Advertising and Consumers' Enthusiasm

Nuannuan Wang[1,2]*

[1]School of Literature, Communication University of China, Beijing 100024, China

[2]Department of Media and Communication, University of Leicester, Leicester LE17RH, UK

*Corresponding author: Nuannuan Wang, allie_wang09@126.com

Abstract: Advertising tends to portray products as a magical power to achieve a happier life, a success in career, or an enhancement in self-esteem, which plays an indispensable role in promoting consumers' enthusiasm towards products. The aim of this article is to explore the connection between advertising, purchase attitude and behaviors from the semiotic perspective. This involves the significance of advertising's development and impacts, the persuasive process of advertising, semiotic system, and latent values in advertisements.

Keywords: Advertising; Persuasive process; Consumer enthusiasm; Semiotic system

1. Introduction

As one of the traditional channels of communication, advertising aims to recommend products to potential consumers by designing a symbolic system and endowing meanings to the advertised products. Johnson (2008) claims that advertising is the "engine of consumer culture" [1]. Exposing to consumer culture, no one can ignore its persuasive process. Advertising serves economical and ideological functions in society and possesses the power of persuasion, which has an influence on individual and social behaviors. From semiotic perspective, it is significant to explore the persuasive process of advertising.

2. Development and Impact of Advertising

Berger (2011) introduced that advertising originally refers to any form of public statement and declaration for the purpose of promoting commodities or services [2]. The root of advertising is to be used as a mechanism to prepare and organize enough marketplaces for commodities in modern industrialized society. The forms and styles of advertising changed with the span of time and the update of media platforms. Lury (2011) summarizes the different focus of advertising in different times [3]. The basic information about the product, such as quality, function and price, are stressed during 1890-1925. In the period of 1925-1945, the benefit that products can provide to consumers is the emphasis of advertisings. Then, some social motivations have been added in advertisings during 1945-1965, which try to link products to social relations. Lately, during 1965-1985, the significance of consuming a certain product in a social context had been emphasized, and consumption had been connected to a form of fictitious pleasure. Nowadays, advertising has become an inevitable element for communication. There are two main functions of advertising, one is to sell things to people, and the other one is to create meanings through structures of symbols. By advertising, people's attention can be directed to the qualities and attributes of one specific kind of product, and consumers' attitude towards products can be influenced according to the conveyed significance. As a

consequence, advertising not only has an impact on economy, but also influences our value and makes people like what they purchase. It has become one of the ways of influencing people's value, imagination and lifestyle, which was originally designed for the promotion of products and services. As adverting is considered as both "a mirror of society" and "an agent of change."

3. Critiques on Advertising

Due to the expansion of commercial, critiques about advertising are noticeable. Klein (2000) suggests that advertising and branding are applied in economic society to deliver information and manipulate message for the requirement of demand [4]. Researches pay more attention to analyze the cultural role of products, seeks the relationship between advertisings and the commodity fetishism, and explains the role that advertising play in mediating the relationship of person and objects. Advertising is condemned as a trigger of materialism in market society, which inevitable promotes blind consumption activity. McAllister (2000) believes that "puffery and promises of emotional and social rewards" have been identified in current advertising, which cannot be easily achieved [5]. All the languages used in advertising related to the products are highly replaced by the descriptions of something else. On the one hand, advertising is a magnificent tool to enhance the modern civilization. On the other hand, advertising is an effective persuasive art to convince people to spend more money on the things they don't really need. Dyer (1982) compares advertising to the myths in primitive societies, which means that people's thoughts are organized and guided by values conveyed by simple advertising stories of explaining the world they live in [6]. Therefore, advertising possesses the same social role with art and religion. In some aspect, advertising has been connected with commodity fetishism.

4. Persuasive Strategies of Advertising

Advertising is a furtive type of persuasion and it has become an essential part of modern social discourse. Ju (2009) suggests that the purpose of advertising is to persuade consumers to purchase the product by a system of persuasive signs, which may play an indispensable role in promoting the mass enthusiasm [7]. Just as The Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA) points out that "advertising presents the most persuasive selling message to the right prospects for the product or service at the lowest possible cost." The developments of advertising style have been commented by Raymond Williams in 1980 [8]. In his research, the persuasive strategies usually applied in advertising are summarized, such as puffery and provide rewards, and the function of teaching social and personal values has also been claimed. It is introduced that some strategies applied in advertisings, such as create good reputation of firms or products by advertising text, emphasize some specific qualities and attribute of product through the use of language, the design of contract phrases in different visible patterns，and the application of different font design and format.

4.1. Form a semiotic system

Hodge and Kress (1988) agree that semiotics can be applied to conduct a systematic, thorough and coherent research of communication phenomena [9]. For example, semiotics can be used to reveal the hidden meaning under the surface, and it also helps people understand how elements generate meanings by a structured system. Advertising is formed by a collection of persuasive signs to influence viewers' purchase attitude and behaviors and instruct consumers how to meet their inner needs and desires by purchasing one specific product according to what they have been told. Typical semiotic strategies and principles are frequently used in advertising. Firstly, appellation is the common language strategy employed by advertisements. Appellation refers those advertisements specifically speak to each one of viewers and treat every viewer as a special individual. It is an effective way to make every "you (viewer)" participates in the conversation and put you in the advertising stories. Secondly, the semiotic system in advertising serves the purpose of

delivering "knowledge." Absence of participants or objects is usually applied in advertising to leave absent space for viewers to fill in, which aims to invite viewers to decipher the latent meanings and values expressed in advertisings. Thirdly, the shape and size, the color system and the lightness and shadow are frequently used to highlight the subject of the image, which combine with a set of surroundings in advertisement to provide a suitable platform for the display of the advertising stories. Last, the process of separation is the typical technique to form a connection between the product and consumers. The product is usually portrayed as a lost part of you, which could be your personal style, your productivity, or your passion. You cannot make yourself a whole without these products.

4.2. Correspond to consumers' knowledge and experience

To open up market for new products or concepts, advertising tends to connect the characteristics ad attributes of "the new product" with consumers' previous knowledge and experience. Advertising designed for the new and fresh products usually provides less descriptive information and tries to draw connections between products with consumers' knowledge and ideology. Generally, consumers' knowledge and ideology are main elements for the successful communication between advertising and consumer. As Williamson (1978) mentions, "anterior" knowledge is the core element to guarantee viewers can understand the knowledge delivered by advertising, which means that viewers of advertising are necessary to engage themselves in the position of perceiving the sign system with some previous knowledge [10]. The process of making up stories in advertising can be conceptualized as a system of combing significations and differences, which can be paralleled to the activity of describing the society where we live in. There is a mutual-influenced relationship between advertising and consumers' knowledge and experience. On the one hand, consumers' culturized knowledge and personal experience help them understand the meaning conveyed by advertisings. On the other hand, the messages expressed by advertising help consumers establish the basic cognition of the new products and benefit the continuous development of the new products. Ju (2009) suggests Korean mobile phone advertising tries to form a link between the produce with consumers' daily experience [7].

4.3. Reshape consumer's self-identification

Generally, advertising contains important content (text), which is the representation of society and its ideology. The messages of adverting have inevitably penetrated into our social and cultural field. With attached meaning, advertising make consumers recognize their own identities by the commodities they purchase and classify their social positions. These ads want to convey idea to spectators that people can create and recognize their personalities, qualities and lifestyles by purchasing the product with some kinds of "images". The image of products created by advertising is its magical power for helping people achieve a better life and meet their inner desire. Just as Williamson (1978) points out, the products have already represented a desired feeling instead of merely reflecting the feeling [10]. Dyer (1982) points out that the product has been created as a social object by the structure of meaning expressed in advertising, which makes products possess more exchange-value compared with use-value. In terms of this, the description of object is usually shifted to the idea related to consumers or human relationship [6]. Ju (2009) conducts a research concerning the persuasive process of modern technology advertising and its cultural and ideological functions in Korea [7]. The images of modern technology have been identified in the research, which include future, hope, success, freedom and self-accomplishment. The process of identifying who we are relates to the process of understanding the ideology expressed in advertising and purchasing one specific produce as what advertising tells us to do.

5. Conclusion

Advertisers try to establish some kinds of relation between products and consumers, which is based on the illusionary images and the promises about what the products can do for us [11]. Advertising tries to insert the advertised product in consumer's daily life as an indispensable object by forming a semiotic system and corresponding to consumers' previous knowledge and experience, which can be used to account for consumers' feeling of an enthusiasm or a compulsion to buy a produce

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

[1] Johnson FL, 2008, Imaging in Advertising: Verbal and Visual Codes of Commerce, Routledge, New York. 81-83.

[2] Berger AA, 2011, Ads, Fads, and Consumer Culture: Advertising's Impact on American Character and Society, Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc, Washington. 235-240.

[3] Lury C, 2011, Consumer Culture 2nd ed., Polity, Cambridge. 156-157.

[4] Klein N, 2000, No Space, No Choice, No Jobs, No Logo, Flamingo, London. 21-30

[5] McAllister MP, 2000, Advertising and Consumer Culture, Mass Communication & Society, 3(4): 347-350.

[6] Dyer G, 1982, Advertising as Communication, Routledge, London. 65-68

[7] Ju H, 2009, Technology and Social Sensibility in South Korea: A Case Study of Mobile Phone Advertising. Communication, Culture & Critique, 2(2):201-220.

[8] Williams R, 1980, Advertising: The magic system. In Problems in Materialism and Culture, Verso, London, 170-195.

[9] Hodge R, Kress G, 1988, Social Semiotics. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, New York. 25-30.

[10] Williamson J, 1978, Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising, Marion Boyars, London. 70-75.

[11] Ellison KL, 2014, Age Transcended: A Semiotic and Rhetorical Analysis of the Discourse of Agelessness in North American Anti-Aging Skin Care Advertisements, Journal of Aging Studies. 29: 20–31