break dance and rap, used to be regarded as expressions exclusively performed by and for African-Americans. However, these started to become popular among White American youths with the appearance of the Beastie Boys in 1984, causing African-American fashion to sift into mainstream American fashion. As hip-hop gradually became a world-wide cultural phenomenon, high-fashion designers such as Giorgio Armani and Tommy Hilfinger became interested in integrating hip-hop style into their fashion lines.²¹⁾

In the 1990s and beyond, many hip-hop artists and executives created their own fashion labels and clothing lines. Notable examples include Wu-Tang Clan (Wu-Wear), Russell Simmons (Phat Farm), Kimora Lee Simmons (Baby Phat), Diddy (Sean John), TI (AKOO), Apple Bottom Jeans (Nelly), Damon Dash and Jay-Z (Rocawear), 50 Cent (G-Unit Clothing), Eminem (Shady Limited), 2Pac (Makaveli), and OutKast (OutKast Clothing). Other prominent hip-hop fashion companies include Karl Kani and FUBU, Ecko, Girbaud, Enyce, Famous Stars and Straps, Bape, LRG, Timberland Boots, Akademiks, and South Pole. Today, hip-hop clothing is produced by many popular and successful designers, who charge large amounts for their products. Hip-hop fashion is worn by a significant percentage of young people around the world, and a significant number of retailers are dedicated to selling hip-hop inspired fashions.²²⁾ Hip-hop fashion is a booming industry; in fact, the Korean company Samsung invested in FUBU in 1995, which also provides a good example of the internationalization of hip-hop fashion.

The classic hip-hop style consists of loose, baggy-fit denim pants, large T-shirts and polos, a hooded sweatshirt



<Figure 3> FUBU(source: <http://www.fubu.com>) & Phat Farm(source: <http://www.phatfarm.com>)

and sneakers. However, recent trends in hip-hop fashion are reverting back to the “old school” style, and the clothing is becoming similar to that worn in the early 1980s. It is geared toward a Hipster-inspired style with a nod towards irony, and may include items such as slim-fit denim jeans, tighter-fitting “vintage style” T-shirts with shorter arm sleeves, polo shirts, sport coats, woven button shirts, large ornamental belt buckles, cufflinks, skull and skeleton decorations, Ed Hardy and Sailor Jerry tattoo-inspired motifs, elaborately decorated zip-up hoodies, trucker hats, lumberjack button-ups or plaid designed shirts, keffiyehs, and snow-inspired fashions.

Shorter length T-shirts have become more fashionable, in order to expose decorated belts, belt buckles, and biker chains. Although the baggy style of dress remains relevant to many, some hip-hoppers forego that particular style, opting for colorful fitted and hipster-inspired clothing, as exemplified by rappers such as Kanye West, Common, and will.i.am, while others are sporting tighter-fitting skater-influenced styles, in the cases of Pharrell and Lupe Fiasco. In many ghetto communities, such as those in Los Angeles, these skater and hipster fashions are considered to be gay or homosexual, however. Other re-emergent 80s trends include Members Only jackets, huge oversized chains, and large eyeglasses. Leather jackets have also seen a rise in popularity.²³⁾

Currently, traditional hiphop brands like Ecko Unltd, Sean John, Roca Wear, Akademiks, COOGI, Ed Hardy, Nyce, LRG, and NEW ERA, along with mainstream brands like Polo Ralph Lauren, American Eagle, Nautica, Hollister, Aeropostale, Lacoste, True Religion, Rock & Republic, and higher end brands like Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Prada, and Ralph Lauren Purple Label, are popular with those who wear hip-hop fashion throughout the world and in the U.S.



<Figure 4> Ed Hardy (source: <http://www.edhardyshop.com>) & SeanJohn (source: <http://www1.seanjohn.com>)

4) Hip-Hop Fashion and the T-shirt as a Symbol of Resistance and Reform

The T-shirt plays an important role in communication, and the symbolic expressions of the patterns displayed on T-shirts are the main mode of delivering messages to people either directly or indirectly.²⁴⁾ T-shirts are moving visual spaces that express various symbolic images or contents more than other casual clothes do. T-shirts can express the wearers' feelings of suppression, comment on social issues, indicate their sense of resistance and struggle, and create a commonality of lifestyle and values.

The circumstances of every time period determine the cultural elements communicated in hip-hop fashion. In the early stages of hip-hop fashion, T-shirts frequently displayed the colors of Jamaica or Ethiopia's flag, or would otherwise combine brilliant colors that indicated a reggae, Afro-centered identity. This style still affects current

hip-hop fashion today; it expresses the fundamental identity of hip-hop culture and acknowledges the cultural-hybridization inherent in the subculture.



<Figure 5> Jamaica T-shirt (source: <http://www.zazzle.com> & <http://www.drjays.com>)

Another popular hip-hop fashion is the graffiti T-shirt. Graffiti does not simply serve as a graphic decoration, but conveys a certain meaning. When the style first became popular, the graffiti T-shirt expressed the wearer's territoriality, resistance to the governing culture, and identification with the ethnic minority. Although graffiti T-shirts currently have a slightly different meaning from their original purpose, it is still a popular icon of hip-hop fashion.



<Figure 6> graffiti T-shirt (source: <http://www.drjays.com>)

Fundamentally, the fashion of the hip-hop subculture reflects the wearer's resistance to his isolation from society and his struggle with the issues that result from his suppressed inner perceptions and suppressed environment. Martin Luther King, Jr. is famous for vocalizing these feelings of isolation and resistance in his "I have a Dream" speech. A symbol of the resistance for the rights of citizens and peace during 1950s and 1960s, Martin Luther King, Jr. is still iconified by hip-hop fashion. His memory is greatly respected throughout America, to the extent that every third Monday of January is designated as a national holiday in his honor. T-shirts with his image printed on them have become the root of the hip-hop spirit, carrying with it his slogan of nonviolent civil resistance. Another icon of hip-hop is Malcom X, another famous activist and speaker for the human rights of African-Americans.

Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X were the two most important leaders of African-American youth in the 20th century. Black Americans followed them because of their unique perspectives on civil and human rights, integration and nationalism, and their dedication to the spiritual values of their faiths. Both shared a common vision

in their relation of Black America's social justice issues to the moral integrity of the U.S. and the world. However, contemporary media tend to minimize the complex interactions between their ideologies and present the two men as polar opposites whose views are frozen in time by the titles of their most famous speeches: "I Have a Dream" and "By Any Means Necessary."

Martin Luther King and Malcolm X are significant role models in hip-hop America because they remind young people that they must endeavor to achieve global human rights, that freedom and dignity are universal rights of man that are granted by God and not by any government. They also show that success and prosperity for the majority of Black Americans in the 21st century will only be achieved by a strong coalition of those who are dedicated to the values of democracy and social justice. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X never achieved such a coalition for the liberation of their people because they were too divided by their religious, political, and personal differences to meet and work to combine their efforts. Their failure to work together was one of the major political mistakes in the quest to gain civil rights for African-Americans.²⁵⁾



<Figure 7> Martin Luther King, Jr. (source: <http://image.google.com>) & Martin Luther King, Jr. T-shirt(source: <http://culturallycool.com>)

III. Fashion Characteristics of the Obama T-shirt in Subculture

1. Barack Obama

The current President of the United States, Barack Hussein Obama II, is a biracial person - his father was a black African from Kenya, while his mother is a white American. He grew up in Indonesia and Hawaii, among other non-whites. Upon graduating from Harvard University Law School, he made his name known as a human rights activist, and as a human rights lawyer as he worked for a Christian volunteer group providing legal consultation to citizens in a slum in Chicago. He was the only politician of African-American heritage to strongly oppose to the Iraq War. His incredible public speaking ability, shown in his keynote speech at the 2004 Democratic National Convention and in the election campaign of 2006 led him to run in the general election for the 44th President of the U.S. in 2008.

In addition to his core public pledge of the complete withdrawal of U.S. forces stationed in Iraq, Barack Obama



<Figure 8> Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcom X T-shirt (source: <http://culturallycool.com>) & Obama T-shirt for solidarity (source: <http://image.google.com>)

However, the Barack Obama T-shirt is somewhat different from the others because of its connection with fashion. The purpose of the T-shirts that contain Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcom X was to appeal their slogans to their groups of followers, while Obama T-shirts are fashionable items that correspond to the trend, although they simultaneously maintain the purposes of persuasion and solidarity inherent in the others.

The Obama T-shirt is slim and tighter-fitting, has shorter arm sleeves and body length, according to recent trends. It has the marketability of an item that appeals through its product value to consumers, with a design element that corresponds to the modern sense. There is a crystal-studded Obama T-shirt, for example, that is being sold for \$150 and also, the Obama T-shirt is a very popular item for tourists in souvenir shops in New York City. Moreover, the Obama T-shirt is selling in famous shop like DNM in Hong Kong. These show the marketability of the Obama T-shirt across a variety of demographics.

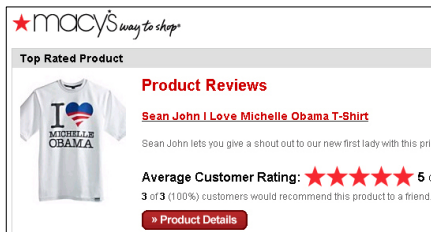


<Figure 9> DNM, HONG KONG (source: <http://www.dnm.hk>)

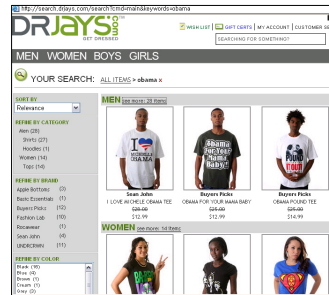
Although global spending has slowed, the fashion world is willing to invest in the Obama T-shirt . Many retailers and designers are in the process of coming up with designs that use Obama as the theme. According to Amazon.com (2009), the high-end hip-hop brand “Sean John,” which is currently one of the top five hip-hop brands in the U.S., is further developing the Obama design. This signifies that the Obama T-shirt is an item that inspires fashion designers.

According to a company spokeswoman of Amazon.com, the most popular clothing items sold on the web-site are T-shirts and hats. She also said that Amazon.com created a separate section of the Obama T-shirt to sell. Also, Dawn Robertson of the Sean John brand announced that they were successful in selling Obama-related merchandise in the midst of the recession, saying that they sold “hundreds of thousands” of T-shirts by creating an entire winter season

section filled only with Obama-related T-shirts last year. They sold these shirts to department stores throughout the U.S. and to Dr. Jay, the biggest hip-hop store in the U.S., as well as to specialty stores such as Against All Odds. Sean John especially established a strong foothold in the market for their Obama T-shirts by successfully selling Obama-themed shirts at Macy's, which is the U.S.'s representative mainstream department store.



<Figure 10> Macy's web-site
(source: <http://www.macys.com>)



<Figure 11> Dr.Jays web-site
(source: <http://www.drjays.com>)

Several top designers, such as Zac Posen, Narciso Rodriguez, Donna Karan, Beyonce, Derek Lam, Juicy Couture, and Gerald Matthews also presented T-shirt designs inspired by Obama.³⁰⁾



<Figure 12> Obama T-shirt from Derek Lam, Narciso Rodriguez and Zac Posen
(source: <http://www.wwd.com>)

Obama's image became the inspiration for T-shirt designs not only for famous brands and designers, but also for many small scale T-shirt companies and designers. In the case of non-branded designs, the Obama T-shirt was designed with a sense of art—with connections to kitsch and pop-art that well utilized the characteristics of the niche market. Kitsch is the rejection of the refined, elegant, and formal senses of fashion. Among the various kinds of kitsch fashion, pop-art is becoming more and more popular in the world of hip-hop fashion.³¹⁾

Pop-art was the main current of art during the 1960s and 1970s, and it is being reinterpreted in modern fashion and reappearing as a significant fashion trend. Since the current technique is similar to the original technique of pop-art, in that silk screen changes a special image into an ordinary one through repetitious reproduction of an

established popular image, it has been playing a significant role as the textile design of the modern costume. T-shirts with strong contrasts and sharp primary colors that use the collage technique of attaching dappled cartoon print and symbols of letters, numbers, and graffiti³²⁾ are the current trend in hip-hop fashion. Graffiti, especially, has drawn the attention of artists around the world. The global spread of hip-hop culture has made the subculture something that is no longer exclusively for African-Americans rather, it is a method expression through various styles from high-end brands to inexpensive ready-made clothes from the 1920s to the present.

Some kitsch seeks common social phenomena, which is a type that connects humans and objects and something functional and comfortable without being caught up in a certain frame. This type is the closest to hip-hop fashion among all the current social trends, and pop-art has the strength of being more quickly understood by the public than any other art trend, due to its vibrant colors and easy interpretation.



<Figure 13> pop art Obama T-shirt
(source: <http://www.karmaloop.com>, <http://www.nicekicks.com> & <http://www.amazon.com>)



<Figure 14> kitsch Obama T-shirt
(source: <http://www.drjays.com>)



<Figure 15> graffiti Obama T-shirt
(source: <http://www.drjays.com>)

<Table 1> Summary of the communication characteristics of the Obama T-shirt in the recent hip-hop fashion, compared to Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcom X T-shirts.

communication characteristics	T-shirt in hip-hop fashion	
	Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcom X	Barack Obama
persuasion	fight for human rights and social security for common people fight against irrational or corrupt social issues and war.	
solidarity	identification with their slogans of the three persons of influence and indication of their pride of being African-American(limited to African-American wearers).	

<Table 1> Continued

fashion	centering on the print technique of figure and slogan, the printed designs focus more on persuasion and solidarity than fashion and art.	design elements follow the current hip-hop fashion trends, present the hopeful trend of reformation and new beginnings in the midst of economic recession, develop into design product through fashion.
art		parleyed to the public through kitsch, pop-art that are just as popular and easy to understand as a T-shirt.

IV. Conclusion

The tendency of social groups in modern society has been for each to form its own unique notions of lifestyle, meaning, value systems, social relations, and customs. This dynamic results in the formation of a unique subculture; these subcultures consist of groups that use a variety of communication methods to express their cultural characteristics while resisting the existing culture. Clothing is a form of symbolic communication that indicates the personality of the wearer. Furthermore, clothing is a non-linguistical form of communication, so it has the advantage of being more quickly understood than formal language. As such, clothing can be considered one of the most important communicative tools of modern society.

Subcultures have the license to intentionally and publicly reveal their identities in ways that are different from those of the governing culture. Subculture identities are characterized by the members' suppressed inner perception, resistance to social isolation, and deviation from the norm. One modern subculture is hip-hop. Hip-hop culture confronts an oppressive environment filled with social contradictions with the non-linguistical solution of clothing.

This study examined the status and characteristics of hip-hop fashion, as well as the communicative characteristics of the Obama T-shirt, by comparing the iconic depiction of three people of great influence in hip-hop culture: Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcom X, and Barack Obama. The analysis focused on the most common and popular fashion item in hip-hop culture: the T-shirt.

The results obtained in this analysis are as follows:

First, the T-shirt is a fashion item that has endured through the ages. T-shirts provide subcultures with an expression for suppressed social issues and serve as an expression of resistance and struggle, commonality, and shared lifestyle and values. In hip-hop fashion, the T-shirt exhibits a direct force of delivery, especially when non-linguistical communication is utilized.

Second, in the comparison of Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcom X, and Barack Obama T-shirts in hip-hop fashion as symbols of resistance and reform, it was found that these T-shirts communicate a message about human rights issues, the fight against irrational and corrupt social issues and war providing social security for common people in the form of civil rights.

Third, there is a solidarity in the messages of Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcom X, and Barack Obama because they all fought against social corruption and fought for civil and human rights. Depictions of these honorable figures in hip-hop fashion indicate a solidarity of purpose and beliefs; for those who are African-American, wearing an Obama, Martin Luther King, Jr., or Malcolm X T-shirt indicates pride in their race.

Fourth, the Obama T-shirt's appeal is primarily in its design element, which follows current trends. This shows the "fashion" of communication. The fact that the fashion design product presents a hopeful trend of reform and new beginning in the midst of economic recession is not only communicable, but marketable. This product represents a new genre of new consumer culture which deviates from the method of selling in niche markets or through solidarity groups.

Fifth, pop-art that can easily be understood by the public and changes special images into ordinary ones is an art trend that influences the majority in T-shirts in hip-hop fashion. Pop-art is based on an unorthodox expression for the stereotype, resistance to formality, and, in the case of the Obama T-shirt, integrates communication with art.

Through this study, the characteristics of modern hip-hop fashion and its relation with communication was empirically verified. A comparison of the T-shirts that express the images of Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcom X, and Barack Obama showed that the fashion of communication is unique to the Obama T-shirt .

An emphasis on communication, rather than creating a symbol, is a new trend in fashion design, and the T-shirt, of all fashion items, has the most direct force of delivery in non-linguistical communication. Therefore, the communication characteristics of T-shirts in hip-hop fashion discussed in this study should be recognized as the vehicles that influence fashion and reflect artistic approach or current trends. The recognition as intentional communication, such as the act of resistance to a governing culture, suppressed inner perception, resistance to social isolation, and identification with a culture that deviates from the norm, and their marketability should also be considered. The positive image of Obama that is presented to the public can be seen also as a pop-culture product geared toward consumer demand.

In future studies of this kind, a more in-depth approach should be made through direct fashion market field research.

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