

An analysis of VICE Media's Expedient Commodification of Modern Hipster Culture as a Motif of Contemporary Capitalism

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VICE Media has risen from a local Canadian counterculture magazine to an international corporate giant. *Bloomberg Business* has valued the company at over \$1 billion, while other reputable outlets have placed VICE's worth at many times that. Remarkably, through its ascension to mainstream relevancy and despite getting into bed with some of the world's richest and most denounced corporations, VICE has managed to maintain its reputation as a counterculture brand. This qualitative analysis on the evolution of *VICE Media* presents past interviews and market decisions by VICE owners to exhibit how the company has expediently captured and preserved the attention of millennials through its strategic commodification of 21st century hipsterism. This analysis also relies on the work of prevalent academics and journalists to provide an understanding of VICE, hipsterism and their inherent connection to consumerism. This is an accessible study that demonstrates how VICE identified and harnessed the socio-cultural/socioeconomic phenomenon of hipsterism to amplify its potential as a commercial media institution.

Keywords: Culture, media, VICE Media, hipster, hipsterism, millennial, consumerism, media conglomeration, branding, identity, counterculture.

Founded in Montreal, Canada, *VICE Media* celebrated its twentieth anniversary in 2014. In that time, VICE has grown from a modestly relevant monthly countercultural magazine, to a multiplatform, multinational media institution. Today, *VICE Media* owns and runs multiple websites, a print magazine, music record companies, an *Emmy Award* winning television show and will soon have its own 24-hour television channel with *Rogers Communications* in Canada and with *HBO's* streaming service worldwide. Based on a variety of recent high profile investors and sponsorships, *Bloomberg Business* valued the company at over \$1 billion in 2014, while other reputable outlets have placed VICE's worth at many times that. Clearly, VICE has become a significant player in the modern media landscape.

The question remains, however, how has VICE become *VICE Media* as it exists today? The answer to this question is complicated and multifaceted. Among many other contributing factors, one could point to VICE personnel's savvy in the digital age, shrewd market dealings, its terrific promotion team, its ability to create and disseminate stories at an efficiency associated with much richer media outlets, and unprecedented access to issues that more acclaimed outlets would not be trusted with. While each of these dynamics (and many others) have all played a significant role in VICE's dramatic evolution, this

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analysis will focus on a concentrated trait of the greater VICE phenomenon. Specifically, it will argue that VICE's commodification of a particular mode of authenticity reflects Jake Kinzey's construct of modern hipster culture as a motif of contemporary capitalism.

According to Kinzey (2012), "hipsters stick to the idea of being authentic self-creators...because it is a necessary illusion within our current system. Being an authentic self-creator has become our culture's predominant fundamental fantasy" (p. 53). Applying this conception of Kinzey's hipster culture to the case of VICE *Media*, questions will be raised that connect VICE *Media*'s evolution with the rise of modern consumer-oriented hipster culture, and will propose that VICE recognized the mainstreaming of 21st century hipsterism and harnessed this socio-cultural/socio-economic phenomenon to amplify its potential as a commercial media institution.

In doing this, this enquiry intends to help facilitate discussion for media scholars who seek to grasp VICE's rapidly expanding success on a broader scale. This paper also ventures to provide the reader with an understanding of how an institution whose very essence is defined by its countercultural sensibility (as defined by Theodor Roszak (1969): "anti-rationalist, youthful dissent coherent enough to be termed a culture...anti-mainstream society" (p. xiv), has maintained its standing as the brand of the insurgent rebel, in spite of its many mainstream moves that could discredit this status. Woven through this analysis is a reflexive discussion of the symbiotic modern relationship between culture and the media, and the influence they have on one another.

The examination will begin by providing historical context on VICE as a developing brand. This will be followed by a description of modern hipster culture as a mainstream construct defined by consumerism. Next, examples will be provided of VICE's purposeful branding towards the mainstream, consumer-oriented hipster culture. Finally, the analysis will conclude with some theoretical groundwork regarding the extraordinary amount of effort cool brands put towards portraying themselves as authentic.

History of VICE Media's Brand

Origins

In the early 1990s, three Montreal-based Anglophone friends in their twenties, Gavin McInnes, Suroosh Alvi and Shane Smith founded the magazine *Voice of Montreal*. The idea came to Alvi while in rehabilitation for an addiction to heroin. Upon his successful completion of the program, Alvi reportedly rushed home to the apartment he shared with McInnes in the mostly Anglophone, bohemian neighborhood of Mile End, and pitched the idea of launching a current events magazine to them – one that would be published in their own opinionated voices. With that, the *Voice of Montreal* was born, and in 1994, the publication was distributed on Montreal newsstands, free of cost. McInnes, who held a long withstanding friendship with Alvi, introduced Smith as a partner to the project based on his reputation as a shrewd salesman with relentless ambition. Speaking to *The New Yorker* in 2013, Alvi said Smith "could sell rattlesnake boots to a rattlesnake...He could sell water to a well" (Widdicombe, 2013).

They were young, brash, and immersed in Montreal's perpetually 'au courant' culture, and the greater North American popular ethos of the nineties. They applied this knowledge for the foundation of their publication, and did so in the vernacular of the young and jaded, which was a prevalent social theme in the era of heroin chic, grunge scene music and the urbanized reawakening of skateboard culture. For their magazine, no word was unprintable and no idea was too controversial.

Montrealers began to talk about the content and tone of the publication. The founders noticed this momentum, and cleverly renamed the *Voice of Montreal* to the more geographically inclusive title of *The Voice*. The name did not last. Under threat of legal action from the long-ago established Montreal based magazine, *The Voice of the Village*, McInnes, Alvi and Smith dropped a single letter from their title, and decided on the appropriately all-caps moniker of "VICE." Soon after, the monthly print started to expand, appearing on the shelves of skateboard shops and drug paraphernalia shops across North America, commencing its now storied and once protocolled tradition of printing articles with gasp-inducing titles such as *Was Jesus a Fag?* and its infamous graphic and patronizing *Dos and Don'ts* list. "A certain type of downtown denizen likes to talk about his first encounter with VICE," writes Widdicombe. "The magazine presented an aggressive hedonism – early covers featured lines of cocaine—combined with a love of everything taboo. Sample cover lines: 'Retards and Hip Hop'; 'Pregnant Lesbians'; '80s Coke Sluts.' Inside, the writing was inscrutable. It was like it was written in another language" (Widdicombe, 2013).

For a magazine that was overtly representing a crude, countercultural sensibility, VICE was becoming astonishingly successful in the late nineties. During these years, McInnes recalls receiving regular phone calls from Smith, screaming, "We are going to be rich, into the receiver again and again, like a financial pervert with O.C.D" (Widdicombe, 2013). According to its three founders, the goal with their countercultural canvas was the pursuit of authenticity. "We were going to cruise around with drug dealers while they were doing their rounds," said McInnes. "Instead of writing about a prostitute, we were going to get prostitutes to write for us" (Widdicombe, 2013). This branding of authenticity combined with the founders' skill of blending the uncouth with a certain level of sophistication made VICE remarkable.

In the early 2000s, VICE moved to Williamsburg, Brooklyn, and has since become the only Canadian founded magazine to make it in America (Kohler, 2012).

Controversy

In 2008, Gavin McInnes left VICE abruptly. Once considered the official spokesperson for the magazine and the embodiment of the publication's essence, McInnes packed his things after publically making anti-Semitic comments. Predictably, the divorce was not amicable. All parties involved have said that McInnes is now estranged from his former partners. Since leaving, McInnes has been very critical of the new direction of VICE for an apparent "Stalinist revisionism" telling *MacLean's* (2012) "that since it was taken over by the head of marketing – Shane Smith – it is focused on marketing and it's low on substance" (Köhler, 2012). Stalinist revisionism or not, from the time of McInnes's sudden departure, VICE has seen sponsorship and investments increase considerably.

Money

In 2013, Rupert Murdoch of *21st Century Fox* paid \$70 million for a 5 per cent stake in *VICE Media*. Shortly after putting pen to paper, he tweeted, "Who's heard of VICE media? Wild, interesting effort to interest millennials who don't read or watch established media. Global success". In 2014, Smith and Alvi sold 10 per cent of the company to the *Disney* owned *A&E Networks* for \$250 million, valuing the company at \$2.5 billion. The year 2014 also saw VICE reach a \$100 million partnership agreement with the Canadian-based company *Rogers Communications* to create around the clock programming aimed at 18 to 34 year old viewers on a 24/7 VICE news channel. In 2015, VICE signed a three-year deal

with *HBO* to produce a nightly newscast, and have their 24/7 news channel available on *HBO* streaming services.

Journalist at *The Hollywood Reporter*, Michael Wolff wrote on VICE's triumphs. In his opinion, the dividends, at least on a financial basis, may not have been merited:

One thing VICE does not necessarily have is a supersized audience. VICE makes a torrent of *YouTube* videos, but most, according to *YouTube* stats, have limited viewership. *The New York Times*, in its coverage of VICE's *TCV* deal, seemed eager to believe in VICE and at the same time was perplexed by it, quoting the company's monthly global audience claim of 150 million viewers but, as well, *comScore*'s more official and low-wattage number of 9.3 million monthly unique visitors. *Buzz Feed*, with an audience many times greater, has been valued at less than a third of VICE's \$2.5 billion" (Wolff, 2014)

Despite contextually humble viewership numbers, VICE *Media* is receiving generous sponsorships and investments. Wolff attributes it to one chief factor:

These executives are drawn to Smith's purported Pied Piper ability to attract that most sought-after and hard-to-reach demographic: distracted young men, more reliably playing video games than consuming traditional media...they and their colleagues seem willing to pay for a piece of VICE...These days one can attach many superlatives to VICE — it might be the hottest, savviest, coolest, richest, Brooklyn-est new media company on the block (Wolff, 2014).

We will come to understand that many of the distracted young men that are concerned with the coolness and "Brooklyn-est" that Wolff is describing are whom we could call "hipsters." The term "hipster" has become ubiquitous enough that it eludes any hard and fast definition. For the purposes of this paper, we will rely on McGill University's Jake Kinzey, who recently published a critical account of the hipster phenomenon called, *The Scared and The Profane: An Investigation of Hipsters*.

According to Kinzey, hipsters are members of a false counterculture; instead, they are "ironic postmodern-kitsch zombies that are finding comfort in the apathy and over-consumption of late-capitalism (2012, p. 1) as selling out is practically programmed into the hipster" (2012, p. 4). As members of the era of late-capitalism, Sarah Banet-Weiser (2012) writes that cultural spaces such as VICE are "structured as by brand logic and strategy, and understood and expressed through the language of branding. This transformation of culture of everyday living into brand culture signals a broader shift, from 'authentic' culture to the branding of authenticity. Contemporary brand cultures are thoroughly imbricated with the culture at large they become indistinguishable from it" (p. 7). In recognizing our world of brands, "we need to account for this ambivalence, explore its possibilities, and think about what the emergence of brand culture means for individual identities, the creation of culture, and the formation of power" (p. 4).

The following sections of this analysis will thus employ Kinzey's Marxian approach to understanding contemporary hipster culture to help explain how VICE has strategically read and reacted to the brand culture which created the hipster, and how they commodified a sense of authenticity that is appealing to the hipster-consumer.

Personal brands are a conscious, strategic process that results in the crafting of an 'authentic self.' A long arduous and artistic process is increasingly achieved through a business plan, a reliance on experts and legitimated within an industry of self-branding. The self should be branded, managed and distributed...there are no limits to what kind of self is brandable (Banet-Weiser, 2012, p.85).

This examination endeavors to detail how members of Kinzey's hipster culture can comfortably rely on VICE as a means to consume and express their own sense of coolness through the industry of identity.

The Hipster-Consumer

A lot has been written about modern hipster culture. From blog posts to *New Yorker* opinion pieces to academic journal articles – the assumed countercultural qualities of hipster culture has been a source of significant debate since the early 2000's. Journalist, editor, and expert on hipness, John Leland articulated his perceptions of hipsterism to *Art Beat Magazine* (2012):

Well, I still go back to the word itself and the word hip. To the best of our knowledge, it seems to come from these West African words 'hipi' or 'hepi' meaning 'to see' or 'to open your eyes.' So I look at hip as being, at its best, a kind of enlightenment, and a particular kind of enlightenment that has a history to it — in the way the West African words come to us through the slave trade, and move from black culture to white culture and back and forth, and exist in the dance between those two things. Hip becomes that kind of outsiders' enlightenment. And I think that's still true" (Finnegan, 2012).

In a fitting correlation that is symbolic of the link between VICE's branding and hipster culture, VICE's international slogan is, "VICE: *The Definitive Guide to Enlightening Information.*"

As the 21st century hipsterism phenomenon continues to evolve, many public thinkers have begun to argue that hipster culture is less about Leland's enlightenment, and more about being *perceived* as being enlightened. Consequently, in the last several years, the term has become quite pejorative, and for many, hipster culture has come to represent people who are lazily presenting themselves as avant-garde through superficial, purchasable aesthetics. In a 2010 article for *PBS*, titled "The Hipster in the Age of Online Ridicule," Molly Finnegan wrote, "Through several decades of commercial and Internet indoctrination, it's much easier these days to embody the external qualities of hip. Hip isn't only attainable; it's accessible, searchable, and for sale. Today, the hipster is usually seen as a clown — not so much a trendsetter or truth-teller, but a young and moneyed member of a cultural niche or the uber-fringe". Kinzey also deconstructs the hipster as a byproduct of capitalist conformity. He uses an analogy of a 1980's *Superbowl* advertisement as an avenue to understand today's hipster culture:

Apple introduced their new line of personal computers to the general public in a well-known parody of 1984. The commercial is set in a grey

dystopic industrial setting, with shots of a Big Brother-like figure talking to people who all look the same. Then there are full-colour shots of a nameless heroine, a track star carrying a hammer, representing *Apple*. She throws the hammer into the screen and destroys it, liberating the grey populace... An easy test is going to any college lecture hall of reasonable size and looking up: one is bound to see a sea of illuminated *Apples* staring back at them (2012, p. 1-2).

Through this representation, Kinzey is offering the reader an example of the move from “centralized capitalism to decentered capitalism” (2012, p. 1), suggesting that hipster culture is just another iteration of capitalist conformity—savvy conformists posing as the authentic, enlightened, avant-garde fringe. Kinzey asserts that hipsterism has become so rampant and commodified, “that being anti-mainstream is the mainstream: here one is able to locate the truth in the typical assertion that hipsters think they are being different but really act the same” (2012, p. 2).

In 2010, Mark Greif wrote a eulogy in *New York Magazine* for the hipster, titled “What Was the Hipster?” His piece elaborated on Kinzey and Finnegan’s notion of hipsterism as an archetype of consumerism. “Through both phases of the contemporary hipster, and no matter where he identifies himself on the knowingness spectrum, there exists a common element essential to his identity, and that is his relationship to consumption.” Greif understands the hipster as the evolution of Thomas Frank’s ‘rebel consumer’ of the late sixties. Frank tracked this phenomenon back to “Madison Avenue’s absorption of a countercultural ethos...The rebel consumer is the person who, adopting the rhetoric but not the politics of the counterculture, convinces themselves that buying the right mass products individualizes and self-brands themselves as transgressive” (2010).

Greif goes on to suggest that purchasing the products of authority which is central to hipsterism, is thus reimagined as a defiance of that very authority. This means hipster culture has no worthy connection to true counterculture:

Usually this requires a fantasized censor who doesn’t want you to have cologne, or booze, or cars. But the censor doesn’t exist, of course, and hipster culture is not a counterculture. On the contrary, the neighborhood organization of hipsters—their tight-knit colonies of similar-looking, slouching people—represents not hostility to authority (as among punks or hippies) but a superior community of status where the game of knowing-in-advance can be played with maximum refinement. The hipster is a savant at picking up the tiny changes of rapidly cycling consumer distinction (2010).

Like Kinzey and Finnegan, Greif’s description proposes that the hipster is defined not by personality or true creativity, but by things. Consumable things. What they eat, listen to, watch, read, and wear, and how quickly, or ahead of the curve they can consume them, thus, as mentioned, Kinzey goes further to say the hipster-consumer is now the dominant culture of the young, a native of economic hegemony. The hipster was born in the era of globalization driven by free-market fanaticism; they represent the socio-economic realities around them. It is no surprise to hear that from Copenhagen to Cape Town...today’s hipsters all wear the same clothes and accessories, listen to the same sounds, ride the same bicycles, and read the same magazines, email-outs and style-blogs” (2010, p. 3). “What started as a small movement in New York can now be found on giant billboards worldwide; the hipster is the

dominant aesthetic filter through which mainstream culture emanates. The hipster's quest for perpetual cool is sustained by endless cultural imperialism; everything is potentially for the taking (2010, p. 3).

Hipster culture as an internationally recognizable consumer standard has undoubtedly had an influence on profit-driven corporations, and the global economy at large. For that reason, questions will now be raised regarding VICE's awareness of its own hipster sensibility and this greater hipster-consumer phenomenon. The paper will argue that VICE plays to this acknowledged landscape by branding itself as the definitive information source for Kinzey's, Frank's, Finnegan's and Greif's definition of the hipster. In other words, VICE, as the "Guide to Enlightening Information," has benefitted through its expedient seduction of vapid hipster culture.

VICE— The Medium of Hipster-Consumer

In a 2014 interview with the website *CANADALAND*, VICE's Gavin McInnes bragged that he invented hipster culture. This, of course, is hyperbole, but McInnes' statement—recall, he was once referred to as "The Godfather of VICE" by *MacLean's Magazine*—is not wholly disputable. As hipsterism boomed in the early 2000s, so did *VICE Media*. "VICE has grown in lockstep with the spread of hipster culture," writes Widdicombe. "What was once a Brooklyn-based trend has become the lingua franca of 'global youth,' as VICE's executives call it" (2010). In the same *CANADALAND* piece, a disgruntled former writer for VICE who asked to remain anonymous stated, "I see people trying to be cool like Gavin (McInnes). They're trying to be like VICE. And then I see VICE, who's also really trying to be like VICE" (Brown, "Gavin McInnes Has Some Problems With me"). That McInnes would make the proclamation that he invented hipster culture is indicative of his realization that there was a sense of marketability to his brand of cool, which he prudently injected it into the character of his publication. People latched onto this in VICE for their own self-branding purposes (Banet-Weiser, p. 7), so VICE rolled with it.

In 2012, VICE's chief marketer, Shane Smith made explicit reference to VICE's perceived hipsterism and his company's reaction to this social-economic landscape in an interview with the *CBC's* Jian Ghomeshi:

Ghomeshi: Nineties youth culture in Montreal and hipster youth culture is steeped in slackerism, the opposite sensibility of ambition. Was the VICE brand saying we want to play at Madison Square Garden, or, was *Reality Bites*? Did you get bigger than you wanted to?

Smith: When we went to New York and we got into that post 9/11 hedonism, and the hipster sort of rare denim and sneakers and cocaine, and it was the end of the world and we were just partying...trying to be the coolest of the cool.

Smith then backpedaled on his comments "trying to be the coolest of the cool."

Smith: We just keep trying to get better at content. We never tried to be the hipsters' bible, we never tried to be cool or go after a demographic, we just wanted to make good shit.

Ghomeshi: But you did try and be the hipsters' bible!

Again, Smith recants in his response, signifying his intention for VICE to act as the hipster's guidebook.

Smith: We did! We were named the hipsters' bible by the *New York Times*! It's funny because everyone was like I remember VICE back in 1994, and I was like, I was there. We were shit.

Widdicombe described similar renderings by Smith while discussing VICE's branding. "Smith likes to say that there are three criteria for a VICE story: "It has to be simple, it has to have a hook, and it has to have a punch in the face...It's the sniff test: Would I tell my buddy about it in a bar? Yes? Cool."

Speaking with *The New York Times*, the most reclusive creator of the magazine, Suroosh Alvi also deliberated VICE's compliance with hipster culture, and what the outcome of this relationship might mean for the founders of the company:

Mr. Alvi, for one, said the magazine's founders are not worried about overexposure and obsolescence. 'The downside to getting recognized,' he conceded, 'is that we're seen as purveyors of hipsterdom to the masses, packaging cool and selling it to the mainstream. The upside,' he continued, 'is financial gain, and dreams and ambitions being realized. We're living the American dream. Hell, we'll all have houses with white picket fences and be wearing trucker hats when we're 65' (Grigoriadis, 2003).

What readers can discern from these interview excerpts is that VICE makes a branding decision to appeal to Kinzey's hipster sensibility (as a motif of conformity) in the era of self-branding. The strategy is working: *Advertising Age* named VICE as "brand of the year in 2014," and "so much more than a magazine." Their press release also detailed that "perhaps the surest sign of VICE's impact is its influence on culture: It is perceived by many as the arbiter of cool...and young people are turning down jobs at established media companies (where they can likely earn more money) to work at VICE's headquarters in Brooklyn" (Sebastian, 2014).

Deprived of Kinzey's definition of the hipster, it would seem that perhaps the most miraculous aspect of VICE's brand success is that they were able to maintain a status of countercultural otherness and hipsterism even though they have on numerous occasions, gone to bed with those who symbolize the opposite of counterculture; mainstream corporate institutions like *Fox*, *Rogers*, who inherently oppose the VICE ethos. Kinzey partly clarifies that these matters mean little to hipster culture, as we have learned that "selling out is practically programmed into the hipster" (2012, p. 4). However, this does elicit questions of how commercial brands like VICE maneuver to maintain their status as an authentic and cool.

The Business of Marketing Cool

In Van Den Bergh & Behrer's *How Cool Brands Stay Hot*, they propose a strategy companies can employ to successfully woo the authenticity-obsessed generation of the hipster-consumers. Van Den Bergh & Behrer define coolness as "a sense of authenticity, uniqueness and ability to self-identify with a brand" (2011, p. 213). They believe that, with this, a very recognizable buying preference will become prevalent, and so will a likelihood of long-term loyalty, because these are the qualities that define what it is to be cool. "The second you tell a Millennial kid you are cool, you can be very sure that, well, you are not. They decide themselves what's cool. It's not a characteristic you can deliberately plan or chase. You have to earn the status of 'cool brand'" (2011, p. 214). As discussed, Van Den Bergh & Behrer's qualities of cool are all merits VICE has achieved.

Alan Liu's research in his *The Laws of Cool: Knowledge Work and the Culture of Information*, elucidates how VICE has been able to preserve, and build upon its cultural cachet for the past two decades, despite some decidedly less-than-cool moves (becoming bedfellows with *Fox*, partnering with *Rogers Communications*, *Disney* etc.). "Cool is the techno-informatics vanishing point of contemporary aesthetics, psychology, morality, politics, spirituality, and everything. No more beauty, sublimity, tragedy, grace, or evil: only cool or not cool" (Liu, 2004, p. 3). Having been categorized by hipster culture as members of Liu's cool, VICE is able to make these emphatically uncool moves, and still maintain its status as cool brand. As a perceived 'cool brand,' context and action does not matter.

Undoubtedly, the quality of cool is terribly difficult to interpret and assess. Once something is deemed cool, it is difficult to prove, explain or argue otherwise, how precisely that state of cool was forged. "Cool is not an intrinsic property woven into the blue denim of jeans," writes Pountain and Robins: "Cool is something we all know when we see it" (2000, p. 9). This helps us understand the interest held by Murdoch and others, despite the comparably lower audience numbers of *VICE Media*. Bearing in mind its deep-rooted connections to hip cities, controversial and progressive perspectives and aesthetics, and superfluous stories, VICE has consistently demonstrated for the past twenty years that they have a knack for commodifying the elusive sense of coolness that is appealing to hipster culture.

This understanding of Van Den Bergh & Behrer, Liu, Pountain and Robins leads us back to celebrated thinker, Thomas Frank's pioneering study *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism*. Here, Frank explains commercial counter-culture as nothing more than another symbol of our unavoidable kneel to the capitalist system:

Commercial fantasies of rebellion, liberation, and outright 'revolution' against the stultifying demands of mass society are common place almost to the point of invisibility in advertising, movies, and television programming. For some, Ken Kesey's parti-colored bus may be a hideous reminder of national unraveling, but for *Coca-Cola* it seemed a perfect promotional instrument for its *Fruitopia* line, and the company has proceeded to send replicas of the bus around the country to generate interest in the counter-culturally themed beverage. *Nike* shoes are sold to the accompaniment of words delivered by William S. Burroughs and songs by *The Beatles*, *Iggy Pop*, and Gil Scott Heron ('the revolution will not be televised'); peace symbols decorate a line of cigarettes manufactured by R. J. Reynolds and the walls and windows of *Starbucks* coffee shops nationwide; the products of *Apple*, *IBM*, and *Microsoft* are touted as devices of liberation; and advertising across the product category spectrum calls upon consumers to break rules and find themselves... A host of self-designated 'corporate revolutionaries,' outlining the accelerated new capitalist order in magazines like *Wired* and *Fast Company*, gravitate naturally to the imagery of rebel youth culture to dramatize their own insurgent vision. This version of the countercultural myth is so pervasive that it appears even in the very places where the historical counterculture is being maligned" (1997, p. 32).

Abiding by the old adage, 'to know where we are going, we must understand where we've been,' Frank's work helps us comprehend the enduring struggle between counterculture

ideology and the capitalist market. These insights are very much commensurate with later formulations made by Kinzey that being an authentic, countercultural self-creator has become the hipster culture's predominant fundamental fantasy (1997, p. 53), and are perhaps the best perspectives to understand VICE's success as a prevalent commercial countercultural institution in the self-branding era of the hipster-consumer.

Conclusion

VICE *Media* has been so successful within the landscape of Kinzey's hipster culture because of its ability to be perceived as an authentic brand of countercultural cool. The mainstream, hipster-consumer views *VICE* as a means to express a fight against the popular system, but what Kinzey's hipsters are really doing by providing an audience-ship for *VICE*, is sustaining the system that true enlightenment is meant to oppose. This is an example of Marx's capitalist interpellation—on all levels, the idea of cool or hip is ultimately bows to the power of capital, and the cycle of the commodification of our brand interrogated everyday life continues. More inquiry into the socio-cultural/socio-economic implications of *VICE Media*'s exponential growth as it rides the evolutionary wave of mainstream hipster-consumerism is needed. An example of the hasty evolution of *VICE*, is in the last year alone, *VICE Media* has signed their major three-year deal with *HBO* to launch a daily *VICE* news show, additional weekly programming hours of *VICE*'s half-hour show, and most notably, a *VICE* branded channel which will be accessible through *HBO*'s streaming service. *VICE* is now set to launch two 24 hour news channels, and is showing no signs of deceleration as a multi-platform/ multi-national media institution. Considering *VICE*'s newly set place at the table with other major media institutions, we need to give more thought to its audience, business model, and corporate allegiances than ever before. Understanding the relationship between *VICE* and hipster culture is a subtle step towards doing just that.

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