

Subliminal advertising research paper example

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Introduction

Subliminal messages are messages created that make a person to respond to the message without being aware of it. The process of responding to stimuli without being conscious of the stimuli is referred to as subliminal perception. Scientists define such perception to be any perception caused by stimuli below an individual's threshold for conscious perception. Research into the field of subliminal perception has shown that subliminal messages do not affect the character or behavior of the person. Messages inform of voices, print media or video can be passed so quickly such that the brain has the time to perceive the message but does not have the conscious thoughts to evaluate the message. Psychiatrists have argued, given a long message that requires conscious perception will lead to a discussion, argument, evaluation and possibly rejection of the idea presented in the message. Therefore to pass messages without any resistance, subliminal messages are used.

Early use and Experiments

The first scientifically conducted experiment of subliminal messages was by a psychologist James Vicary. The experiment was conducted at a movie theatre as several people watched a movie called 'the picnic'. In this experiment the words "Hungry? Eat popcorn, drink coca cola" were displayed on the left end of the screen and it lasted only 0.003 seconds. This is very fast for anyone to commit a conscious analysis of the message, but the goal of perception was already attained. Sales of Coca Cola products and popcorns in theaters increased by nearly 57.8 percent. Several psychiatrists approved the result of the experiments. Governments and big advertising

corporations admitted that the result was convincing.

However, the use of subliminal messages in media had began as way back as during World War I. Print media was the first kind of media to use such kind of messages. In 1917, a newspaper cover pages incorporated embedded SEXes in the messages . At the time, such messages in print media were assumed to be either a mistake or just a joke in passing. It was until 1950s that the world of advertising and media introduced the use of subliminal messages. The first recorded case of subliminal advertising in television was by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in 1956. In this trail, the BBC flashed a series of images on the screen rather quickly. The result was that, most of the audience perceived the message in the images but did not take keen interest in the message. This was a successful step in advertising. The experiments moved to other states such as Canadian Broadcasting Corporation which used this kind of approach in their TV commercials. Other stations in the United States and Mexico took up the idea of subliminal messages in advertising.

This kind of advertising was not only limited to TV and Print media. According to Sheenan (2004) radio industry also experimented with such messages. A Chicago radio station experimented with word such as “ how about a coffee” and “ that coke is cold”. These messages were quite “ sub-audible” and appeared masked in music played. By the 1970s several commercial advertising firms had suggested the inclusion of subliminal messages in planes and movies. Supermarkets were slashing theft cases by embedding messages such “ we are watching” as well as improving sales by having machines running subliminal messages outside their premises .

The entire idea of subliminal messages is contained in perception. Most of us are familiar with the five senses suggested to us by Aristotle, these are, sight, hearing, smell and touch. However, scientists have suggested that there are nearly thirty seven known sensory inputs to the brain . It is the function of the brain to select which of the senses is to be considered and which is to be disregarded. The process of choosing which stimuli is important and which is not happens in the subconscious of the brain. A good example of such multiple sensory operations is called then ' cocktail effect'. In this hypothesis, the brain actively perceives all that is happening around even if one is fully engrossed in a conversation. Words such as a person's name, sex, blood and death are known to trigger attention.

Creative and Strategic use of Subliminal Messages in Advertising

Advertising has been defined in the by scholars as both an art and a science . In that, while an advertisement message has to be both relevant and original, it must also have its impact for it to work. This is commonly referred to as the ROI (relevant, original and effect) effect in an advert message. Advertisements are meant to generate a big idea, which is an advertising strategy that ensures that the message contained in the advertisement is both attention catching and easily memorable. Thus the challenge for advertisers is finding a convergence between original ideas conveyed in an interesting manner getting the attention of the audience. In ensuring the required effect, two strategies have been suggested in formulating the message. First is the hard-sell strategy. In this strategy, the message should invoke a response based on a logical conclusion upon

getting the message. The second strategy is the soft-sell, which uses emotional appeals in images and messages. The audience should make a decision to purchase based on the emotions created in the advert .

In developing a creative idea, Shimp (2004) suggests the use of a juxtaposition of two seemingly different ideas in the same context. Creativity may also imply the use of analogies and metaphors that previously did not exist. In creating a new advert, seeking for idea that will prompt intuitive, non-verbal or emotion based thinking. In creating a creative advert, the creator should be able to visualize the intended message and should be open to new experiences. Advertising should not have a tradition rather new ideas should be introduced every time.

After developing a creative idea, also known as the big idea, the next step is finding a good strategy for delivering the idea in the advertisement. There are many media outlets that one can use to pass the advert. Each media outlet requires a different strategy. For instance, in case of television advert, there is an assortment of strategy that would pass a subliminal message. Employing a short demonstration might be helpful in advertising technical products. Such a product can also be advertised using a non verbal video depicting a problem-to -solution situation .

On the other hand, in print media several strategies have proved to work in subliminal advertising. Images have been said to carry a thousand words. An image of a lady holding a drink filled with ice cubes is said to be epitome of all subliminal messages . In analyzing the lady, wearing a satyr is a sign of full submission. The use of ice cubes in any advertisement is said to bring the sex appeal in any of the sexes. The messages are even as detailed as

how the fingers are folded as the lady holds the drink. It has been proved that whatever appeals to sexual arousal of the public will improve on terms of sales.

Conclusion

Subliminal messages have worked in the past and still do in present times. Its use has been controversial to the point that the same doctor who performed the theatre experiment later denied ever performing such an experiment. Bunn (2003) argues that the greatest trick that could ever be pulled was convincing the world that what exist actually does not. This way, no one will be bothered about fighting what ' does not exist'. The key is to use such a technique in a disguised manner. Appealing to senses beyond the normal five senses seems to have a more cognitive effect. The message is not strong to elicit an argument in the brain but is good enough to be perceived.

References

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