

The iphone and my identity as an apple consumer



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The iPhone and my identity as an Apple Consumer

“ First was the mouse. The second was the click wheel. And now, we’re going to bring multi-touch to the market. And each of these revolutionary interfaces has made possible a revolutionary product – the Mac, the iPod and now the iPhone.” These words are said by Steve Jobs, the CEO and co-founder of one of the world’s largest tech companies, Apple. This company has come a long way in terms of the latest technologies. Ever since the first iPhone was launched, Apple never failed to impress their consumers by launching newer versions of the iPhone. I, just like other iPhone users, would keep my eyes out for the latest updates on the new iPhone models. This enthusiasm that I portray makes me wonder, what role am I exactly playing as I continue to buy more Apple products? In this analysis, I will focus on Louis Althusser’s definitions of ideology and his concept of Interpellation to help further explain my identity as an Apple consumer.

Louis Althusser was an influential philosopher. He believed that we are all ‘ unconsciously’ influenced by an ideology that is altered by our own beliefs and ideas (Storey 71). To theorize even further, he introduced three definitions of ideology. First, he argues that ideology is “ a system of representations (images, myths, ideas or concepts)” (71). In other words, Althusser believed that ideology was governed by rules that had a political aspect to it. This emphasizes our ‘ real’ and ‘ imaginary’ relation. Since we live in a world dominated by the upper class, there obviously is an assumption that we idealise them as they seem happier and wealthier. But Althusser proves it differently. In “ Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)”, he states “ there is no

ideology except by the subject and for the subject" (Althusser, 1970). He clearly means that ideology is imaginary and everyone, including the dominant class, are not aware of it. This creates a notion that ideology does not reflect the actual conditions of the real world but rather the imaginary relationship of us as individuals, to the real world. His second definition states that ideology is a "material practice" (Storey 78). He believes that ideology is something that we inherit as thoughts or practices and continue to use that ideology in our day to day lives. For example, I am a waitress and I bring a cup of coffee to a customer and I accidentally spill a bit while carrying it. I apologize and become more aware when I carry a cup of coffee henceforth. Now in this example, the imaginary ideology is that I am taught to feel concern for my customer and I end up feeling guilty. The material practice is when I apologize for my mistake. In this way, ideologies shape our thoughts.

Althusser's third definition is the concept of 'interpellation'. He argues that ideologies construct "concrete individuals as subjects" (78). These ideologies "hail" or "call us" to be a part of a particular subject position and we are encouraged to accept this position only because it seems 'natural' when in reality, it's just something that we inherited. Althusser uses the example of a policeman calling out to an individual. When called out, the individual is interpellated into a subject position unknowingly as he/she responds (78). This act of hailing the subject is achieved by the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) which represents school systems, families, churches, technology and other private entities. Althusser implies that these ISAs are fully functioned by ideologies and reinforce different social norms on

us as subjects. These ISAs are usually controlled by those in power, that is, the upper class or the 'elite'. Being a subject can result in two options. One being a subject where you have the freedom to make your own choices or being a subject to a person of higher authority where you do not have enough freedom to take up your own responsibility.

In relation to Althusser's idea of interpellation, I consider myself in a subject position as an Apple consumer. I got my first ever phone four years ago and it happened to be a Samsung model. I used it for almost a year and then switched to Apple. Ever since I switched, I can never seem to go back to Samsung or any brand as a matter of fact. It's not just me but even my family has the Apple products from iPhones to the Apple Tv. Now the real question is, how am I interpellated into being an Apple consumer? In my opinion, Apple is the ISA here as it acts as an entity that holds some authority and power. Every year, Apple launches newer versions of the iPhone with extravagant features. For example, Apple suggests that we record our fingerprint in order to unlock our iPhone instead of putting a passcode lock. Not only that, iPhones have a health app installed that keeps track of all your data. Since Apple users have their iPhones or Apple watches with them all the time, the app serves as boon. It records the number of steps you've taken and flights of stairs you've climbed per day. You can also enter specific data such as your nutrition and sleep analysis. Now as we enjoy such privileges, we don't realize that Apple has interpellated us into a certain set of expectations which has caused us to accept this specific approach that all our information is stored digitally. In other words, Apple interpellates us into trusting them with our personal information. Recently,

Apple was receiving backlash after admitting to slow down older models of the iPhone such as the 6 and 6s. This strategy, I believe, was another way into compelling us to buy newer versions of the iPhone. Like I mentioned before, it is hard for me to switch to another brand as I am used to the iPhone interface. So, this interpellates me into buying the latest model so that it could last for another 4-5 years.

Just as I hold the subject position as a consumer, I do have other identities. The first identity I hold onto is the cultural identity. I am an Indian and I grew up learning the beliefs and ethics of India in order to strive my position as a citizen. Being a daughter would be my second identity. I grew up internalizing the values my parents taught me. As I mentioned before, being a subject means freedom or no freedom. In this case, I do not have much freedom as I have to look up to the ISAs (family and culture) in order to follow the ideologies they teach us.

Overall, Althusser highlights his notion of ideology being our 'imaginary relationship to the real world' and a 'material practice'. The usage of both in our day to day lives suggest that we are unaware of this ideology as we assume it to be natural. His concept of "hailing", also known as interpellation, is viewed to be subtle as we are encouraged into being a subject to something without even realizing it. This proves my identity as an Apple consumer as I am interpellated into trusting this brand with my personal information hence leading me to buy more products in the future. This makes us commodities when we are subjected to interpellation (Doug). With all this research I wonder, does the 'i' in iPhone stand for identity?

Works Cited

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