

CLEVELAND COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

COURSE BA (HONS) PHOTOGRAPHY

***UNITED COLOURS OF BENETTON***  
-  
***UNITED COLOURS AGAINST ILLUSION***

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UNITED COLORS  
OF BENETTON.

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# *INTRODUCTION*

*"I cannot offer solutions to these problems, but if I can make  
people more aware than that is all I offer."*

Luciano Benetton  
([www.chat.carleton.ca/~bavunca/benpov.html](http://www.chat.carleton.ca/~bavunca/benpov.html))

Living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century our lives are dominated by consumption. Simultaneously, our senses are overstimulated and our minds influenced by accompanying advertisements in all possible mediums, for example TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, flyers, billboards and the Internet. Wherever we are, whatever we do, and whatever time of day, the industry is constantly trying to influence our minds. Telling us what to think, what to buy and what we need to live a happy and successful life.

The advertising industry has created a world of illusion and maintained it ever since. This world is perfect, no problems exist. In his book *'Die Werbung ist ein laecheIndes Aas'* Oliviero Toscani, the photographer for *Benetton*, tries to describe this illusory world of advertising. It is a world far from reality but still we, the consumers, believe what we see, hear and read in the ever-present advertisements.

Somehow the advertising agencies manage to create and form our attitudes in a way to fit their needs. This process of brainwashing has been going on for so long now that we believe what we see and hear without questioning its credibility. This happens not only in the world of advertising, but also in many other aspects of life, for example in politics.

One series of advertising campaigns has aroused my attention more than any other. I am referring to *Benetton*. Although *Benetton* is an Italian clothing company, their advertisements very rarely deal with any of their products, but show images of social and political issues. By doing this they are trying to make us think and question these issues and everything associated with them. The *Benetton* Company and Oliviero Toscani believe that the very valuable and powerful space of advertising should be used in a more thoughtful way. They are both aware of the

power advertising has on our minds and their philosophy is to use this public space to make us aware of any social and/or political issues and maybe also try to change some of our attitudes by confronting us with images that sometimes frighten us, disgust us, make us laugh or even all of them together. By creating images that provoke new thought patterns *Benetton* has to some extent succeeded already. Their startling new images stay with us for much longer than any other advertisements, and it is almost inevitable that people talk and discuss the adverts and the issues they deal with. This can be a negative or positive reaction as can be seen in the many prizes and acknowledgements, and at the same time in their rejections and bad press releases. Either way, when this happens, as it does with almost any *Benetton* campaign, *Benetton* and Toscani's aim is fulfilled. They once again managed to arouse the attention of the population and make them question the issues and their consequences, and may even succeed in changing the attitude of a handful of people.

In my dissertation I want to look at the way attitudes are created and formed. What makes us develop an attitude and what it takes to change it. These are essential issues when working in advertising as many of our attitudes have been created and still are through this way of communication. At the same time when a new advert is being developed it is important to be aware of the main attitudes of the consumers, to promote the new product as successfully as possible.

The first chapter will deal with the way we develop attitudes, why we create them, what it takes to form them and to change them. In the second part of the chapter I want to look into the advertising philosophy of *Benetton* more closely and the way they believe the power of advertising should be used to reverse some of the illusions and attitudes that have been created through advertising over the years.

In my second chapter I will look at four carefully selected images from *Benetton's* campaigns giving an idea of the issues Toscani addresses in his images and the consequences they have had over the years. By doing this we will understand what Toscani's aims are and how the images work on us. In the second part of the chapter I will look at the relationship between the findings of the first chapter on attitude formation and change and *Benetton's* campaigns.

In my conclusion I want to look at the findings of both chapters and evaluate what they mean to me. I intend to finish by discussing my own opinion of Toscani's work.

**CHAPTER**  
**ONE**

UNITED COLORS  
OF BENETTON.

***TALK TO ME***

UNITED COLORS  
OF BENETTON.

*"Advertising is the richest and most powerful form of  
communication in the world. We need to have images that will  
make people think and discuss."*

Oliviero Toscani  
([www.benetton.com/www/aboutus/ourcomms/file1947.html](http://www.benetton.com/www/aboutus/ourcomms/file1947.html))

The importance of attitude within social psychology has been agreed on by many social psychologists. Thomas and Znaniecki (1918) and Watson (1930) had actually defined the whole of social psychology as the scientific study of attitudes<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, I feel it is important to understand the meaning of the term social psychology before moving on to attitude research.

Many different definitions exist but the content is always the same. Social psychology is the "scientific investigation of how the thoughts, feelings and behaviour of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined or implied presence of others"<sup>2</sup>. Putting it simply, the main idea of social psychology is to explore and explain human behaviour. Psychologists examine behaviour because this is the only concept within social psychology that is objectively observable. The common definition of behaviour is, "what people actually do that can be objectively measured"<sup>3</sup>. Ever since, the correlation between behaviour and attitude has been the subject of extensive discussions. Some social scientists however, question the direct interrelation between these two important concepts. The theory that developed over the last two decades is that there is no easy one-to-one correlation between an attitude and a specific behaviour, and that it is generally not possible to put someone's behaviour down to a verbally expressed attitude. Nevertheless, there seems to be a link between peoples' actions and attitudes; but how many different factors it takes to form a behaviour is different every time, varying from individual to individual and from situation to situation.



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<sup>1</sup> HOGG M. A. & VAUGHN G. M. *Social Psychology* Page 116  
<sup>2</sup> HOGG M. A. & VAUGHN G. M. *Social Psychology* Page 2  
<sup>3</sup> HOGG M. A. & VAUGHN G. M. *Social Psychology* Page 2

It is important to understand the correlation between behaviour and attitude, as a change of attitude will affect some spheres of our behaviour. It may not have an instant effect but in the long run it will influence our actions in some way.

Before looking into changing attitudes it is essential to understand what an attitude is, what components it has, what its actual function is, how strong it is, how it is being formed and how we access it. I will address these topics in the next part of this chapter.

"The word attitude derives from the Latin word 'aptus', which means 'fit and ready for action'. This ancient meaning refers to something that is directly observable, such as a boxing ring"<sup>4</sup>. Even though we nowadays define attitude as a concept which is not directly observable, the ancient meaning can still be adapted to modern research as any attitude results in behaviour and influences our choices and decisions. The effects of attitudes on our lives are much profounder than that. The official definition of attitude is: "A relatively enduring organisation of beliefs, feelings, and behavioural tendencies toward socially significant objects, groups, events or symbols. A general feeling or evaluation - positive or negative - about some person, object or issue"<sup>5</sup>. However, since the early days of researching attitudes there have been major differences in solving one of the main questions of how many decisive components it takes to form an attitude. Over the decades three main theories have developed. The simplest one is the 'one-component theory'. Edwards defined it as "the degree of positive or negative affect associated with some psychological object (Edwards 1957)"<sup>6</sup>. The only question addressed within this theory is whether you like or dislike something or someone. They believed that an attitude was formed through the simple answer of yes or no. Another theory is

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<sup>4</sup> HOGG M. A. & VAUGHN G. M.

*Social Psychology*

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<sup>5</sup> HOGG M. A. & VAUGHN G. M.

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the two-component attitude model. This theory stresses that it is a combination of "mental readiness to act"<sup>7</sup> and the influences of our responses in a general and consistent way. This way of thinking implies that they are private and unobservable. It also led to the conclusion that an attitude is a "hypothetical construct"<sup>8</sup>.

The last thesis was very popular in the 1960's and was based on the work of Rosenberg and Hoveland (1960) and Krech et al. (1962). They suggested that an attitude is formed out of cognitive, affective and behavioural components. In 1974 Himmelfarb and Eagly took this approach further and defined "an attitude as a relatively enduring organisation of beliefs, feelings and behavioural tendencies, towards socially significant objects, groups, events or symbols."<sup>9</sup> Even though this definition turned out to be problematic for scientists who did not believe in the direct correlation between attitude and behaviour (Zanna and Rampell 1988), it still lead to three major conclusions within attitude research that are still accepted today. Firstly it stresses that attitudes - once formed - are more or less permanent. This ensures that a momentary feeling is not classed as an attitude. Secondly, it suggests that "attitudes are limited to socially significant events or objects"<sup>10</sup>. Finally it states that "attitudes are generalisable and involve at least some degree of abstraction.

In 1956 Smith et al. proposed that once an attitude towards any psychological object is formed, it saves time and energy, as we recall it when a situation or object relates to it. They also suggested that attitudes enable us to maximise the

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|---------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|----------|
| <sup>6</sup>  | HOGG M. A. & VAUGHN G. M. | <u><i>Social Psychology</i></u> | Page 115 |
| <sup>7</sup>  | HOGG M. A. & VAUGHN G. M. | <u><i>Social Psychology</i></u> | Page 118 |
| <sup>8</sup>  | HOGG M. A. & VAUGHN G. M. | <u><i>Social Psychology</i></u> | Page 118 |
| <sup>9</sup>  | HOGG M. A. & VAUGHN G. M. | <u><i>Social Psychology</i></u> | Page 118 |
| <sup>10</sup> | HOGG M. A. & VAUGHN G. M. | <u><i>Social Psychology</i></u> | Page 118 |

possibility of having positive experiences and at the same time minimising the negative ones<sup>11</sup>.

From what we have learned up to now we can conclude that we have countless different attitudes, but how do these attitudes interrelate with each other? There are two main theories dealing with this issue. One of them is the cognitive dissonance theory which I will address later in this chapter, as it plays an important role when dealing with the correlation between attitude and behaviour, which is a basic theory in the matter of changing attitudes. The other theory is called balance theory and has been described by Heider in 1946 as being that "people prefer attitudes that are consistent with each other, and avoid those which are inconsistent"<sup>12</sup>.

Having many different attitudes interrelating with each other leads to the conclusion that they also have to be differently weighted. The three evaluations are:

- a) "non-existing' (i.e. a non-attitude)
- b) a weak association
- c) a strong association"<sup>13</sup>

The stronger an attitude becomes the more it becomes accessible and the more it influences our behaviour, by recalling an attitude or experience related situation the stronger it will become. This can also work in reverse. At this point it should also be mentioned that certain situations could make us act differently to our attitudes (Calder and Ross 1973). Peer-pressure can often be one of these triggers.

Having ascertained that we are not born with a set of attitudes there must be a system by which we gain attitudes. There are two different approaches to this problem.

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<sup>11</sup> HOGG M. A. & VAUGHN G. M.

*Social Psychology*

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<sup>12</sup> HOGG M. A. & VAUGHN G. M.

*Social Psychology*

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## BEHAVIOURAL APPROACH

One of them is the behavioural approach, which is split into four different sections. The first one is the theory that attitudes are formed by direct experience with any subject or object. If the first encounter with an attitude object is positive the influence on the attitude will be positive as well and vice versa. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) also suggested that the effect of an attitude upon an object could be influenced even more when information about the object is provided in advance. If however, we have no information about the object the first experience is crucial, especially when there are numerous encounters with the object. Secondly, there is classical conditioning, which suggest "that through repeated association a formerly neutral stimulus can elicit a reaction that was previously elicited only by another stimulus"<sup>14</sup>. Staats and Staats (1957) and Zanna et al. (1970) were supporters of this theory of attitude formation. They also supported the idea that classical conditioning is a very "powerful and insidious" factor in attitude structure. The next step is instrumental conditioning. This form of learning involves rewards for good behaviour and punishment or negative outcomes for bad actions.

The last process of formation is observational learning. Bandura (1973) and many other scientists stressed that attitude formation is not influenced by reinforcement but is a pure social learning process. Social psychologists define it as "the tendency for a person to reproduce the actions, attitudes and emotional responses exhibited by real-life or symbolic models"<sup>15</sup>. This process is also called modelling.

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<sup>13</sup> HOGG M. A. & VAUGHN G. M.

*Social Psychology*

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<sup>14</sup> HOGG M. A. & VAUGHN G. M.

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## COGNITIVE APPROACH

The second approach to attitude formation is cognitive development. The followers of this theory believed that there were numerous elements involved in the process of attitude formation. The more elements interrelate with each other the clearer and stronger the attitude becomes. These elements can be feelings, beliefs, or any sort of information.

"The difference between cognitive and behavioural approaches is the relative weight that each gives to internal events versus principles of reinforcement"<sup>16</sup>. Even though nowadays the cognitive approach is much more common and recognised, the behavioural approach still plays a very important part in social psychology in the area of learning processes.

As cognitive interpretation involves elements of information the two main sources should be mentioned at this point. For one there are the parents. This source of information involves all of the above mentioned sources of learning information (classical, conditioning, instrumental conditioning and observational learning).

The other very powerful source of information is mass media. Any form of media, especially television, has a major influence on attitude formation. As we will find out later *Benetton* is using printed mass media to influence the elements involved in our attitude structure.

In the next part of this chapter I will look into the research on how our attitudes are influenced and changed. As with attitude formation there are endless theories about attitude change. I will look at two main approaches that are generally accepted within social psychology.

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<sup>15</sup> HOGG M. A. & VAUGHN G. M.

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<sup>16</sup> HOGG M. A. & VAUGHN G. M.

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## PERSUASION PROCESS

Firstly there is the persuasion process which concentrates on changing peoples' attitudes by using valued arguments for persuasion. However, there is not one common tactic but many different variables that need to be successful in changing somebody's attitude and consequently will also lead to behavioural changes. Even though scientists have always been aware of the importance of persuasion in analysing social behaviour, in general it was only at the end of the Second World War that specific research on the importance of persuasion was started. In 1953 Hoveland et al. suggested that there are three variables within persuasion. These are:

- 1) the communicator, or the source
- 2) the communication, or message, and
- 3) the audience<sup>17</sup>

Psychologists nowadays agree that there are many steps to any successful persuasion but are not in agreement on the specific amount and details. However, they do agree that the recipients have to pay attention to the message, understand what is being said and then think and evaluate the received information (Eagly and Chaiken 1984). They argue that the chance of successful persuasion is higher if there is little disparity between the message and one's own thoughts. Alternatively, the bigger the discrepancy the higher the rejection will be. To understand how persuasion works, I will look at each one of the three components (communication, message and audience) individually. However, as I do so, it is important not to

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<sup>17</sup> HOGG M. A. & VAUGHN G. M.

forget that they interrelate at all times but their importance differs from setting to setting.

The effectiveness of the communicator depends on many variables, which influences the acceptability of a message. Hoveland and Weiss (1952) discovered that arguments brought forward by an expert are more successful than when presented by a non-expert. Miller et al. (1976) found that rapidly speaking communicators are more successful than the slower speaking communicators, as it implies to the audience that they know what they are talking about. The logic was that "attractive, popular and likable spokespersons are persuasive, and therefore are instrumental in increasing consumer demand for a product"<sup>18</sup> (Chaiken 1979, 1983).

Similarity suggests that the more the communicator and recipient have in common the stronger the persuasive message and vice versa. For example, the argument of a communicator within a peer group will be stronger than from a stranger.

It is important to remember that any communicator needs a combination of these variables to be successful. There is always some sort of interrelation between them, differently weighted, depending on the audience addressed.

Before considering the audience, let's look at some variables within the message itself and how the strength of the message changes on whatever medium is used. Within the advertising industry it is established knowledge that a message is enhanced through repetition. Only repetition ensures that the audience fully understands the message forwarded and that it will also be recalled in appropriate situations. However, frequent repetition in any advertising medium is expensive and a middle course has to be found. In 1988 Ray verbalised that the goal of successful

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<sup>18</sup> HOGG M. A. & VAUGHN G. M.

advertising is "to have the maximum impact with the minimum exposure and therefore, the most cost-effective expenditure"<sup>19</sup>. In 1991 Arkes et al. believed that repetition of a message gave the audience the impression of truth. Furthermore, Jacoby et al. (1989), suggested that the multiple exposure to a brand name makes it more popular. It works the same with objects. The more we are exposed to an object or brand name the more familiar it becomes, and the more likely we are to change our retail behaviour.

UNITED COLORS  
OF BENETTON.

Another variable often used within message-construction is fear. The difficulty with this instrument is that if the fear aroused is too low it has no impact and at the same time, if the fear aroused within the recipient is too high the whole thing can have a negative effect. This is a big issue within the advertising campaigns that *Benetton* has published over the years. Arousing fear or shocking the audience can be very successful when the right balance between positive and negative information is hit upon. We will return to this issue in the second chapter.

Finally a message can be divided in factual and evaluative advertising. This distinction does not mean that every advert is either made up of factual messages such as, price, quality, contents, availability, taste, packaging, and special offers, or on the other hand only contains evaluative factors such as subjective opinions. In fact the advertising industry believes that a successful advert has to contain factual and evaluative elements.

Chaiken and Eagly (1983) have researched the effectiveness of a message in relation to the used medium. The main question in advertising has always been, which medium (visual, verbal or printed) has the most impact on the recipient and will influence his retail behaviour most effectively? They suggested that it is

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<sup>19</sup> HOGG M. A. & VAUGHN G. M.

dependent upon the simplicity or complexity of the message. With a very simple message the order will be visual, audio and finally printed. The more important the arguments and the higher the thought-process required the weighting order changes to printed, audio and visual.

*Benetton's* advertising campaigns are only published in print as they always contain a image of complex social issues. By using print media *Benetton* ensures that the image has the biggest impact possible as every individual can take all the time required to fully understand the message.

However, the difficulty of a message changes with the audience. If the audience is intelligent it will not be too difficult to understand a persuasive message, whereas a not so intelligent audience will take longer. There are more interrelating factors, for example Allyn and Festinger (1961) found that an easy message had a stronger impact, when the audience was distracted. Furthermore, Janis (1954) researched that low self-esteem works in favour of the persuasive message, whereas people with high self-esteem are harder to persuade.

How exactly does the persuasion process work? Many different beliefs exist but they all have some elements in common with the two main approaches.

Firstly, there is the elaboration-likelihood model, which has been created by Petty and Caciappo (1986) and can be divided into two routes by which we tackle a message. If we give the arguments lots of thought and consideration we attend the central route. Whereas, if we don't give the information lots of attention and just give into the persuasion, we follow the peripheral route.

Secondly, there is the heuristic-systematic model. Chaiken (1980) suggests that we use systematic processing when the message is important to us otherwise we use 'mental short cuts' or heuristics.

UNITED COLORS  
OF BENETTON.

As mentioned earlier these two models are very similar. "In summary, when people are motivated to attend to a message and to deal with it thoughtfully, they use a central route to process it according to the elaboration-likelihood model (Petty and Cacioppo), or process it systematically according to the heuristic-systematic model (Chaiken). When attention is reduced so that people become cognitive lazy, they use a peripheral route (Petty and Cacioppo) or resort to heuristics - simple decision rules (Chaiken)"<sup>20</sup>.

Again these models of persuasive processes play an important role within *Benetton* as their attempt is to make us think carefully about the issues they raise in their images.

### COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

The second main approach to attitude change is the concept of cognitive dissonance, developed in 1957 by Festinger. "In essence it states that cognitive dissonance is an unpleasant state of psychological tension generated when a person has two or more cognitions (bits of information) that are inconsistent or do not fit together. Cognitions are thoughts, attitudes, beliefs, or states of awareness of behaviour"<sup>21</sup>. If our attitudes don't correlate in harmony we will try to reduce disharmony by changing one or more attitudes to restore harmony.

When an attempt to change people's attitudes is begun we find components from all the discussed theories involved. With *Benetton* we can see many parallels between their understanding of advertising and the attitude changing theories. To

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<sup>20</sup> HOGG M. A. & VAUGHN G. M.

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<sup>21</sup> HOGG M. A. & VAUGHN G. M.

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be able to see these theories it is essential to comprehend *Benetton's* understanding of the purpose of advertising.

From very early days Luciano Benetton (*fig. 1*) felt strongly about other “peoples’ problems, minority rights, birth control, disease, wars, racism and religious intolerance”<sup>22</sup>. He decided to use his advertising budget for communication purposes rather than to produce an illusionary world of peace and harmony where people can buy happiness by purchasing *Benetton's* products. Benetton believes that “You can’t buy happiness but you can buy social awareness”<sup>23</sup>. When Benetton saw some of Oliviero Toscani’s (*fig. 2*) images for the first time he was impressed by his approach towards advertising and the way he did not seem to care about the existing expectations of advertising.

Both, Benetton and Toscani felt that the very valuable and powerful space of advertising could be used for more important messages than to illustrate a fake worldwide peace and harmony. Toscani wanted to use his power in a different way and to put it into his<sup>24</sup> own words: “*Benetton* has 7000 stores around the world to display its wares; the company prefers to use its advertising budget to talk to people”<sup>25</sup>. As Benetton felt exactly the same there was nothing stopping them from rewriting advertising and its changing purpose. By constantly producing cutting edge images over the years, *Benetton* achieved two of advertising’s most important aspects in creating a strong brand name. “Be noticed and be remembered”<sup>26</sup>. However, *Benetton's* effort of arousing public awareness about many social issues has not always received positive reactions. Often the same image won awards in one country and was banned in another. Many times *Benetton* has been accused

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<sup>22</sup> [www.chat.carleton.ca/~bavunca/benpov.html](http://www.chat.carleton.ca/~bavunca/benpov.html)

<sup>23</sup> <http://wabckimi.carleton.ca/~bavunca/deal.html>

<sup>24</sup> SAUNDERS D. 20<sup>th</sup> Century Advertising

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<sup>25</sup> SAUNDERS D. 20<sup>th</sup> Century Advertising

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of using social misfortune to increase their profits. Also the use of the logo 'United Colours of Benetton' on each image has been seen as insulting and degrading<sup>27</sup>. Toscani's reply to these accusations is: "why is traditionally advertising acceptable with its fake images, yet reality is not? We think we have a duty to talk about such things. I wish some cigarette or car company would devote their incredible budgets to promoting social issues"<sup>28</sup>.

However, even though Benetton and Toscani see it as their duty to make the world aware of what is going on, we should not forget that they are still trying to sell their products and increase their profits. In contrast to other companies they try to sell by making a public statement about important social and political issues. They don't want to make a statement about whether they agree or disagree with the standing attitudes towards the issues raised but they want to openly state that at least they are aware of it and feel strongly about it. *Benetton* is not prepared – as almost all other companies – to ignore war, child labour and HIV for example to name only a few problems they address.

Toscani and Benetton say:

"We don't imagine that we are able to resolve human problems, but nor do we want to pretend they don't exist". In the next chapter I will look at some of Benetton's adverts more closely and also look at the way they influence our way of thinking.

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<sup>26</sup> SAUNDERS D.

*20<sup>th</sup> Century Advertising*

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<sup>27</sup> SAUNDERS D.

*20<sup>th</sup> Century Advertising*

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<sup>28</sup> SAUNDERS D.

*20<sup>th</sup> Century Advertising*

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CHAPTER  
TWO

*SHOW ME ATTITUDE* UNITED COLORS  
OF AMERICA

*"Benetton has associated its name, in a risk taking way, with intense, controversial, sometimes political and often charming photography that promotes understanding between diverse cultures of the world"*

UNITED COLORS  
OF BENETTON.

Roy Lichtenstein, painter, New York, 1994

We know that *Benetton* picks up on important social and political issues with the intention of making us aware of their existence and that we should not ignore them, even if the rest of the advertising industry tries to maintain the illusion of a perfect world.

Their campaigns deal with racial harmony, religious intolerance, war, peace, natural disaster, child labour, human rights, sex, HIV, Aids and disability. Every one of Toscani's images raised different reactions wherever published, depending on the issue raised and how strong the public, the church and the politicians felt about it. However, many of Toscani's campaigns helped to change general awareness, acceptance and change of attitude.

I will now look at four, carefully selected, images published as part of *Benetton's* campaigns dealing with natural disaster, religious intolerance, racial harmony and safe sex.

After that I will summarise *Benetton's* attempts to change the way people think and how this has much in common with the findings on attitude change of the first chapter.

### **THE BIRD (fig 1)**

This was one of seven images that were published in the autumn/winter campaign of 1992-1993. For this campaign Toscani selected seven documentary images, that had already been published as part of articles in different newspapers or magazines. He took the images out of their written and so political context and enlarged them to 4x5 metre large images to enhance their impact. *Benetton* then



*Fig.1 The Bird;  
Autumn/Winter 1991  
Photo: Steve McCurry; Concept: Oliviero Toscani*

plastered them all over the main cities of the world not allowing anyone to ignore them. *The Bird (fig 1)* was one of them. Steve McCurry took the picture during the Gulf war at the Persian Gulf. All the image shows is a bird covered in oil, swimming in a layer of thick black oil and a fire red eye glazing at the viewer. The only thing Toscani added to the picture is the green logo 'United Colours of Benetton' in the top left corner.

Whenever we are confronted with images in newspapers, magazines or even the television news, we are always given the political or social context, by doing so the editors enhance the messages and the impact they will have on our beliefs and thoughts. This is the reason why television news has the strongest influence on our feelings and attitudes.

By taking the images out of their written and therefore political context Toscani allows the image to work for itself. Nothing accompanies the image and leads the direction of influence. In this situation it is up to the viewer's own thoughts, feelings and attitude system to decide what influence the image will have.

This is exactly what Toscani has done with Steve McCurry's image of the oil covered bird. By taking it out of the political context of the Gulf War he gave the image its original power back and let it grow on the audience as what it is.

The other six images in this campaign worked in exactly the same way. The advertising industry screamed blue murder. They said that these billboard-sized images were degrading and besmirching the space of advertising. Other people felt that it was disgraceful for *Benetton* to use human suffering and natural disasters to sell their products and increase their profit.

The logo for United Colors of Benetton, featuring the text 'UNITED COLORS OF BENETTON.' in a light green, sans-serif font, set against a solid light green rectangular background.

Whatever we feel individually about Toscani using images documenting real life and disaster he successfully aroused social awareness of personal suffering happening all over the world every day.



Fig. 2 A Kiss from God  
*Autumn/Winter 1991-1992*  
*Photo and Concept: Oliviero Toscani*

**A KISS FROM GOD (fig 2)**

(named by the Italian magazine L'Espresso (February 14, 1991))

Again the image is very simple. All we see is a priest and a nun kissing. We can't identify what religion they belong to but from experience and knowledge we know what these two people represent. Looking at the image there are two ways of interpreting what Toscani was trying to address by creating this image. One is that he did not aim at one specific religion but wanted to make a comment about religion in general. When it comes to religion the attitudes in everyday life are very strong, as the church, whatever denomination, has had centuries to reinforce its beliefs, thoughts and rules. One of the many rules within almost any religion existing is that relationships between different religions are taboo. The acceptance of inter-religious relationships has grown during the last few decades, but there are still many areas in the world and various religions where these relationships are not allowed and any disobedience will result in exclusion from the church and also from their own family.

The other interpretation is that Toscani was only aiming at the catholic belief of celibacy. Within the catholic religion it is a sin to break the celibate vow when somebody has devoted their life to God by becoming a priest, monk or nun.

Whatever interpretation the viewer adapts to, Toscani tried to bring it to sway by publishing this image. Once published it was strongly criticised in countries where the power of the church was still great and either of these two beliefs were still lived by. In countries where catholic belief was strong, the image was largely rejected. In Italy where the catholic church is all powerful, it was banned and sharply criticised by the Pope, whereas it received the Eurobest Award in England. Toscani himself



Fig. 3 Contrast in Black and White  
*Autumn/Winter 1989-1990*  
*Photo and Concept: Oliviero Toscani*

intentions with this image: “Its message is that love surmounts all conventional taboos”<sup>29</sup>. Sister Barbara of Alzey from Germany made another very powerful comment: “...I think that this photo expresses a great deal of tenderness, serenity and peace”<sup>30</sup>.

### **CONTRAST IN BLACK AND WHITE**

Two images were part of the autumn/winter campaign in 1988-1999. One showed a black woman breastfeeding a white baby (*fig.3*) and the other showed both a white and a black hand handcuffed together (*fig. 4*). Both images showed no faces ensuring that it could only be seen as a general statement dealing with the philosophical concept of the mixture of races. They also contained the green logo ‘United Colours of Benetton’ in one corner of the image.

At the time these images were published, apartheid was still in action in parts of the world and strong racist beliefs were still held. Looking at the historical ideologies in politics, law and religion we realise that the attitude towards strict racial segregation was very strong and reinforced whenever possible. Slavery and apartheid are only two methods of racial oppression. Many different political events forced the population to rethink their racist attitude and so slowly racial acceptance took over. However, apartheid still lives on in some places, like for example South Africa where racial attitudes are still present in the background and frequently flare up. Toscani and Benetton both felt then and now that racism is a very important social issue that should not be ignored but openly dealt with to help eradicate the ideas of

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<sup>29</sup> [www.Benetton.com/wws/aboutyou/ucdo/cutteres/file/1948.html](http://www.Benetton.com/wws/aboutyou/ucdo/cutteres/file/1948.html)

<sup>30</sup> [www.benetton.com/wws/aboutyou/ucdo/cutteres/file1948.html](http://www.benetton.com/wws/aboutyou/ucdo/cutteres/file1948.html)

racial purity. Therefore they published the image of a black woman breastfeeding a  
all over the world. In the USA the black community strongly opposed the image as

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Fig. 4 Contrast in Black and White  
*Autumn/Winter 1989-1990*  
*Photo and Concept: Oliviero Toscani*

white baby (*fig 3*) in 1989. The reactions towards this image were very controversial they felt it was racist, that Toscani was trying to reinforce the colonialist cliché of the black wet nurse and the white new-born. The population also felt that Toscani was dehumanising the black woman "through the way it was cropped - she is a headless unidentified 'other'"<sup>31</sup> At the same time the image was boycotted by the advertising industry in South Africa, where apartheid was still part of politics and everyday life, as they felt it was too anti-racist.

In addition the second image in the 1989 campaign raised many controversial feelings. It showed a black hand handcuffed to a white one (*fig 4*), nothing more, nothing less. The audience can not tell who is the guard and who is the prisoner. Toscani did not want to discriminate against anyone but to show that black and white are the same, and that it is us that decide on the superiority of races.

The image was banned in England by the then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, although both images, the woman breastfeeding and the handcuffed hands, had won many awards all over the world. For example they won the International Andy Award of Excellence in the USA, in Italy the Confindustry prize for the best print campaign in the textile category and the overall Grand Prix for the best photo in print advertising. It also won major awards in Austria, Denmark, France and Holland to name only a few.

The follow-up images dealing with racial tolerance were a row of Pinocchios ranging from different colours of wood, two miners covered in black dust, two children, one black one white, sitting on their potty playing with each other and finally a tiny black hand clutched to a grownup white hand. The last two of these images were published in 1990, just before the referendum of the abolition of

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<sup>31</sup> WELLS L.

apartheid in South Africa. *Benetton's* campaigns were very positively accepted within the rows of anti-racist groups within South Africa and once Nelson Mandela was voted president he invited Luciano Benetton and Olivero Toscani to visit his country and to thank them for their support in the fight against racial discrimination. This shows how raising worldwide awareness of social issues like racism can make major changes in the way people think and act.

### **Prophylactics (Confusion and Condoms) (fig 5)**

The spring/summer campaign of 1991 was the first time that *Benetton* addressed the subject of safe sex and Aids. The campaign contained six images, one of which featured coloured condoms. This image shows a series of different coloured condoms spread over a white background (fig 5). Toscani thought of the concept and photographed the image himself. In 1991 sex and Aids were subjects that were not openly discussed or shown for educational purposes. Sex and the prevention of Aids by using condoms was a known fact but not openly talked about. So when *Benetton* published its campaign about safe sex, the world was in uproar. It was the first time condoms were published through print media, not even institutions dealing with sex education or Aids patients had the courage to use blatant images as Toscani did. The major achievement of Toscani by producing these images was that he took away the embarrassment associated with condoms and their purpose. To accompany the release of the campaign and its purpose of portraying condoms as every day fashion items, condoms were sold in *Benetton* stores all over the

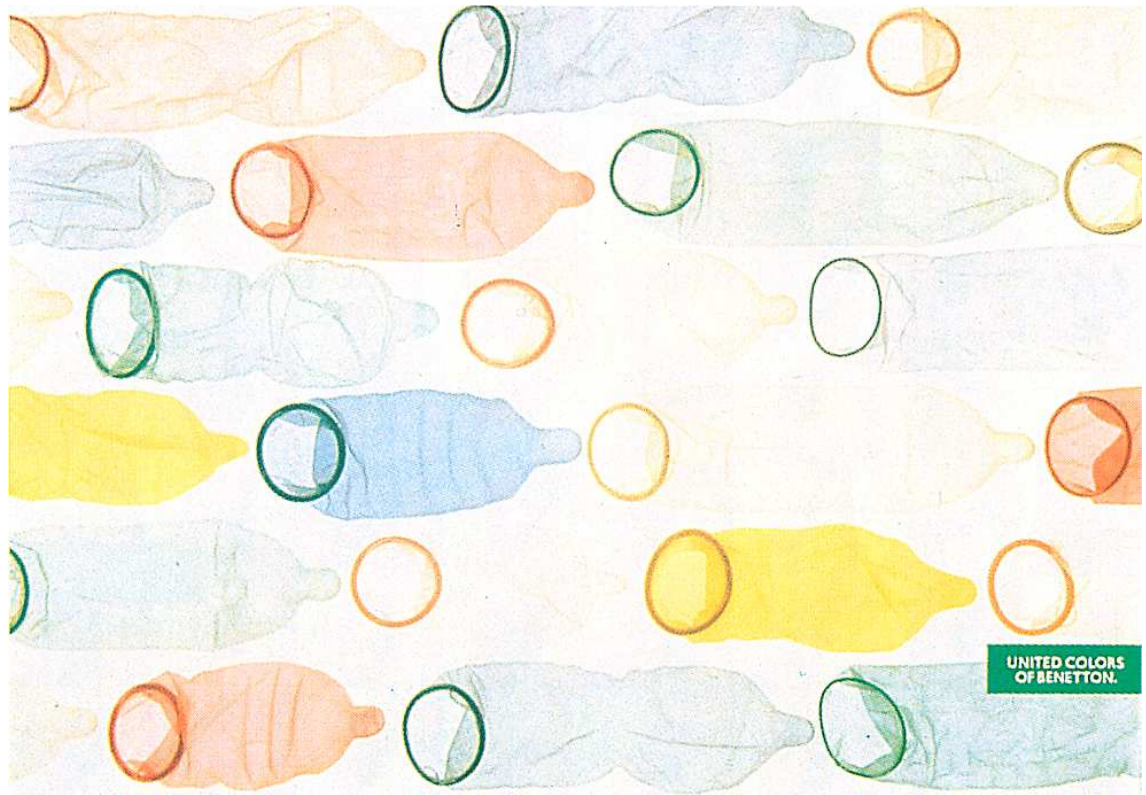
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world. The older population disapproved whereas the younger generations responded very positively and with enthusiasm<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> [www.bentton.com/wws/aboutyou/vedo/AIDS/file1959.html](http://www.bentton.com/wws/aboutyou/vedo/AIDS/file1959.html)



*Fig. 5 Confusion and Condoms;  
Spring/Summer 1991;  
Photo and Concept: Oliviero Toscani*

This shows how different attitudes can influence our behaviour. People that grew up with the continuous reinforcement that sex was not talked about - neither private nor public - and sex education was not needed showed disapproval and thought negatively of Benetton's efforts to raise awareness of Aids and the prevention that exists. As this way of thinking slowly changed over the last few decades younger people feel the urge for sex education and open discussions about sex and everything linked to it. This major change of thought explains the two very different reactions towards the *Benetton* campaign and has led to major attitude and behavioural changes since it was first published. Obviously these changes are not only thanks to *Benetton*, but it is to *Benetton's* credit as they have played a major role in getting the thought and questioning processes started, as it was the first company to openly acknowledge the existence of sex and Aids. "In the U.S. the image was censored by the media, on the grounds that it was "pornographic" and thus inappropriate for distribution through traditional press outlets such as supermarkets."<sup>33</sup>

Some years later the National Medical Research Council in Kapstadt, South Africa, asked *Benetton* for a set of posters from the 1991 campaign to use for an Aids and sex education campaign. *Benetton* supplied these billboard-sized posters and also paid for their public display.

Now that we know some of *Benetton's* campaigns and the public reactions they can cause it will be much easier to understand the influence the images have on our attitude system. It is essential though to understand that it is neither Toscani's nor *Benetton's* aim to tell us what to think and what attitudes to have. All they want to

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<sup>33</sup> [www.benetton.com/wws/aboutyou/ucdo/aids/file1959.html](http://www.benetton.com/wws/aboutyou/ucdo/aids/file1959.html)

achieve is to make us aware of the existing social problems, make us think about the attitudes and behaviours we have, question and perhaps rethink them, when we feel it is appropriate. The social issues Toscani addresses in his images are well known to the population. We don't have to form a new attitude but the existing ones are addressed.

The general attitudes to any social issue is mostly very strong and is being reinforced through television programs, newspapers, magazines or any other source of information that is not 100% neutral. Even though, we believe television news to be neutral, it still subliminally reinforces or weakens our attitudes. Obviously not every individual agrees with it but even then the permanent influence will mostly succeed. By publishing cutting-edge images, that have no related information on the subject, Toscani makes sure no subliminally reinforcing elements are influencing our thought-process. He confronts us with the general established attitude and at the same time also with our very own personal one, as we often seem to agree with the general attitude in public but deep inside we think and believe differently. The reason why we react so strongly when we see Toscani's images is, because we are not used to being confronted with no additional information on where to place them within our attitude system. We are not told if we should approve or disapprove. This makes it necessary to look at the message more closely.

From what we have learned in the first chapter the message is very important in the process of persuasion. *Benetton* has no intention to persuade us to agree with their own beliefs, but purely make us aware and think about the issues raised, the message and its components are still very important. The first thing we

realise about all *Benetton's* campaigns is that we only see them in print, mainly on billboards, but also in magazines.

As we established in the first chapter the more important and profound the message, the more time the audience will need to fully understand the meaning. Therefore, print is the best medium for publication as it allows the viewer to take as much time as he needs. As *Benetton's* images are always dealing with difficult issues it is important to allow some time for them to work. The printed images also allow people to come back to an image if they feel it is necessary, whereas, in the visual medium this is very difficult. The problem *Benetton* would also have when using television for distributing their message is the fact that commercials only run for a few minutes, and that it would be impossible to address important social issues in such short time and make people think about them. It is impossible for the audience, however intelligent, to stop television and look at the image for as long or short as personally required. For television adverts to be successful they have to contain a very simple message, portrayed in an easy understandable way, making the viewer feel happy without making him/her question the received information. This is the total opposite of what *Benetton* is trying to achieve with its advertising strategy. They want us to stop, look, think and discuss the issue raised with each other.

Using the audio medium would also work against their philosophy, as it is very difficult to verbalise a message without adding any subliminal influence. Even the voice and the way the communicator speaks can easily influence the thought-process of the audience listening. This is the reason why no written information is added to the images. Any text on the images would subliminally influence the thoughts and beliefs of the audience. This impact would be strongest at the first

encounter, the one confrontation with the subject that is most crucial in forming or changing an attitude. Adding text would also be equivalent to making a statement about the issue raised and *Benetton* does not want to take sides and so tell the audience what to think and believe.

Why is it then that they include their logo on every image that they publish? Usually the company's name is not seen as text but shows the viewer who is responsible for the advert they are looking at. In *Benetton's* case though the meaning of the logo is increased by the absence of any other written message. By adding their logo *Benetton* shows the public that they are responsible for the image and that they are aware of the social issues they address, without stating the company's own opinion on the subject.

Often Toscani is also accused of using fear and shock in his images to make people stop and look. With many socially important issues this is the only way of making people aware of the existence of the problems as we have been made numb over the last few decades towards some of the issues. We feel fear and shock because we are confronted with the images and no explanation, no lead to where we should place them within our thoughts. For the first time we are confronted with their pure existence and that scares us. By doing so Toscani comments on the existence of the problems and that nothing can make it go away as long as we are not prepared to face the problems and find a way of dealing with them.

This leads us to looking at the communicator a little closer. As we saw in chapter one (*Page 13*) a persuasive message can be increased by using the right communicator, in this case *Benetton*. Neither *Benetton* nor Toscani are experts on the issues they address in their campaigns. However, they don't have to be, as

they don't argue about the subject's existence, as we all know that they are part of our every day life or about the issue itself. As they don't try to persuade us to agree with their beliefs, but leave everybody decide for themselves, they have become well known in all spheres of our society and their new campaigns are desperately awaited to see what they will come up with next. In some way *Benetton* has become a very famous and well-known communicator what helps them to arouse attention within society and people paying more attention to the social issues they address.

As we saw in the likelihood model (*Page 17*) we either use a central or a peripheral route to deal with any attempt of persuasion. *Benetton* does not allow us to use the peripheral route as they give us no easy way to understand or ignore the message. Toscani makes us think and discuss the issue raised and therefore we have to use the central route, even though he does not try to persuade us in either direction. *Benetton* makes us think for ourselves and persuade each other in discussion, in favour or against existing attitudes. Baring this in mind and looking back at the image of the condoms we can now understand how the two very strong and diverse attitudes have been formed. As Toscani only triggered the persuasion process of by ensuring that the viewers could not use heuristics around the message it was up to the population to persuade each other to follow a certain belief. As the older generation felt offended by the open display of condoms and their purpose of contraception they persuaded as many people as possible that this was morally not right. At the same time young people that believed that this was right and necessary formed the opposition by persuading their own age-group of the positive outcome of this image.

The cognitive dissonance theory (*Page 17*), developed by Festinger in 1957, becomes relevant, once we have formed a new way of thinking and a new attitude. Most times a new attitude provokes disharmony with an existing one. Festinger believed that in such a situation it is our main aim to restore harmony within our attitude system. So if one of Toscani's images made us revalidate and rethink our existing attitude we will end up in disharmony and are forced to choose between the old and the new belief. If the image was strong enough and the new attitude is dominating the old one, attitude change will occur. However, Toscani's images are not-always successful in changing obsolete ways of thinking, as can be seen at the image of the black woman breastfeeding the white baby (*fig 3*). Even so Toscani's intention was to address the issue of racial harmony many people especially in the USA felt that it was racist and that he tried to reinforce the idea of the black wet nurse.

As we have seen, the theory of influencing peoples' way of thinking, and the way *Benetton* thinks about the purpose of advertising have much in common. However the main difference between *Benetton* and the rest of the advertising industry is that for the first time no illusion is created. The world is shown as it is, with all its tragedies.

# *CONCLUSION*

UNITED COLORS  
OF BENETTON.

*"Benetton frightens me, in its disposition as in their proceedings.  
I boycott their shops and to be quite frank I am not in the mood  
to dedicate only one line to them."*

Francoise Giround  
French Publicist and former special emissary of the  
Condition feminine, in a letter to Chantal Michetti,  
Leader of the museum of contemporary art in  
Lausanne.

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Looking back at the first chapters we have learned about 'attitude', how we form them and in what ways we are constantly influenced to strengthen one and change the other. We have also learned about *Benetton's* advertising philosophy and what Toscani is trying to achieve with his cutting edge images.

The second chapter looked at a selection of published images, Toscani's thoughts behind them and the different public reaction across the world. Finally I linked the findings on attitude change to Toscani's images exploring the effects his offensive images have on our attitude system.

I have never agreed on the way *Benetton* advertises their products and was always interested in the idea behind their advertising strategy. Looking at *Benetton's* campaigns and the very closely related theories of attitude and attitude change helped me to understand what *Benetton* is trying to achieve. I feel that their ideas are right and it is impressive that at last someone stops pretending the world is a paradise and that we can buy happiness and success by purchasing a certain product.

At the same time, though, I cannot stop thinking that at the end of the day *Benetton* is still pursuing profit, as that lies within human and business nature, and that they are just trying to gain more attention than other companies. I believe that if they were serious about their intention of only wanting to make people aware of social issues they should do the same as they do now, but without including their logo on the images. This, in my opinion, would show that it is not important who is responsible for the image but that only the issue matters. To say we don't add text, as it would comment on the issue raised but adding the logo contradicts itself. The logo implies some kind of belief of the company, even if it only shows that they care

about the issue so much that they spend money on publishing images dealing with them.

I appreciate that Toscani attempts to break the walls of illusion but I will still not buy any of *Benetton's* products, as I feel strongly that they are not totally honest about their intentions and by doing so they live in an illusion themselves.

I believe that when Toscani started his career as photographer he had the right ambitions and aims, but over the years, as his success and public status grew and he learned that he could get away with the controversial images he produced, he lost the overall picture and aim. The best example for this is his last campaign 'Death Row' where he travelled all over the United States of America to photograph the prisoners on Death Row awaiting their death sentences. At the beginning of the project he only wanted to produce a catalogue but as he proceeded with his work he changed his mind and publicised the images on billboards and in print all over the world. The campaign was most certainly different from any previous one and so was the public reaction all over the world. *Benetton* stores closed in protest and leading chain-stores were forced to end their contracts with *Benetton* due to the strong public protest. The reactions also forced Luciano Benetton to part with Oliviero Toscani after 18 years of working together and ended a very long and close friendship between the two.

In the end Toscani offended the wrong people. He had to take the consequences of ignoring social and political beliefs and ethnical boundaries for so long. Many people believe that he got what he deserved. One victim's father of a murderer who participated in Toscani's last campaign said:

"Toscani is an intelligent and sick individual."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> BBC 2

Blood on the carpet 09-01-01

9.50 p.m.

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BBC2 *Blood on the carpet - Benetton & Toscani*

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09-01-01 9.50 pm