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REVIEW ARTICLE

A LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF ADVERTISEMENT

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A Linguistic Analysis of Advertisement

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Advertisement analysis is no different from any other type of analysis. The goal is to break down a specific advertisement down into its component parts to see how it works, to see how it persuades. Treat the ad as a puzzle; all you are trying to do is to see how the pieces of the puzzle work individually and how it all fits together. An advertisement should be broken down into the following parts:

Purpose: The majority of ads have a very simple purpose: To convince the audience to purchase a particular product or service. Other types of ads include public service (information) ads and ideological ads such as those for Greenpeace or the National Rifle Association (selling ideas).

Picture: Nothing in the picture is there by accident; everything has a purpose. Look for a pattern of symbols or images. For example, a champagne advertisement may have a couple walking hand in hand on a moonlit beach (symbols of romance). The key is the association of the product to a certain idea. In other words, advertisements are primarily illogical. They are used to persuade. So, this champagne advertisement will not tell how much the product costs, what it tastes like, and so on. The goal of the advertiser is to get the audience to associate the product with something positive, so champagne = romance. Look for patterns of symbols or images that develop a certain dominant theme(s).

Language: Similar to the picture, none of the words in an ad are there by accident; they are all very carefully chosen, and this includes not only the wording in the ad but also the product name and slogan. Look again for patterns of words that develop certain themes. For example, a computer advertisement will contain words like high performance, powerful, and so on. Usually, the themes present in the language will echo or reinforce the themes present in the picture.

Audience There is no such thing as a general audience. Advertisers direct their ads toward specific audiences. Audiences are broken down in such categories as age, race, gender, economic class, region of the country, and so on. In addition, these are the broad categories. The magazine the ad is placed in will give a very clear indication of the specific

audience targeted. In other words, Bride magazine has a very specific audience. An advertisement in Business Week will target business people. Cosmopolitan ads target contemporary women. You will not find many Harley Davidson motorcycle ads in Cosmo, just like you will not find any champagne advertisements in Field and Stream. The magazine, the product, the language, and the picture will help to clarify whom the specific audience that is being targeted by advertisers. Try to be as specific as possible when narrowing down the audience.

Techniques--The ultimate goal is to uncover the specific persuasive techniques employed by the advertisers to sell their product. The following techniques are generally the most common strategies used by advertisers:

- A. **Name calling**◆ When a company puts down another company or product in order to make itself or its product look superior. The MCI and Sprint ads are examples. When Ford refers to Honda or Toyota as ◆foreign◆ cars. Political ads are also good examples of name-calling.
- B. **Bandwagon**◆ The majority is right. If you want to be popular or successful, you need to be using this product, like the popular, successful people in the ad. Very often targeting a young audience, most ads on MTV are bandwagon ads. If you want to be popular like these people having such a fun time, you need to wear the jeans they are wearing. Join the Pepsi Generation is another such ad. Everyone is using this product so why aren't you?
- C. **Glittering Generalities**◆ Advertisements associating the product with positive language, either in the wording of the ad, the slogan, or the product name. Joy Liquid Detergent, Huggies Diapers, Chevy◆The Heartbeat of America are some examples. A recent Armed Services recruiting ad promised ◆numerous rewards and opportunities in a sophisticated and technologically-advanced

atmosphere◆◆you do not get much more
◆◆glittering◆◆ than that.

- D. *Transfer*◆ Advertisements associating positive symbols/images with the product. The good hands of Allstate, the Rock of Prudential, the Statue of Liberty with Liberty Mutual Insurance, the American flag in the background of all NRA ads, bikini-clad women in Budweiser ads.
- E. *Testimonial*◆ There are two types of testimonial: Celebrity and Expert. Celebrities such as Michael Jordan endorse everything from sneakers to hot dogs and underwear. These ads are usually very age-oriented: Ed McMahon selling life insurance to people over 65. These celebrities are familiar and trustworthy and people believe they support such products because they use them themselves. Expert testimony includes doctors, lawyers, engineers, etc. vouching for the product.
- F. *Plain Folks*◆ There are two types of Plain Folks: Real and Professional. Real plain folks include those average people populating Saturn commercials, Toyota ads, and detergent ads. The idea is that if it works for them, then it will work for me. Professional plain folks include Dave Thomas of Wendy's, Bartles and James Wine Coolers, Orville Redenbacher and his nephew selling their popcorn◆ just a bunch of average, everyday people who also happen to run multi-million dollar corporations. They are trying to connect their products with the average consumer.
- G. *Emotional Appeal*◆ Advertisers associate their products with emotional elements like family, country, children, and animals. For example, the golden retriever puppies in the Red Devil vacuum cleaner commercials, the little girl in the Pepsi commercials, the Coca-Cola Polar Bears. This type of strategy could also use scare tactics, such as protecting your family from intruders in security system ads.
- H. *Stereotypes*◆ Be aware of the stereotypes, especially gender, in ads. The advertising world is somewhat trapped in the two-parent, suburban, white picket fence, wood-paneled station wagon world of the past, where the father goes off to work and the mother raises the kids and cleans the house. Domestic and cleaning products are usually pictured with women, while tools and other outdoor equipment are associated with men. Some advertisements are starting to appeal to professional women, but overall the ad world is slow to change in this respect.

Advertisements comprise thirty percent of the material aired on television, and many of us will view more than two million commercials in our lifetimes. The A. C. Nielson Company reports that, by the age of sixty-five, the average U.S. citizen will have spent nine years of his or her life watching television—twenty-eight hours a week, two months a year. And in one year, the average youth will spend nearly twice as many hours in front of the tube (fifteen hundred hours) as he or she spends at school (nine hundred hours).[1] We may turn the box off eventually, but the advertisements remain. We are surrounded by them: they cover billboards, cereal boxes, food wrappers, bathroom stalls, tee shirts, and tennis shoes. They seep into our music, our newscasts, and our conversations. We recognize corporate logos and hum jingles ("Ba Da Ba Ba Ba"). In short, advertisements inform every aspect of our lives. Yet we often give them very little thought. We may make aesthetic judgments about them (e.g., "That commercial was funny" or "That commercial was stupid") or view them as innocent means to purchasing ends, but we rarely acknowledge them as messages that require critical attention.

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