

Semiotics a science that studies the properties of signs and sign systems

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Semiotics is the study of culture and communication through conscious and unconscious methods that are used to understand areas such as advertising, retail and consumer behaviour . In contrast with traditional qualitative market research, semiotics looks to answer how perceptions, beliefs and attitudes towards products end up in peoples' heads by using an outside-in approach . Throughout history the most represented object in advertising campaigns is the human body as it allows the consumer relate to the products being sold . A good representative of semiotics can be found in advertising, as the meaning behind most campaigns now runs deeper than its face value. For example, Dove's 2004 " Real Beauty" campaign was a broadcast code aimed at the global female population to negate the negative views of the true meaning of ' beauty' within the media market. The visual signs in this campaign clearly are the women's bodies with contrasting pairs, while the emphasis of the message screams " we feel great in our beautiful bodies". However, a more cynical viewpoint can also be examined and will be explained upon further reading.

Denotation refers to the literal meaning or concept that an advertisement is referring to . The denotation within the photo can be the women of different sizes, ethnicity and body figures all standing together. The backdrop is also plain white to allow the attention to be drawn to the natural beauty of the models. Connotation refers to the personal and socio-cultural ideas underpinning the advertisement . This can be the self-confidence and positivity in each woman's natural beauty and raise awareness of how society has viewed female standards of beauty up to this point. The slogan " Real Beauty Campaign" also highlights the larger issue which is the need to

create a more positive message towards women as most suffer with negative personal body issues due to current media trends. Many brands highlight that only women of a certain height and body shape are beautiful leading to these negative issues. However, this campaign by Dove was created to combat these ideas and invite consumers to become involved in this movement of embracing all forms of beauty.

The use of ethos shows that Dove is trying to heighten their reputation by appealing to the emotive side of women. Although no product is shown in the photo it has a dualistic vision of signs that suggests that any product produced by Dove will lead to a natural confident beauty. More even, any product from any company using this backdrop for their advertising would project the image that the use or consumption of the product will make women feel good about themselves. Imagine what would have happened had McDonalds launched this programme successfully.

Looking at the campaign in a more cynical view it can be argued that Theodor Adorno's theory of pseudo individuality relates to the false sense of personal portrayal people feel they express about themselves. Dove uses this theory to influence their consumers into believing they are being different and individual when in fact they are causing the consumer to become dependent on their products. By using regular women in the campaign, Dove targets more discreetly to the low self-esteem of the consumer so they now trust the brand to accept them and their flaws. The consumer is unable to recognise that they have now become dependent upon the brand and products and prefers to preserve the illusion of free

choice. The campaign may also be seen as a symbolic resource for the positive construction of a woman's identity. This can be achieved through mediated experience where the campaign may vary in its relevance to each individual but still creates an impact through mass-communication .

Therefore, semiotics and symbolic resources can be compared within this campaign. Both the semiotics and symbolic aspects can be compared and contrasted for both positive and negative aspects. Throughout the campaign, many women attached a brand loyalty to Dove , showing that its effects were not only semiotic but also reached a symbolic consumption to create an identity that they accept the natural beauty each woman possesses. The brand director of skin cleansing at Unilever, Jennifer Bremner stated that they “ believe conversation leads to brand love, and brand love leads to brand loyalty” . Dove understood that by causing a mass impact to the media they would influence consumers to become more attached to their products as they targeted issues many other brands wouldn't. Their unique viewpoint to the campaign allowed them to fill a gap in the market that they could profit on.

However, a more cynical view to the campaign is that Dove created a unique marketing method to get consumers and media talking about the brand. As a corporation, their real interest is in making more profits and less about the individual buyers. From a critical point of view, striving to create the self through symbolic consumption may enslave us in the illusive world of consumption while semiotics allows us to understand how this occurs .

Overall, Doves campaign achieved a mass debate into the ideals and norms

of beauty in the media industry and has since allowed women to feel more confident within themselves. The marketers clearly used their knowledge to the full and created a very effective and successful campaign projecting the right message to the targeted consumer group while maximizing sales for their client.