Semiotic Analysis for the Advertisement "Fashion Claims More Victims Than You Think" by WWF



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CN3609 – Copywriting & Creative Evaluation

Spring Semester 2018

Analyses of Print Advertisement.

5/3/2018

Abstract:

The advertisement “Fashion claims more victims than you think” was created by the global organization WWF in 2007. And it was held the winner at the Concerned Communicator Award. The ad tried to inform people about the abusive behaviors towards leopards, raise awareness about the unethical ways that they treat this species, and to wanted to emphasize the intervention of human actions towards nature. The purpose of this study is to thoroughly analyze the signifier and signified elements of this ad by using semiotics. The semiotic approach that this ad belong is the social advertising that tries to raise awareness. Semiotics emphasized and helped with the analyses of the ad and how the visual and text elements delivered the initial. I used semiotics to analyze the body message, logo, and visual image of the ad to see what they signify.

WWF (World Wildlife Fund) is one of the biggest conservation organizations in the world and it started in 1961 (WWF in Brief, 2017). The mission of this organization is to stop the degradation of the environment and build a better future for both people and animals. They try to maintain biological diversity, to check if all the renewable natural resources are sustainable, and finally to try and minimize pollution (WWF in Brief, 2017). WWF is one of the most recognizable organizations globally when it comes to the solution of the environmental problems. They try to protect the wildlife, are very active, and they always fight for a better future. WWF is also known for the dozens of campaigns that they have created for the protection of the animals, to inform people, and increase environmental awareness. They always chose to approach people with very unique and creative campaigns. With this way they become easily recollected and everyone who is aware with the organization they can recognize their campaigns.

The print advertisement that I choose was a campaign from WWF with the message "Fashion claims more victims than people think". It was an ad created in 2007 and tried to inform people about the abusive behaviors towards leopards. In 1990 leopards were listed in the red list as Threaded (T), and after 6 years they were listed as Lower Risk/least concern (LR/lc). In 2002 they were considered as Least Concern (LC), and in 2008 they became again Near Threatened (NT) (Panthera Pardus, n.d.). This shows that WWF had to act and inform people that leopards are facing extinction and about the abusive behaviors. Moreover, in 2007 the population of the Amur leopards were estimated to be from 25 to 34 (Leopard Near Extinction -- Only About 30 Remain, 2007). So, WWF organization identified the problem and they created the ad "Fashion claims

more victims than people think". The structure of the advertisement was very simple. The ad showed a mother leopard walking with her baby in the grass/forest. Both the mother and the baby leopard have size clothing tags in their backs. The size clothing tag on the back of the mother is the number XL (extra-large) and for the baby leopard is the number S (small). Moreover, at the upper right corner there is a text message that says, "Fashion claims more victims than you think" and right next to the message of the ad there is the logo of WWF organization. This extraordinary hard-hitting ad was held the winner at the Concerned Communicator Award, and it was created by the agency of Ogilvy and Mather in Mumbai. The Concerned Communicator Award is well known for the philanthropic actions and it is a contest where advertisers are called to create ads that can touch the heart of people. These awards are known for bringing together people who are like minded and their mission is to create a better world (Concerned Communicator Awards, n.d.).

Advertising is a very important means of communication in any society (Akpan, et al., 2013). Advertisers have many ways in transmitting their message to the consumers and in many cases, this can be achieved through ads. The semiotic approach transmits messages through signs or symbols. Signs can be a sound, image, text, flavors, and objects (Akpan, et al., 2013). Ferdinand de Saussure stated that the signs have two terms. The first term is the signifier which is the form the sign takes, and second term is the signified which is the concept that represents (Akpan, et al., 2013). Moreover, it is a process where events and things come to be recognized as signs that are important for marketing scholars and practitioners (Pinson, 1998). In semiotics some signs might not have a meaning if people have never experienced them before. So, signs can have a meaning when people

are exposed to these signs and when they are significant to them. Semiotics is one of the many techniques that allows the analysis of signs and they also offer a critical analysis of the text. Also, they help people to understand and interpret the text. Moreover, it offers a critically analyses and add meaning to the text (Akpan, et al., 2013). This does not happen because semiotics shed light to people minds because people on different cultures understand different messages. Advertisers try to transmit not only messages but to sell products or services, to propagate ideologies and to change behaviors (Akpan, et al., 2013). But this cannot be achieved by simply presenting images to consumers, it takes time and a lot of work to create an ad that will meet the basic marketing objectives, it will be creative work, identifying needs and target groups, will deliver and desire satisfaction more effectively than the competitors, and without offending anyone (Pinson, 1998).

In print ads sometimes, the symbols are signs that stand for something else (Akpan, et al., 2013). So, one of the most common signs in print advertising is the image of the product or the brand combined with the text. Fairclough stated that any discursive event has three dimensions. The first one is the written part or spoken text, the second one is what each person interprets from this discursive event, and finally how it is applied in any society (Najafian & Ketabi, 2011). So, every advertisement might correspond to many people, but it might not mean anything to other people. And this the reason advertisers have a very specific target group when it comes to ads.

The ad “Fashion claims more victims than you think” by WWF is social ad that is consisted of signs, and the system that these signs make sense is the social advertising. Social ads do not advertise products or services, but they address social problems. Every society must deal with social problems like, child and women abuse, animal abuse, drug

addicts, animal extinction, environmental depredation etc. So, the aim of social campaigns is to address the problem and help raise awareness among society members (Bila, 2011). Social campaigns belong to the category of non-commercial advertising, where the intention is to communicate an important message. Moreover, people must feel the responsibility to help and change their behavior for a better future, because without a future there is no hope. Social advertising and non-social advertising are directly related to ethics, and all ads must follow the Code of Ethics. This code states that all ads must be decent, truthful, and must always have social responsibility (Bila, 2011). Furthermore, ads are directly connected with the fields of phycology and sociology, thus emotions and behaviors. So, social campaigns generate, target, and deliver marketing communications, like non-social advertising.

The purpose of WWF was similar. They wanted to educate, inform, and change people's behaviors towards fur products from leopards, and wanted to underline that people heavily harm nature. Human actions intervene and harm the environment in many ways, such us cutting trees for building more cities, create more paper, poaching animals, polluting ecosystems etc. This is happening because of the commercialization of nature, people see nature as source of money and not as resource of life. These messages were established through the structure of the ad. The message of the ad is the phrase "Fashion claims more victims than you think," which was placed with small white letters at the upper left corner of the ad. The people that created the ad placed the logo of the WWF organization right next to the message. The purpose of that was so that the viewer can critically analyze and read the message and recognize immediately the organization, which is well known for taking environmental actions. The message indicates more than

one meaning with the phrase “fashion claims more victims than you think”. The semiotic approach suggests that depending on the knowledge of the viewer, each person can interpret and critically analyze a different meaning. The main message is clear and obvious, that leopards treated in unethical ways and that individuals harm nature by following trends. But by applying semiotics in this ad each person might understand a different meaning of what it is implied in the message.

The interpretation and the meaning that WWF established in this ad was clever. The main message “fashion claims more victims than you think” suggests that there are two types of victims the first one is the fashion victims and the second one leopards. A fashion victim is always following trends and do not care about consequences (Fashion Victim, n.d.). Throughout the years people have considered to be victims of fashion, and this will always happen since fashion changes frequently and people will follow them. For example, women used to wear corsets so tight that they could not move or breath, and men used to wear stiff collars also known as “father killers” were they could die from suffocation (Culture - Fashion victims: History's most dangerous trends, 2015). The fashion victims only care about the result and how they look and do not think or care if these trends could be harmful for them or others. The message of the advertisement suggests that the fashion victims that wear fur products from leopards do not think of what the impacts on nature are. Since the population of leopards in 2007 was approximately 30, this is a huge environmental disaster that could suggest that it a serious reason for someone to refuse to wear fur products from leopards. But the victims of fashion do not care or think what are the impacts on animals and nature every time the

purchase a fur coat from an animal. So, the second interpretation of the ad could be considered ironic.

The semiotics signs used at the visual image of the ad where two, the leopards and the size tags. If you separately take them, they interpret a different meaning. Leopards are wild powerful animals mostly located in Africa and they live in the wild. They symbolize a powerful and dangerous animal that leaves in the wild. On the other hand, the price tags suggest the sizes of clothes and it is a symbolic icon of fashion, which relates the social issues with the fashion world. But in the social ad the leopards have the price tags attached to their backs and they are presented as "living clothes," that walk in the forest, as if nothing is wrong. These two elements, the leopards, and the size tags, have a completely different meaning when they are combined. They symbolize that the skin of leopards is used for clothing products and that human actions see nature as a source of profit. Furthermore, if we combine the visual and text elements together, then the impact of the advertisement becomes more powerful. It suggests that the fashion victims are victimizing a family of leopards for fur products. For example, Fur coats have been a trend of fashion for many years. There are many ethical issues when it comes to fur products. And many people do not seem to care. Animals in fur farms are treated in terrible and unethical ways (Why Fur Is Back in Fashion, n.d.). Therefore, WWF wanted to do something about the abusive behaviors towards leopards and try to change the behavior of people.

The approach that they used was very unique. They attached the size tag in the back of the wild leopards who walk in the forest. This represents that these animals are heavily used for fur products, and they also show the social relationship between people

who have different attitudes towards nature. These people can be identified as the once that will stand up and protect the nature and those who will harm wildlife and nature. This conflict is represented with the image of the ad. Moreover, the colors used in this advertisement wanted to emphasize that even though these leopards are in their natural habitat they are still victims. One of the main reasons that these animals face extinction is due to poaching. In 2007, 126 leopards died due to illegal human activities (Leopard Poaching Statistics, 2018). And in the 2 previous years (2005-2006) 365 leopards died due to poaching (Leopard Poaching Statistics, 2018). These numbers are enormous comparing with the population of the species. So, WWF needed to act and do something about it. The semiotics techniques applied in this ad helped people to understand the message that wearing clothes from animal skin is unethical and that nature is life and not a source of money. Semiotics are very important in advertising because without it ads like this one wouldn't have an impact.

Finally, the logo of the organization is a panda in a white background and below the panda the we see the name of the organization. The panda of the logo is a sign and more specifically a signifier, and the interpretation that someone gives to the logo is called signifier. For the people that are not familiar with the WWF organization and their logo, they will interpret the logo as a panda and not as something more. But for the people that are familiar with the organization they will immediate recognize the logo and give a different interpretation. They will most probably translate the meaning of the logo as the company that constantly fights for animal rights and environmental degradation. Moreover, they might instantly recollect some previous campaign or action from WWF, with similar context. The importance of semiotics in this ad is vital. Because without

semiotics both groups will understand something completely different by simply looking at the logo. Additionally, WWF offered further information about the issue by simple writing “www.panda.org” in the bottom right of the ad. We see that the logo and the website of the organization are both placed in the right side of the ad. The reason that they placed them in the same side is because consumers can identify the organization and at the same time look for more information about the issue. It is easier for the eye and it does not confuse the consumer. So, people who have interpreted the message and want to know more about the issue can go and find more about it.

The analyses of the ad “Fashion claims more victims than you think” showed the importance of semiotics in advertising. Without semiotics most of the visual and text elements of the advertisement would not make sense. The ad had a very powerful message that can be remembered easily. The message that the ad tried to pass was that many animals especially leopards, are victims of the fur products and trends in the fashion world. A world that treats this species and nature with a terrible and unethical way.

The reason that I choose this advertisement is because I have a strong environmental awareness and when I saw the ad for the first time I could not forget it. I believe that it is very creative ad that catches the eye of people and it is unforgettable. The message that is stated in the ad was so powerful that made me curious and wanted to interpret the meaning of the ad. Both the visual image and the text of the advertisement where unique and special. I really liked how an ad so simply in structure had established something so magnificent.

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