

Design, humor and advertising



Humor in advertising if well presented could bring about an unprecedented success as it can be so much arresting to the attention of the viewing audience. However if the method is not properly done it can leave a damaging effect and can turn out to be counterproductive. It leaves indelible mark in the memory of the viewer . A good example is that of Budweiser Frogs and Wendy's " Where's the Beef" on television. The VW Bug intro campaign was a great one in print. As this is difficult. The power of advertising has grown largely over the past twenty years and companies are now realizing that different methods of advertising suit different types of people, from the rich down to the poor.

There are several interconnections between design and production and the process of planning and implementation revolve around the whole issue of design and production. Designer products can be seen all around the street and the designer products have become increasingly popular day by day. Humor as a form of advertizing strategy has a way of attracting audience to the designer products. To this end, advertising plays an important role in Design. In order to make the advertising more effective, interesting and unforgettable to the audience, the use of humor seems to be needed.

As Gulas and Weinberger mentions that " The broadcasting grew, the use of humor grew along with it in these twenty years. The media outlets continue to expand, many advertisers have used humor to break through the confusion and reach jaded consumers" (2006: 16). In other words, the use of humor in advertising has assumed a veritable marketing strategy in the last few years as it functions in attracting the uninterested, bored and exhausted

consumer's attention. The purpose of the essay is to analyze the function and impact of advertising that is spiced up with humor.

It will shed light on the evolution of humor in advertising as an emerging marketing strategy and the reason for its magical tendency to draw a large number of consumers. The advantages and disadvantages of exploring humor in advertising will also be explored citing few examples to corroborate the evidence and therefore the efficacy of this marketing device will finally be established. First of all, advertising is a form of communication to inform customer about products and services. Also advertising appeals to human instincts and approaches to consumers' consciousness.

In this modern society, advertising has become so omnipresent that it has assumed an essential mechanism used to promote goods and educate the public. Advertising is about delivering message and getting the audience attention. With respect to the effectiveness of advertising, humor does indisputably play a role in it as Gulas and Weinberger state that “ The advertising industry has built a strong association with humor under the appropriate development of technology” (2006: 16). The effectiveness of any commercial institution is predicted on the basis of certain factors of which humor is a strong and of utmost importance (Wells et al 1971).

It therefore goes without saying that advertising as a form of humor has become a broadcast entertainment industry. Using humor in advertisement is seen by some as the ability to generate amusement on the part of the consumers. However this term can be a connotation of different interpretation as for instance, it has been said that “ Humor is a broader set

of stimuli that may act as peripheral communication cues and that may provide pleasure for an audience” (Gulas and Weinberger 2006, 85).

However in his own view, Stern suggests that “ Humor itself breeds confusion by confounding the formal aspects of the stimulus advertisement with the response aspects of effects on consumers” (1996: 37-59). It therefore implies that the use of humor in advertisement has a broader function that extends beyond the provision of laughter and amusement to the consumers . It sends a greater message than this. Humor is unstable, potentially dangerous, and fickle method of advertising. Good humor wins friends.

Using humor in advertising attracts people’s attention as Weinberger and Spotts remark “ humor is more effective than non-humor at gaining attention and enhancing mood” (1989: 39-44). Nevertheless, Gulas and Weinberger note that “ Humor can prove highly effective but it is usually risky” (2006: 72). The hazards posed by humor as good as it is cannot be overemphasized. Some do not have sense of humor among the audience and such category of people are bound to interpret it negatively. The audience is the final judge of humor and it is left for them to decide and interpret it either positively or otherwise.

“ Humor cannot be examined in isolation from an audience. Only the audience can decide whether an attempt at humor will result in the sense of humor” (Weinberger and Spott 2006, 56). Although an advertiser decides all the details of an advertisement and its method of execution, only the audience can decide if the advertisement will be hilarious or not. Using

humor in advertising works out well or otherwise depending on the type and moral composition as well as the mood of the audience at that point in time.

Therefore, humor is quite individualistic and making up what one thinks is humorous is not sufficient. Gulas and Weinberger remark: “ Advertising humor appears to be a significant risk because of individual cultural reference points, taste, interest or educational level, humor may not be appropriate and could affect reaction to humor and have unwanted result” (2006: 119, 194). Generally speaking, the use of effective humor draws people to your message. It is not only engaging the prospect, but also getting people to remember the product or advertisement.

However, there are some disadvantages and the downsides of using humor in advertising too. As advertising humor needs to be well suited to its audience, it can be risky because it is very subjective. Due to different cultural backgrounds and tastes, humor may annoy or offend the audience in some way. This is especially true if the audience is pious and such religious beliefs make certain sexual scenes to be offensive and turns off such category of people instead of attracting and winning them as demonstrated in one of the pictures below (Fig 1).

Humor in advertising can also backfire and achieve the opposite effect as well as detract audience from the advertising message since advertising humor may cause confusion to people. In order to give more understanding about the pros and cons of advertising humor and how humor works in advertising to create consumers or motivate the public, three examples which are BMW poster, Sony poster and Anti-smoking poster will be

discussed. By using advertising humor in brand, it can increase the awareness of the brand as that humor, whether delivered through visuals or words, has its greatest influence on brand awareness (Percy 1997).

The BMW advertisement in figure1 above is for a luxury performance car which is red color. The use of red according to Gulas and Weinberger is that “ Red symbolizes flamboyance and it is expressive” (2006: 79). Looking carefully at the figure depicted, there is a couple on the bed and the female is enjoying sex and the scene is replaced suddenly by a page of BMW car advertisement with the inscription: ‘ The Ultimate attraction’ written at the centre page of the poster.

The humorous incongruity combining with the visuals and text intensify that the car as female fantasy object is more powerful than the sex with a sexy man. It gives a sense of humor that the BMW car is very enjoyable and pleasant to senses. That it is more reasonable and attractive . This portrayal of BMW advertiser is used to convey the message that a woman can enjoy the advertisement more than any sexual experience although this is not gender homogenous as the males may find this offensive and insulting.

However, the BMW advertisement mainly creates humor with the sex but not the gender, in order to raise the attraction and attention of the brand. By the way, Gulas and Weinberger admit that “ This advertisement does attract people’s attention and have a positive effect on creating consumers” (2006: 79). The second example is another advertisement from a famous brand, Sony “ PlayStation Portable”. Some of advertisements in the Sony “

PlayStation Portable” target market experienced positively the humor in it. However, the advertisement also offended many.

The Sony “ PlayStation Portable” advertisement in figure 2 is one such example. The figure simply demonstrates the slogan of “ PlayStation Portable White is coming”. Looking at the poster more closely, there is a white woman who uses her hand to hold the black woman lower jaw, and you can see from the white woman eye that there is an expression of provocation and arrogance. That of the black woman shows that she was offended and maltreated and helpless and the scenario foreshadows the next slogan in the picture that:” PlayStation Portable White is coming”.

But this weak humor does cause backfire, detracts from the advertising message and irritates more than amuse the audience. This humor depicts an heterogeneous idea and as such is likely going to be offensive to individuals with black skin leading credence to the fact that “ Humor is dangerous area which works differently in different cultures and subcultures. Since it operates close to the edge of acceptability and respectability, it usually offends someone” (Saunders 1997, 18).