

Lifestyle

Persuasion In Advertising and Informational Campaigns

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In this day and age, we can't seem to leave the house without someone trying to persuade us to do something. Billboards, radio shows as well as radio advertising, even loud signage on the front of some retail stores: all of these are examples of someone trying to persuade an individual to do something. Even when we are in the safety and comfort of our own home, that level of persuasion slips in through television, internet usage and on a smaller level, postal mail.



Not all persuasion is the same. There are some forces out there trying to persuade you in an effort to sell a product and there are other forces that are trying to persuade you through an informative campaign to make a decision based on belief.

Take a look at the poster art from World War II.

At this time, our society was still in its infancy. Men were supposed to provide for their families and fight in wars while women were expected to take care of the home and raise the children. After World War II started, the first jolt to our society's subconscious was felt: so many men were needed to fight in this war, it was immediately accepted that the women needed to be a part of the workforce.

People of higher power took advantage of this naivety by producing gorgeously rendered posters illustrating:

“pictures of fists, muscles, tools, and artillery (that) convey American strength. Patriotic colors of red, white, and blue predominate as national symbols and heroes appeal to patriotism... (Additionally, other) posters confront the viewer with the frightening stakes of the war and its human cost. Dark, earthen colors appear in portrayals of imperiled citizens, as well as dead and wounded soldiers” (The National Archives, 2011).

It was imperative that the entire country supported their government and participated supportively in war efforts in any way that they could. It didn't matter if it was something as small as collecting spare bits of aluminum for manufacturing weapons or growing a Victory Garden, every American needed to support the country at this time.

As it can be seen, all of these posters rely heavily on the use of Symbolic Expression. According to Charles Larson, author of “Persuasion: Reception and Responsibility”, symbolic expression affects us psychologically. After taking a good look at some of these posters anyone would whole-heartedly agree with that. It would be quite a challenge to look at any of these posters and not feel the paranoia that our government was pushing on our grandparents during this war.

Advertising, in contrast to the informative campaign set forth during World War II, conveys the sole purpose of getting a section of society to purchase a specific product. The success of consecutive sales of “said product” is dependent on the advertising campaign that has been set forth.

A concrete example of a consistently successful advertising campaign can be seen in the Ivory Project. Through the National Museum of American History, the Ivory Project is an assemblage of:

“1,600 advertisements and related ephemera, 1838-1998, (and) features a representative sample of print advertising for Ivory soap, one of the nation's longest-lived, branded consumer products... these... materials... frequently use images of house cleaning, bathing, women, and children. (Ivory Project, 2011).

There could be any number of reasons as to why Ivory has continued to enjoy successful sales across two centuries. The obvious reason would be that they have created a quality product with a simple formula and have never strayed far from that original formula. Another example of this would be McDonald's: There really isn't much difference between how they cook their burgers now versus when they first started.

Another reason could involve the presentational meaning of the images in a given advertisement. The presentational meaning of a given image:

“occurs all at once and the message is experienced in its entirety at one time, such as when one looks at a painting, architecture, or a statue, or experiences a ritual or an emotional gasp of approval to eloquent language use. In this way it resembles a metaphor which is recognized all at once and is best fit for a media-saturated dramatic world” (Larson, 2010).

The frequent use of images like “house cleaning, bathing, women and children” could lead one to believe that the section of society that purchases Ivory Products is largely female and the Ivory Soap Company is appealing to its clientele.

Based on these two examples alone, it can be seen that our society is directly affected through the use of symbolism and imagery. With the use of a frightening pair of eyes staring out from the depths of a Kaiser Helmet, how could you not have felt Germany was the enemy? After seeing an advertisement from the 1940's of a small child taking a bath, would it be possible to not associate bathing with the name of Ivory Soap?

Regardless of the intent, the use of such imagery is, in essence, the creation of a symbol. The use of symbols has been present throughout our species communication history. However, with the creation of specific symbols we are not only communicating but we are also creating an ideal; the epitome of something to put our faith in. This is very present in the archival material from the Ivory Soap Company as well as the use of motivational posters during World War II. The creation of: “symbols made possible all our major cultural advances, and this is more true than ever in the current age... we as persuaders need to recognize these symbols for what they are and what they do to us in order to accomplish persuasive results” (Larson, 2010).

The use of appropriate imagery is a very powerful tool. It's kind of sad really: the advertisements we see today only have a fraction of the words that the ads our grandparents grew up with. The implications in this are saying more than a careful juxtaposition of images can get a message across. It's saying that our society can't be bothered with reading a simple ad. This is proof that whether you are trying to sell a product to a certain section of society, or if you are trying to inform society at large that there is a sleeping wickedness in the world waiting for them to let their guard down, a picture can be worth a thousand words.

Sources Consulted

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