

What is ethical advertising? discuss how designers address such issue nowadays wh...

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Cultural Histories & Theories: 22 Beyond Shopping: The Responsibilities of Consumption
Title: What is ethical advertising? Discuss how designers address such issue nowadays when they convey their message to consumers. Advertising is often seen as “ social messages” that have been given a purpose to attract viewers’ attention. As aimed at the general public, they should be conscientious, or in other words, good. Yet not all aesthetically commendable advertisements convey worthy messages or promote harmless product.

The advertising industry sometimes is claimed for not adhering to clear ethical standards. Some suggest that the industry as a whole lacks a strong code of professional conduct and does not always distinguish correctly between what is morally right and wrong, instead it solely focuses on making money. As a result, it ends up becoming a very gray area, as unlike a legal issue, which the law clearly states what can and cannot be done, the area of ethics in the advertising industry is far more subjective.

Ranging from advertising cigarettes that are apparently known to cause cancer; to claiming that a sugar-coated cereal is “ part of a nutritious breakfast” for children when only the accompanying milk or toast has the actual nutritional value; to implying that the use of a particular perfume will bring crowd of admirers to one’s doorstep. In some cases, legal issues do become involved; the use of excessive “ glue or paint” to make a product look more ideal in an advertisement is not only unethical, it is also illegal.

Dating back to the early decades, advertising images were intended to be read literally, without much meaning beyond their surface value. However
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after decades of revolutions, the way advertising delivers messages has been changed drastically. Considering Steven Meisel's 2001 "Four Days In LA" image of two women in a Versace advertisement. Two almost identical Supermodels Amber Valetta and Georgina Grenville were portrayed as two well-off women in the photograph, who both dressed in gold, diamonds, and Versace in a luxury mansion.

Alongside the scene set, the portrait of the two women associates the Versace brand with the high-end society. The image creates its realism from the natural light which leads the viewers to believe that what we see before us is far less contrived than the abstract quality of typical fashion advertisement photography. On the other hand, an advertising image can indeed be seen as a narrative with explanation, complication, climax, and resolution. In fact, they are all conveyed in an instant instead of several minutes of copy-reading.

As mentioned in Considine (2000), Images, whether natural or manipulated on a computer, have usurped words as the new narrative. In 2006, photography is the new copy. We now expect photographs to tell us a story, whether it's through photo-story realism or contrived composition. [...] Ten years ago, advertising would be about the one iconic image. Now it's more about stories than concepts. It makes you work a little bit harder, which makes you own the image ... It sticks.

Due to the furious competition in the advertising world, advertising nowadays becomes so competitive in the way it conveys a message, When

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you have an interchangeable product, like water, you can't ask that there be a taste distinction in the product. So you have to generate the taste distinction somewhere else... In the area of luxury goods, if you look at what they do, they're close to the same things. There's no intrinsic difference. Which is why, to be successful, you have to generate, as Tom Ford does, some outrageous advertising, or some outrageous display in the design of the hardware.

From a marketing standpoint, I feel quite sympathetic. What do you do when your product is very similar to everyone else's? This is part of the brand's expectation. Part of the expectation is the Gucci is going to this place. There are not really luxury goods at all. The only thing extraordinary about it is the advertising. I'm not saying some of the stuff isn't very expensive, but they make most of their money on 18-year-old girls buying a purse. It's the massive-ification of luxury. What you're really buying and tasting is the advertising. Lockwood, 3rdFebruary 2003) Shock value is often presented in attempt to break through the ad clutter and help building up the profile of a brand with an extreme sensibility. In 2003, Marc Jacobs starred Winona Ryder, who was found guilty of shoplifting his clothing from Saks Fifth Avenue, in his spring ad campaign; and Tom Ford, the former Gucci and Yves Saint Laurent's designer, presented Gucci ad campaign which portrayed a woman's pubic area with a shaved "G" letter, and as well a male model spanking a female in another ad.

As mentioned by George Fertitta, chief executive officer of Margeotes,

Fertitta, the New York ad agency, [as for Gucci] they've really crafted an

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image that's gone from completely uncool to in style and as cool as it gets. [The 'G' image] is a small piece of the cool puzzle. It's fine and won't turn people off. Gucci is all about [Tom] Ford and he has that kind of talent. Nothing you can do can hurt that. He's impervious. (Lockwood, 3rdFebruary 2003) From looking at the two Gucci's ads, the images are some examples of encoding of a visual narrative in a single photograph.

And they both presented as full as they need to be for the viewers to appreciate it: it contains an exposition (the brand name, and the set of costume), climax (the provocative actions happening in the image) and resolution. Considering Gucci as a luxury brand which topped itself in a high-end market, the customer base would generally be looking for a brand with a strong defined image. In order to be successful, such brand has to be creative and generate ideas like what Tom Ford did for Gucci, some outrageous advertising, or some outrageous display in the design of the hardware.

As they understand what the niche market wants ??? the exclusivity and independent status conveyed by being outside the mainstream, a brand sometimes may desire an ad with a strong personality that even runs the risk of alienating non-customers as long as it creates a tighter bond with the target segment. Meanwhile, looking at the CK Jeans and CK Collection campaigns which starred Kate Moss and some teenage models in 1997, one can certainly see how a brand has operated itself in a market saturated with other high-end jeans manufacturers, all selling products that differ in appearance and even less in functionality.

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With a theme of aspirational, healthy sexuality, their ads often tend to mirror the spirit of youth, a certain sector of youth. As mentioned by Ronnie Cooke Newhouse, the creative director of CRK, Calvin Klein's in-house ad agency. I think sexuality is part of jeans. In a way, it's a uniform in the same way a suit is a uniform for older people, With jeans, somehow there's a lot of expression in what they choose, whether it be low-rider, flare, wide-leg, tight or baggy. It's an expression of their sexuality.

I don't think sex sells jeans, but people's own sexuality is expressed by them. (Lockwood, 31st January 1997) Calvin Klein's tremendous success in its way of narrative in advertising has been reflected from its ever soaring sale since they launched their campaigns in 1997; even they had once been in trouble with the Justice Department in the States, as some felt the brand bordered on child pornography, a storm of media activity ensued. In conclusion, it is indeed the visual literacy of modern viewers that makes the telling of elaborate narrative possible in a single image.

A sense of communication is built in between the viewers themselves and the advertisements, which involves the viewers' ability to reference abstract concepts even if a clear definition is not explicitly given. Meanwhile, targeting allows the designer to better understand what level and type of visual literacy can be expected of the ad's audience: in which also what visual references they will understand and what concepts will appeal to them. By given that knowledge, a brand which includes the designers, photographers and artists, etc. can encode the favorable messages and transform them into different forms of narratives and representations in their

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