

Advertisement pushing the boundaries through Visual Metaphor

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Abstract:

Living in the era of multi-media and online communication it is need to deliver as well as to receive a great number of messages. This is carried out by using a considerable number of advertisements being of a commercial or non – commercial nature. The verbal aspect and dimension of advertisement have been the focus of research of nowadays media.

One of the main theories considering the concept of metaphor including visual metaphor is the interaction theory. It defines the metaphorical statement as a composition of two subjects: “the primary” and “secondary” subject. However, it should be emphasised that the advertising messages usually have both a visual and linguistic component.

In a fast changing world it is a well-known fact that you can create a trend and change and push the boundaries every day but is there a real impact of the visual metaphor in advertisement in shaping our fast changing world?

Key words: advertisement, visual metaphor, ad, taboo

We live in the era of multi-media and online communication. We are constantly connected exchanging views, and ideas being the deliverer as well as receiver of great number of messages. Advertisement being of a commercial or not-commercial nature

is one of the elements that we do constantly find in the various sources of now-days media. Not paying attention more often than not we do not even realize that it is there in an angle of the in or off the corners of the website we are currently browsing or even under the log in option of our Facebook profile. Nevertheless sometimes we notice that that leads to the delivery of a message and accomplishment of the objective of the given advertisement process.

The verbal and cognitive aspect and dimension of advertisement have been the focus of research over the past few decades. However metaphor can also occur in pictures and draws on relevant studies from various disciplines to propose a model for the identification, classification, and analysis of visual metaphors (pictorial metaphors).

Charles Forceville (1996) in his book “Pictorial Metaphor in Advertising” shows not only how metaphor can occur in pictures, but also provides a framework within which these pictorial metaphors can be analyzed. He emphasises the importance of visual metaphor in advertisement and through detailed analyses of the advertisements goes even further by suggesting how metaphor theory can be employed as a tool in media studies.

One of the main theories to consider the concept of metaphor including visual metaphor is the interaction theory. It defines the metaphorical statement as a composition of two distinct subjects that are identified as the “primary” and “secondary” subject. Charles Forceville (1996) While the primary subject is quite directly identified the secondary one is to be regarded as a system rather than an individual thing. If we consider remarks such as “Society is a plant” the primary subject is society having a direct correlation to what it represents while the secondary subject in the statement is not much about the plant as about a system of relationships and processes.

More than thirty years ago, Giovanni Giovannini exposed the “impressions of inconsistency” with which the

technical terminology of art had been applied to literature in studies published from 1925 to 1950 but in our time the reverse has occurred. Once critics claimed to see coloring in poetry while now they speak of pictures and images as texts, as readable literary and as a consequence message delivery structures complete with metaphors.

However it should be noted that when it comes to advertisement, the advertising messages usually have both a visual and linguistic component. The presence of the visual element is present for obvious reasons but on the other hand advertisements are very rarely of a purely pictorial nature. Even though current trends reveal a clear shift from verbal to visual there is still need for a minimum of text such as the product name, a tagline and/or slogan.

In a fast changing world characterized by constant and fast interaction and communication it is a well-known fact that you can create a trend and change and push the boundaries every day but is there a real impact of the visual metaphor in advertisement in shaping our fast changing world?

In 1961, Henry S. Levy and Sons an American bakery most famous for their rye bread introduced the ad “ You don't have to be Jewish” that showing a picture of non-Jewish New Yorkers eating a sandwich made from the baker's rye bread, together with the tagline:

"You don't have to be Jewish to love Levy's".

This is considered a ground breaking ad using for the first time a positive religious reference in advertising.

The aim of this advertisement was to enlarge public acceptance of the product and to deliver the message of its suitability not only for the Jews but all so mixed ethnically inhabitants of New York. The idea was very different for its time, and using religion is risky, but the ad including both the visual and verbal elements work mainly also due to the fact that the product, bread, is nearly universal and it somehow succeeds in engaging all religions in a clever and at the same

time light-hearted way. The impact of the ad was significant for it brought social acceptance and emphasized a simple yet very important common element of the very religiously and ethnically diverse society. It somehow helped people in recognizing the fact that although quite different under many aspects there are always common features and universal values that characterize us all.

Another important example that had quite an impact in the later social development was the visual metaphor used by the Health Education Council of Great Britain in its ad “Pregnant Man”. The ad was published in 1970 as part of the British campaign to promote contraception, it proved extremely successful is considered as one of the first examples of an ad flipping cultural norms. It shows the picture of a visibly pregnant man with the tagline “Would you be more careful if it was you that got pregnant?” and it is considered an ad that is educational, without being moralistic or patronizing. Delivering a strong visual message to the general public, it is considered to be more than an advertisement that moved beyond the accepted boundaries of the time.

The advertisement campaign “Real Beauty” used by Dove in 2004 is another good example of successful, positive and long term impact of visual metaphor in the message delivered to the general public. At the time of its launching based on various surveys carried out by the company Dove, 75% of women felt that advertising and media set unrealistic standards of beauty. That was why the central goal of the campaign aimed to make beauty a source of confidence, not anxiety for women everywhere, showing the pictures focusing on the beauty of real everyday women not the perfect and flawless fashion models. Women, the main target group of the main target audience reacted in a very emotional way to this ad and the general positive perception and acceptance of the campaign played a visible role in the modification of beauty standards acceptable by society even when it comes to the advertisement of beauty related products dominated for a very

long time by the perception that beauty aimed toward the perfect beauty represented almost always by extremely beautiful woman.

Advertisement plays an important role not only due to the introduction of innovative ideas that lead to behavioral modifications but also due to the fact that it is a world wide recognized and effectively used tool deliver messages of various nature and raise awareness. A good example is the campaign of King Khalid Foundation titled “Can't Be Covered”. In April 2013, the King Khalid Foundation launched Saudi Arabia's first ever campaign against domestic abuse, aiming to generate awareness of a subject long considered taboo. It was an initial step toward a more proactive campaign that was controversial but based on an important culture aspect of Saudi Arabia. The ad shows the picture of a woman in a black niqab, only the eyes being visible and one of them is visibly bruised. The message is clear and simple and it should be noted that following the campaign in the summer of 2013, Saudi Arabia passed a new law to criminalize domestic abuse.

Perhaps, when you mention the name Oliviero Toscani most people might not know that he is a well-known fashion photographer whose work has appeared in the most prestigious fashion magazines such as Elle, Vogue, Harper's Bazaar and Stern. However, a lot us are familiar with his advertising campaign for the company The United Colors of Benetton from 1982 to 2000 that gave him and mainly Benetton a worldwide fame and recognition. He brought together strongly contrasting opposites in the same image to symbolize the acceptance of differences, multiculturalism, the fight for equality and peace. One of the most iconic and controversial among the images and visual metaphors uses is the picture “Kissing-nun” (1992) dealt with the theme of religion, which at the time was not a new topic per se but it was introduced in a very controversial and what could be considered as even a profane manner going against the sacred vows pronounced by men and women who enter the catholic religious orders. Challenging the principle of

religious celibacy, the picture shows a catholic nun while sharing a passionate kiss with a priest.

Benetton is clearly not advertising any particular products from its vast collections but is merely creating a source of social response to a particularly sensitive topic and issue, whether the response and reaction is negative or positive, what is clear is that the chosen topic sparks a response. The idea of a “Priest kissing a nun” provokes a reaction even in a non-religious person, therefore we are well aware how extremely upsetting that same topic is considered by those that are religious. The ad was even banned in Italy and other catholic countries, slating it “illegal”. It can be easily classified as part of the genre of “shock advertising” commercially effective showing simply the small green slogan of Benetton in the top right corner of the ad, thus creating a direct link and identifying the trademark in question with the controversy the image that has been generate.

In this advertisement we see a clear rhetoric impact used to introduce a belief and portray what we believe is wrong, however the main idea after Benetton and his slogan is Unit so others do believe and accept and consider the created controversial as part of the fight for equality and peace. While the impact in the previous examples is a clear proof of the role of advertisement, its visual elements and metaphors have played in pushing the existing boundaries of the society the Benetton campaign ad example introduces a category of advertisements that although very effective in fulfilling their main goal lead to very contradictory outcomes.

The evolution of advertisement and its impact in today's society is visible with respect to subjects and aspects of life that were or still are considered taboo. The term Taboo refers to something that should not be touched or changed, the prohibition of an action or use of an object based on ritualistic distinctions of them either as being sacred and consecrated or as being dangerous, unclean and accursed. Elsa Simoes Lucas Freitas (2008). However as we can see from the examples a

number of sensitive and even former taboo issues have been dealt with and sometimes avoided, indirectly mentioned or even foregrounded in order to benefited the image of a product or simply deliver the foreseen message. When advertisers decide to discuss social problems now-days instead of focusing on the comparative superiority of their product they often tend to bring up taboo issues aiming to increase social awareness.

Advertisement has proven to play a very important role in today's world while fulfilling a significant and main requisite for an effective delivery of the process through the correct and effective identification of the communicator and addressee(s) as well as a well defined distinction between strongly and weekly communicated aspects of the message. The communicator aims to produce a stimulus that will manifest to the audience or addressee(s) what the communicator needs if done properly and correctly the process will be successful and in specific cases lead to a direct or even indirect impact in pushing the boundaries of one or more aspects or important issues part of our everyday life and society.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Advertisement is always in the front line when it comes to the introductions of innovative and even shocking elements even through the use of the most unlikely materials including those that, apparently, could seem harmful for their purpose. Advertising campaigns are often constructed taking risks and working on a very delicate balance in between strong, controversial and even taboo issues and the message they aim to deliver in order to strengthen and amplify its effect
2. Visual metaphor is an indisputable and crucial element of advertisement and several examples throughout the years of ads and campaigns have proven that it is also one of the key elements in delivering messages that not only promote products, services and ideas but on both a

long and short term period have had a visible impact in the modification and evolution various important social behaviors

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