

# Yo! It's Po-Mo!

THIS IS ABOUT POST-MODERNISM – or “Po-Mo.”

There are po-mo movements in art, architecture, philosophy, literature, history, and sociology.

And, there's one in advertising. Sort of.

Post-Modernism began as “a revolt against modernism (duh), a rejection of progress, the power of reason, and the dominance of science and technology...” (From “The Chaos of Meaning” by Ian Forth, BMP/DDB)

You'll find this sensibility in art galleries, rock lyrics, and even physics lectures that deal with “chaos theory.”

## MARKETING MODERNISM.

Meanwhile marketing, which pays for advertising, is essentially “modernistic” and “positivist.”

Marketers view their own activities as “progress.” They offer you products that solve problems, fashionable fashions, specials this week only, and generally work to keep business in business.

Marketing tries to be logical – there's a lot of money at stake. Marketing works to discover objective “truths” about the best way to do things – whether it's how to introduce a new running shoe with improved arch support, sustain consumption of a breakfast cereal that's been around for fifty years, or sell you a beer as soon as you're old enough to buy one.

## On the Other Hand, It's Not a Simple World.

One person's progress may be another's environmentally unfriendly behavior.

One person's “better” may be sexist, racist, classist, exploitive, or worse yet, unfashionable when viewed from another perspective.

OK, it's time for a chart.

## Addendum:

*At the end of some chapters, we may add a few more things we think you need to think about.*



Ad for a “po-mo” brand – Doc Martens.





**#31070**

subscription holder, reporting for duty! Is that what you want, for me to become another faceless entity that you can anonymously slip your paper to? Maybe I'm an antique, but I don't mind going down to a real newsstand, paying with real money, flashing a real smile, and heck, maybe even slipping in a "Thanks, 'preciate it." What human contact do we have left? Computo-bank tellers, TV diplomas, "Personalized" bulk mail, blow-up dolls, push "1" for this - push "2" for that. How 'bout I come down there, push "3" and blow your whole operation to bits? Listen here, you... you...personality leeches, I'm a real person! I have a name. I am not, I repeat, NOT, a credit card number!



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A SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON.

On one side, we'll list some "modernist" and "progressive" values, and on the other, we'll list some post-modern perspectives.

Modernity	Post-Modernity
Order/Control	Disorder/Chaos
Certainty	Ambiguity
Content	Style
Tomorrow	Today
Similarities	Differences
Commodification	Customization
Universality	Individuality

See what's going on here?

Marketers are usually "modernistic."

They pretty much have to be. Because there's a lot at stake if you own a cereal factory.

But consumers nowadays, and young people in particular, may not be. After all, if you're just buying one box of cereal, what's the big deal.

Meanwhile, advertising is usually in the middle – working for the cereal manufacturer, trying to sell one box at a time to individuals.

Now let's talk about those individuals.

GENERATION PO-MO.

Today, most younger people understand and empathize with the chapter title from Doug Coupland's book *Generation X*.

That chapter was titled "*I Am Not a Target Market.*"

Well, actually, you are a target market – we all are.

But that awareness, and that dissonance, changes things. And this awareness can be very different for different generations.

For example, even though I know I'm a target market, I don't have those feelings.

I can remember a time, as a child, when I was only occasionally a target market. For only a few hours a day, we could see TV for kids. Yay!

We'd plant our little blue-jeaned fannies in front of *The Howdy Doody Show*.

But, just like you, I discovered that you can eat just so many boxes of cereal – no matter what cool prize is inside. And we all discovered that the cool prize maybe isn't as cool as you thought it would be.

But you... Can you remember a moment when you didn't have a channel changer full of KidVid?

I'm guessing probably not.

You have a different attitude about the marketplace – very aware – but with very mixed feelings. Yes?

Well, that's po-mo.

#### TARGET MARKET AWARENESS.

So now let's look at the problem of advertising – the major way marketers speak to their target market.

The target is onto the game. They "get it." Don't you?

It isn't that you don't want to see an ad for something that might interest you – it's that you're aware of the fact that the marketer is doing what they're doing.

And, if advertisers don't send some sort of signal that "they know that you know," you may think they're pretty dim – or you may give them no thought at all.

You may buy the product, you may not, but the connection with the brand won't be as strong.

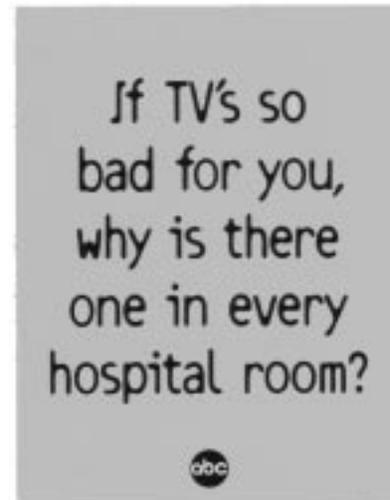
This awareness of being the target of marketing efforts is at the center of post-modern advertising.

#### CLAUDE HOPKINS RIDES AGAIN.

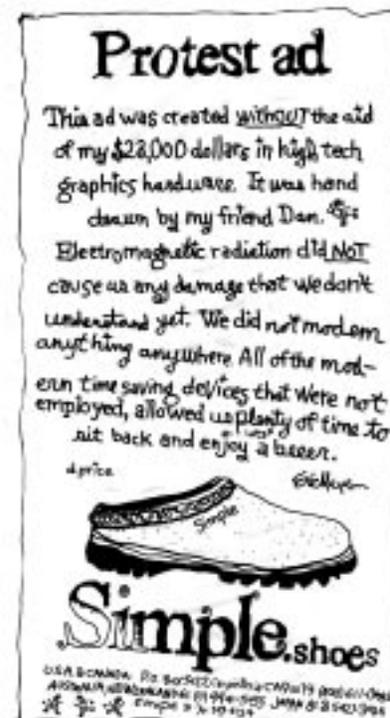
Remember Claude Hopkins? Remember his lesson? It was to make that one-to-one connection.

It's still all about connecting with the consumer.

And the post-modern movement in advertising, which tends to be limited to certain specific types of products – those that appeal to younger consumers – is simply applying that lesson.



*Po-Mo Promo.* Here, ABC uses an ironic po-mo attitude to promote their "brand."



*Po-Mo Attitude.* Here, Simple.shoes takes a stand against modernity. Wonder if they have a Web site?



### WHEN DO YOU PO-MO?

For certain products, in certain circumstances, good po-mo is critical for making a successful connection.

It's Claude Hopkins' one to one – with attitude.

Above, is a good example – a frame from a Sprite TV spot. They made up a phony soft drink, Jooky, and made fun of the claims and attitude.

It positioned Sprite as a more “honest” drink and more in touch with younger drinkers. Sprite sales grew.

Below, is a not-so-good example. The cutting-edge work for Subaru by Wieden + Kennedy didn't work.

Then again, the cars weren't much.

Better cars and more traditional advertising helped them get traction again.



And, at this point, it depends on the type of product.

You may have a po-mo mindset picking out Friday night's entertainment or the clothes you wear when you go out – but when you're figuring out the best way to finance a car – or pricing a trip for Spring Break – you're probably all business.

In the next chapter, “Two Brains are Better Than One,” we'll spend a little more time on the concept that we can be very different people depending on what types of products we're thinking of purchasing.

### “WHASSUP” WITH PO-MO?

The post-modern attitude tends to be ironic, knowing, and often self-referential.

It's the “we know that you know” syndrome. Done right, it's a shared joke.

“We know you get it.

Wink. Wink. Nudge. Nudge.” And you do – when it works.

This is the road that logically leads to “Whassup?”

“Whassup?” is about cameraderie and connection.

Good po-mo creates a loop of shared understanding. Nike, because of its concern for the “personal truths” and values of its audience, contains aspects of po-mo.

It's also probably true that the crew at Wieden + Kennedy in Po-Mo, Oregon, is more in touch with these values than most.

### PO-MO STYLE.

As Stephen Brown said in his very clever little book, *Post-Modern Marketing*, “Post-modernism is characterized by style rather than by content.”

Getting the style or attitude right is critical.

What is that style? It's often a bit wry, or ironic, or cynical – but not always.

It's often “deconstructed” so that the audience can be involved in filling in the missing puzzle pieces.





This proves that you know that they know – or is it they know that you know?

And, since it's about style, not content, the critical ingredients in getting the recipe right are subjective –like art, attitude, and awareness.

So, how do you use po-mo? And when?

You use it like the beer they want you to buy when you're old enough – with moderation and when it's appropriate. Too much at the wrong time tends to have an unhappy result.

Because if you do it wrong, it shows that you don't know, you know?

Still, now you know po-mo.

But then again, we already knew that you knew.

## Exercises & Discussion:

1. Describe the types of products where you think a po-mo appeal might be effective.
2. Describe people and products that are not po-mo.
3. OK, let's make a list:  
First, categories that are po-mo and not po-mo.  
Then, brands in categories that are and are not.
4. Look for some examples of advertising you think demonstrates good po-mo. How did they do it?
5. When are you a bit po-mo?  
When are you a modernist who believes in progress?

### A VERY FUNNY CAMPAIGN.

The billboard on the left, for John Smith's Bitter, a British beverage, uses a number of po-mo devices.

It deconstructs a billboard, showing part of a John Smith's billboard over what looks like someone else's old billboard – with a very humorous result.

It's ironic and makes fun of ad cliches as it builds its own humor on top of it. Get it?



### GOVERNOR PO-MO.

Ironic, satirical commercials that made fun of establishment values and rhetoric were key ingredients in ads for Jesse Ventura, now governor of Minnesota.

Young voters, who responded to those appeals, were the key to his victory.

### READ ALL ABOUT IT.



The book *Where the Suckers Moon* tracks the history of a Subaru new business pitch and the subsequent advertising by Wieden + Kennedy, who won the business.

Their innovative work had many po-mo aspects – such as deconstructed typography. One presenter mentioned punk music in the context of one of the Subaru models. It didn't work.

It can also be argued that the Subaru product that Wieden + Kennedy had to sell at the time wasn't all that terrific.

Then again, some have observed that the most popular car brand with younger consumers is "used," which is, after all, a po-mo brand.