

A Semiotic Study of English Commercial Advertisements

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Visual communication is an intricate process, which involves a broad knowledge of semiotics. Semiotics relates to the study of signs and codes. How these signs and codes are inferred is studied underneath semiotics. The aim of semiotics is to acquire and understand the message carried in advertisements. The arrangement of images, words, colours, and slogans must be interpreted by the audience or consumer. This study examined the communicative values of signs in print advertisement copies of selected American magazines from 1990-2010. Throughout this time, the present study compares the differences that influence marketing because of the development, and implications, of such influence on product marketing. The present study introduces one of the most important theories and models of visual social semiotics, namely Kress and van Leeuwen's grammar of visual design. Meaning of social life are represented in the advertising, passing through social semiotic resources (words, images and colours).

Key words: *Semiotics, Pierce's Triadic model, social semiotic approach, Kress and van Leeuwen, advertising.*

Introduction

Semiotics is defined by Morris (1938) as the general shape of a science of signs. When people talk about others making or giving signs, they usually refer to gestures. There are signs which help to guide and regulate traffic. Wherever people are going, signs appear, such as words, books, architecture, signs in people's behaviour, etc. Semiotics always serve a communicative purpose. Theories of semiotics can be applied to any field since most processes in nature and culture rely on communication, as well as on signs that serve communicative purposes (Patrick, 2002: 75).



Semiotics is frequently used in advertising to signify an advertiser's message through signs and symbols. A sign can be better understood as a signifier or symbol that signifies something else. Advertising is an autonomous adaptable which can, through belief, influence society, culture, and individuals, by making social developments or choosing exact written and semiotic devices (Kress, 1996:115).

Advertising is the activity or professional production of information, for promoting the sale of services or commercial products. Advertising is a subject of numerous studies in diverse disciplines such as mass communications, marketing, sociology, cultural anthropology, social psychology, semiotics and cultural studies. Ahmed (2000: 11) relies on that 'whether from a numerical, qualitative or informative perspective, or an investigator follows the modern social scientific method, study of advertising and other media content is of rising position.' For Cook (1992: 22) the distinguishing feature of advertising discourse is its function, which is usually to persuade people to buy a particular product.

Kress and van Leeuwen (1996:165) posit visual organizations as pointing to specific clarifications of knowledge and forms of social interaction. In terms of social semiotic analysis, an attempt has been made, in this work, to examine the theory proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) for analyzing visual communication including images, words as well as choice of colours. Framing within images disconnects or connects elements of the image, signifying that they belong or do not belong together in some sense.

Literature Review

Semiotics : A General Perspective

The word semiotics is a resultant from the Greek word seme/on, denoting 'sign'. Already, in the seventeenth century, the philosopher John Locke referred to *semiotika*, which he defined as the Doctrine of Signs; the business whereof, is to consider the Nature of Signs, the Mind makes use of the understanding of things, or conveying its knowledge to others' (Martin and Ringham, 2006:1-2).

The chief apprehension of semiotics is the study of the structure of signs. If semiotics is the study of how signs are shaped, transmitted and interpreted, then semiotics is actually a theory of meaning. (Lyons,1978:96).

Morris divided semiotics into three areas:

- 1- Semantics: the connotation of signs (the relationship of signs to what they stand for).
- 2- Syntactics: the associations between signs.
- 3- Pragmatics: the ways in which signs are used and interpreted.

(ibid: 97)

Saussure sees linguistics as only one portion of a much wider science which he called semiology. Both semiology and semiotics get their names from the Greek word *semeion*, which means sign, and they both refer to the study of how signs communicate meanings. Semiotics is now the more common name for this kind of study (Cobler, 2005: 16).

Kress and van Leeuwen: Reading Images

Kress and van Leeuwen developed a methodical system for 'reading' or recounting the 'grammar' of visual images, or the method in which image fundamentals are joined into meaningful units. By expanding Halliday's social semiotic vision of language to include the mode of visual communication, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) recommend all images fulfil Halliday's three main functions through the subsequent patterns:

- 1) Patterns of representation: These resemble to Halliday's 'ideational' meta-function and denote to the visual properties for the exemplification of communications and theoretical affairs between the people, places and things portrayed in the image.
- 2) Patterns of interaction: These resemble to Halliday's 'interpersonal' meta-function and denote to the properties, which build relationships between the spectator, the image producer and the people characterized in the image.
- 3) Patterns of configuration: These resemble to Halliday's 'textual' meta-function and denote to ways in which patterns of depiction and communication cohere into expressive units.

The Model of Analysis

This section presents the model adopted in the analysis of the data. The analysis is both visual and textual. The analysis relies on Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) which tackles the concept Social Semiotics and its variants. The model contains the three main elements of Social Semiotics; image, word and colour.

Visual Analysis

It is noted that Kress and van Leeuwen (2006:2) posit the presence of 'a visual sign or grammar of visual design'. They accept as true that both visual constructions and verbal structures can be used to prompt meanings drawn from shared cultural bases. Baren & Dennis (2008) state that in social semiotics, viewers are surely active, but they are not essentially very conscious of what they organize. Images comprise modality of symbols which create clarification of each sign, conceivable according to precise cultural and ideological rules. The chief objective of social semiotic study is to comprehend how receivers and viewers make sense of advertising messages. Rendering Kress (1988: 261), "social semiotics concerned with the social meanings constructed through the full range of semiotic forms, through

semiotic texts and semiotic practices, in all kinds of human society at all periods of human history."

According to Jewit & Oyama (2001: 134), "social semiotics analysis of visual communication involves the description of semiotic resources, what can be said and done with images (and other visual means of communication) and how the things people say and do with images can be interpreted." Social semiotics is able to say to a certain degree about the purpose of the styles (writing, image, colour and facial expression) in the multimodal manuscript, how these styles relate to each other, and the central objects nearby (Kress 2010: 53).

Bignell (2002) believes that "photographs used in print advertisements work as a system of signs that gives form and meaning to consciousness and reality". Concerning van Leeuwen (2005: 8), "a good starting point for studying aspects of visual communication is to consider that there are three visual modes of communication in print advertising with complex interaction between them." The image, word and colour are understood in this way as the creation of social observes. They are just three of the many semiotic styles through which social senses of ads are implied.

Image

Dyer (1986: 130) states that 'whatsoever image is being used certain kind of sense is devoted to that goes further than the literal meaning. On the connoted level, because it is not unbiased, it is established within society, creating new meanings relies on our information of the procedures of ideology that advertisements employ' (ibid: 129 -130).

The field of moving images is a social semiotic approach in visual communication. In this view, most accounts of visual semiotics have concentrated on what might be regarded as the equivalent of 'words' – what linguists call 'lexis' – rather than 'grammar', and then on the 'denotative' and 'connotative', the 'iconographical' and 'iconological' significance of the elements in images, the individual people, places and things (including abstract 'things') depicted there (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006: 1).

Word

Kress and Hodge (1988: 8) state that "Social Semiotics begins its description with an account of the social messages which govern the normal production and reception of the text." In this method, the circumstance has to be hypothesized and understood as an additional set of texts. There occur discretionary powers which can control both whether a text performs here, and how someone sympathetic to a text might act.



For instance, what is expressed in language through the choice between different word classes and clause structures, may, in visual communication, be expressed through the choice between different uses of colour or different compositional structures (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006: 65).

Colour

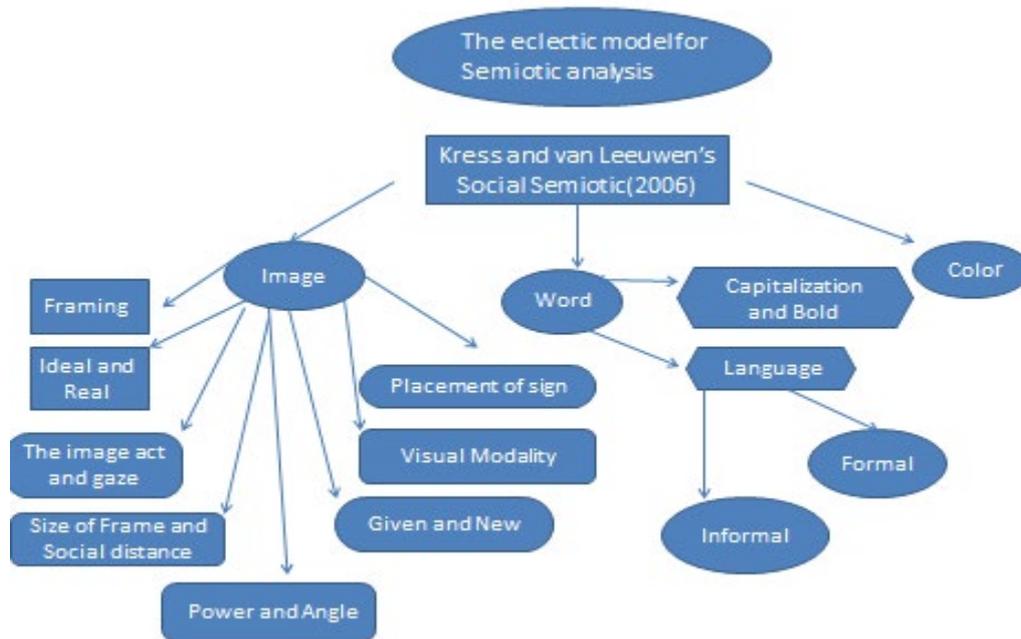
Kress and van Leeuwen (2006: 229) state that colour plays an essential role in the accomplishment of advertisements and it appears to be the major thing the receivers recognize (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 229). "Color is also used to carry 'interpersonal' meaning".

Kress (2010: 88) states that 'most of the readers have quite a solid sense of the implications of colour; which is to say that we could clarify what such meanings are.' Mayr (2010: 89) believes that 'looking at what is hidden or made less important or what is enhanced (e.g. colours) can tell us about the world that is created for us'. Rendering (Scollon and Scollon (2003: 91) the identical as language, visual images can transfer cultural ethics and typecasts. Therefore, cultures have diverse colours and colours have governmental, shared or even marketable indexical beliefs (Gorn et al. 1997:133).

The model

The researcher follows the model in Figure (1) according to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006):

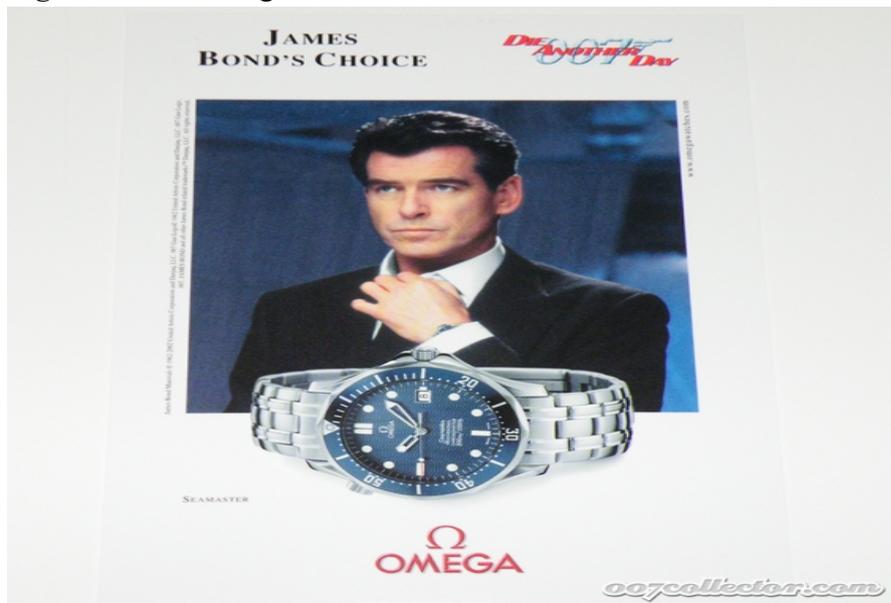
Figure 1. The model of analysis



Data Analysis and Findings

Ad. (1)

Figure 2. The Omega watch advertisement in 1995



Images

This figure shows an *OMEGA* ad delivered in 1995. The ad transports messages not only from the printed language but also from the visual average. The main code in this ad consists of the elegant actor. The photo and the trade mark of the product also offer visual evidence to the receivers. It contains the copy of one American well-known actor, *Pierce Brosnan*. The promoter has used the more familiar name of this actor as *James Bond* as an alternative to his actual name, due to its then worldwide admiration. In ads produced exactly for upper-class customers, the images of the product take another place. Here, the characterized image of the watch bears a resemblance to the product in actuality.

Placement of Signs

There is one image of the watch which is located in the centre of this ad, and above that one human image is recognized. This suggests that this human image is the dominant carrier of facts. In this ad, placing the snapped well-known actor '*James Bond*' over the product actively hypothesises an association between the man and the product. At the same time it gives an imprint that this product is for men.

Given and New

The image of a man is given as a result of it comprising familiarity during this ad. The New is pictured visually, the image of one watch. Simply by reading the body copy or seeing the symbol during this ad, the viewer will understand the name of the watch.

Visual Modality

This ad contains lifelike photos of a human image and the product. Hence, it has great modality in terms of using imageries.

'Ideal' and 'Real'

This ad displays associations, in nursing an 'Ideal-Real' composition. The highest part of the ad, the perfect half, consists of the image of a notable actor, someone ideal for individuals. Individuals might want to be in his place. The bottom half provides factual details and a true image of the merchandise.



Framing

In this ad no important 'disconnection' is ascertained between the photographed man and the watch image, from the horizon of framing. The absence of framing stresses cluster identity.

The Size of Frame and the Social Distance

The photographed man is portrayed in a personal mode, and the advertiser used the close shot (or 'close-up') which shows the subject's head and shoulders. Henceforth, it makes a rather close relation between the image and the spectator. In this ad, the image of the watch is shown, close. The object is shown as if the viewer is engaged with it, as if he or she is using the watch.

Power and Angle

Human copy in this ad is snapped from a low angle, as if consuming representative power over receivers. Low angles demonstrate the power of characterized contributors in ads over viewers. Low angles normally provide an impression of dominance, adoration, victory, and control on readers.

The Image Act and Gaze

In this ad, the fictitious character doesn't look directly at the viewer. Hence, contact might not be established. These forms of footage address viewers indirectly.

Words

Capitalization / Bold

In this ad, the headline consists of three capital and daring words, James Bond's selection, to draw receivers' attention and interest them in what this advertisement in the main says. It led readers to travel on reading, and reaches its goal of influencing readers to shop for it. In this ad of 'OMEGA', larger, capital and daring letters are utilized in the headline, presumably to draw the receiver's attention.

In this ad the trade mark is specially designed, with huge letters. The last letter of the Greek alphabet (Ω) is higher than the emblem to relinquish the impression that this watch resists. That shows the long expertise of the corporate as its name. It

is the image of resistance in physics. The last half contains only one sentence that provides the web site of 'OMEGA' company.

Language: Formal / Informal

Written text is considered informal, when everyday syntax, words, language and terms communicate meaning within a marketing message. Therefore, this ad used informal language to convey meaning because it used every day syntax, words and language.

Colours

Blue is the main colour in this ad. That is somewhat ironic, given that the ad stresses that the watch contains this colour. The watch below the photographic image serves to bolster this claim. As a result, there exists colour coherence within the first promotion. The repetition of one colour, black, is employed to market matter cohesion. As a result of that, it is accustomed to representing the special *OMEGA* watch artefact as its image with constant colour, and it signals its identity. All the words inside the phrase, ***Die another Day***, are coloured by red. It is believed that 'red' could be a terribly showing emotion powerful colour. It has terribly high visibility and brings text and pictures to the centre.

Ad. 2

Figure 3. The Polar Bear advertisement (1994)



Image

The polar bears were an immediate hit with viewers and made encore appearances in two spots during the 1994 Olympic Games, in which the bears slid down a luge and soared off a ski jump. Bear cubs were later introduced in a holiday ad. The world of computer graphics was much different back in 1993.

Placement of sign

Two images of Coca Cola are placed in this ad. One is in the centre and another is in the left bottom of the advertisement. Placing the photographed polar bear above the product constructs a relationship between the animal and the product. It relates cooling in the northern areas and cooling in Coca Cola. When seeing a polar bear it means that this drink has the same quality of refreshing and cooling, cold places. This connection between the polar and Coca Cola is very significant for the meaning of this ad.

Given and New in Advertising

The element not yet known in this ad is the image of Coca Cola. It is the New in this ad, while what is given (heard, seen) is the image of the polar bear. It is known without reading its name; known from its photo. The image of Coca Cola needs a look, a read, to be understood which type of drink it is.

Visual Modality

This ad contains an unrealistic photo of a non-human image. It has a photo of polar bear. Hence, it has low modality since it has non-realistic photo that doesn't exist in the around areas. The background in this indicate that this product is usable by both men and women. Modality is presented at the top and the bottom part is not the same.

Ideal and Real

The top part of this advertisement is the "Ideal". It consists of the picture of polar bear. The polar bear is the ideal for people. The centre and left lowest portion offers the accurate feature and real photograph of the product.

Framing

The disconnection is not observed between the photographed polar bear and the image of Coca Cola from the preview of framing. There is no separation between these two images through frame lines. The absence of framing stresses group identity.

The Size of Frame and Social Distance

The photographed animal is depicted in a personal way. The advertiser shows the head and the top part of the bear's body. It is all what the receivers could see about him. This means an intimate relation between the image and receivers. The image of Coca Cola is shown, at close distance. This product is shown as if the viewer is engaged with it.

Power and Angle

This is photographed from a low angle. It has a symbolic power over receivers. Low angle shows the power of represented object in advertisements over viewers. The polar bear is not looking straight forward towards receivers. The point of view is not of equality.

The Image Act and Gaze

When participants look at the viewers, it means a connection between participants and receivers. The polar bear is not looking directly at the receivers. Hence, the connection is not established because he looked indirectly to receivers.

Words

a. Capital and Bold

This sample doesn't contain a long text. There are two clauses in this ad. These two clauses "ALWAYS COOL" and "ALWAYS COCA COLA" are written as white colour organized with bolding. The headline consists of two capital and bold words "ALWAYS COOL" to draw the receiver's attention, and make them curious about what this ad mainly contains. This will consequently lead the receivers to go on reading to arouse their curiosity and desire, leading the ad to reach its objective which is persuading the receivers to buy the product.

b. Formal and Informal language

It used informal and everyday syntax, words, language, and terms to utilize the communicating meaning within marketing message. There is high effective involvement between the participants and the icy drinking.



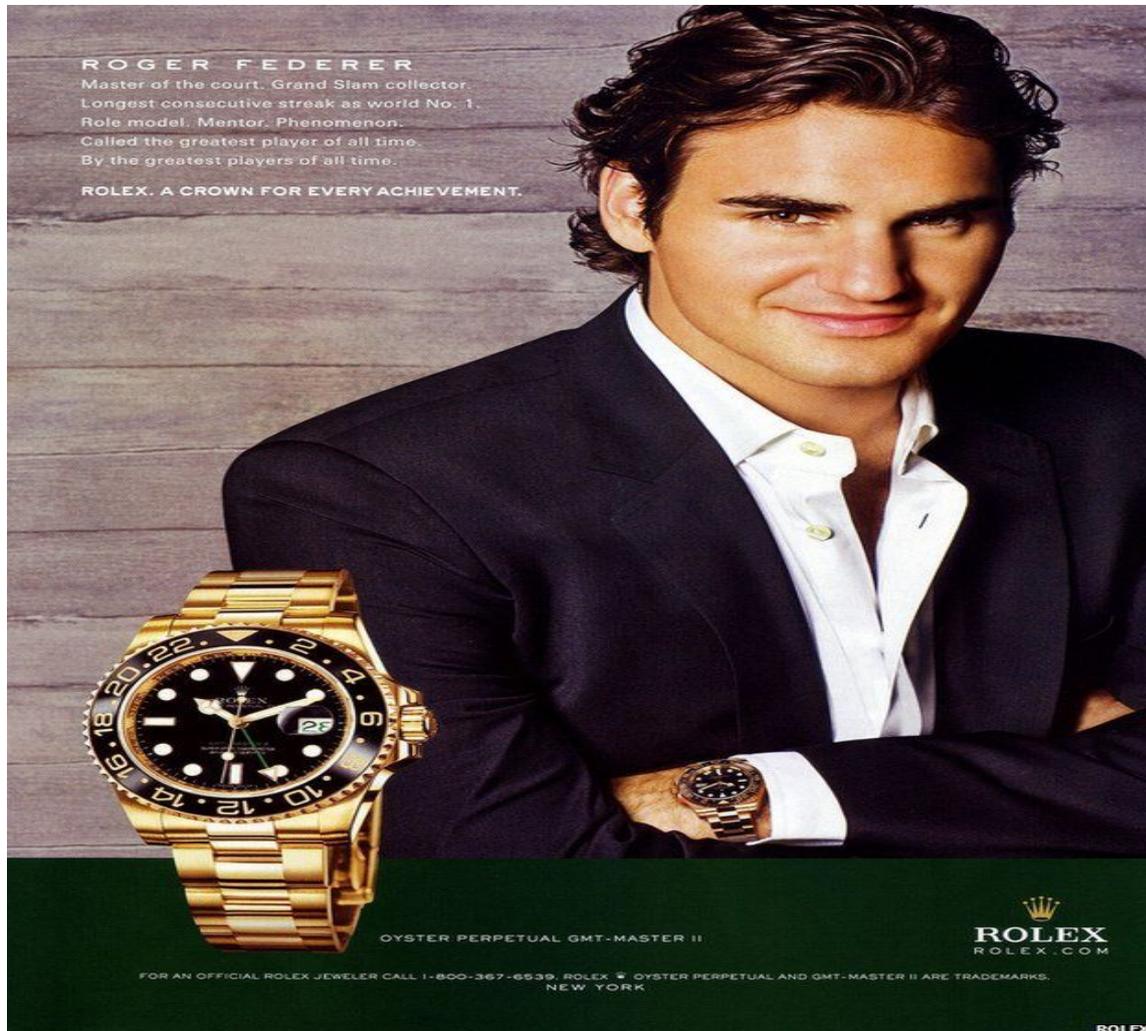
Colour

The polar bear is coloured white which expresses innocence and purity. The colour of the polar bear and the text is indulged with saturation. This is the scale which include white colour. It is called saturated or "pure" manifestation of a colour to its softest. White is the colour of ice which encourages cooling if the viewer drinks it. This applies to the colour of wording. Its key lies in its ability to express emotive temperatures, kinds of effect. This advertisement has low saturation which is cold, repressed and moody.

The colour under the word Coca Cola is read. Also, there is a red circle around the bottle at the bottom of the image. Red is a passionately powerful colour. It is very discernable and transports text and images to the centre. It is used by advertiser to arouse people to make quick choices. It is regarded as perfect colour to surround the bottle of Coca Cola and this why the company chose the red to be their symbols in adding to white.

Ad. (3)

Figure 4. Rolex watch advertisement (2009)



Image

This image shows a ROLEX issued in 2009. In terms of discourse analysis and therefore the medium of communication, the ad transmits messages not solely from the communication however conjointly from the visual medium. The primary word form during this consists of the well-dressed player. It used graphic logical devices to supply information. The picture (and the|and therefore the|and conjointly the) trade mark of the merchandise also give visual information to the readers. It consists of the image of one renowned Swiss player Roger Federer. The big image of Roger Federer, that occupies two-thirds of the area, offers a transparent image of the merchandise.

Placement of Sign

In this ad one image of the watch is placed within the left bottom of the promotional material. On top of that one human image occupies three quarters of the ad. A comparatively little section is dedicated to verbal signs. Placing the photographed renowned player Roger Federer on top of the merchandise constructs a relationship between the person and therefore the product. The watch is in front of the player which gives connectivity between the watch and the player.

Given and New

In this ad the player is given because it is an element which is famous and known to all people. The New is represented visually by the picture of the watch. It is also placed under the photo of the man which is more obvious.

Visual modality

This image has high modality because it contains realistic things and people. It contains a photo of a player who is found in real life. Therefore, it has high modality in terms of using images.

Ideal and Real

This ad shows an "Ideal-Real" configuration. The highest part of ad is the Ideal part. It contains the image of a famous sportsman, a person who is ideal for people. The Real part consists of the real picture of the product which is Rolex.

Framing

In this ad the important stoppage is experiential between the snapped man Roger Federer and the watch copy. From the perspective of framing, the stronger the framing of an element, the more it is presented as a separate unit of information.

The Size of frame and Social distance

In this ad image, the human image is chosen to depict the participant as close to the viewer. "The player" is looking at the viewer (participant). This image is regarded as a very close shot, an "extreme close-up" because it shows his head and less of his shoulders. Therefore , it shows the distance between people who have an intimate relation with each other .

Power and Angle

This ad has a low angle because it makes the participant look imposing and awesome. The relation between the interactive and represented participants is depicted as one in which the represented participant has power over the interactive participant. Thus, the image of Roger Federer has power over receiver.

The image act and the Gaze

In this ad, the participant Roger Federer is looking directly at the viewer. Therefore, contact is established between him and the receivers. This kind of image addresses the receivers directly.

Word

a. Capital and small

This ad contains text in a large scale. The headline consists of two capital and bold words 'Roger Federer'. This will lead receivers to go on reading, to distinguish more around this product; consequently reaching its goal to persuade receivers to buy it. Under this headline there is a description about Roger Federer's job. It is written with capital and 'unbold' letters. The name of this player is important. All people know who is this person and know his job and that he is a great player. Under the description of this player, there is a sentence which consists of five capital and bold letters. It contains the mark for this watch which is "Rolex". The sign of the watch is a crown, and its name 'Rolex' with white colour, is under this sign. The crown perfectly encapsulates Rolex's core values of excellence and exclusivity, while its five points mirror the five letters of the company name that are frequently printed below it. Additionally, 'crown' means a symbol of a king so it gives the feeling of power, superiority, control, as well as honour and prestige. So it means if one chose a product from this company, you would get the feeling of a king. Beside the sign of the crown, there is a brief description about the mark, the company that produces it and its place.

b. Language: Formal and Informal

This ad used informal language to convey meaning because it used everyday syntax, words and language. Equal power, frequent contact, and high effective involvement are the typical situations of language used in this ad.

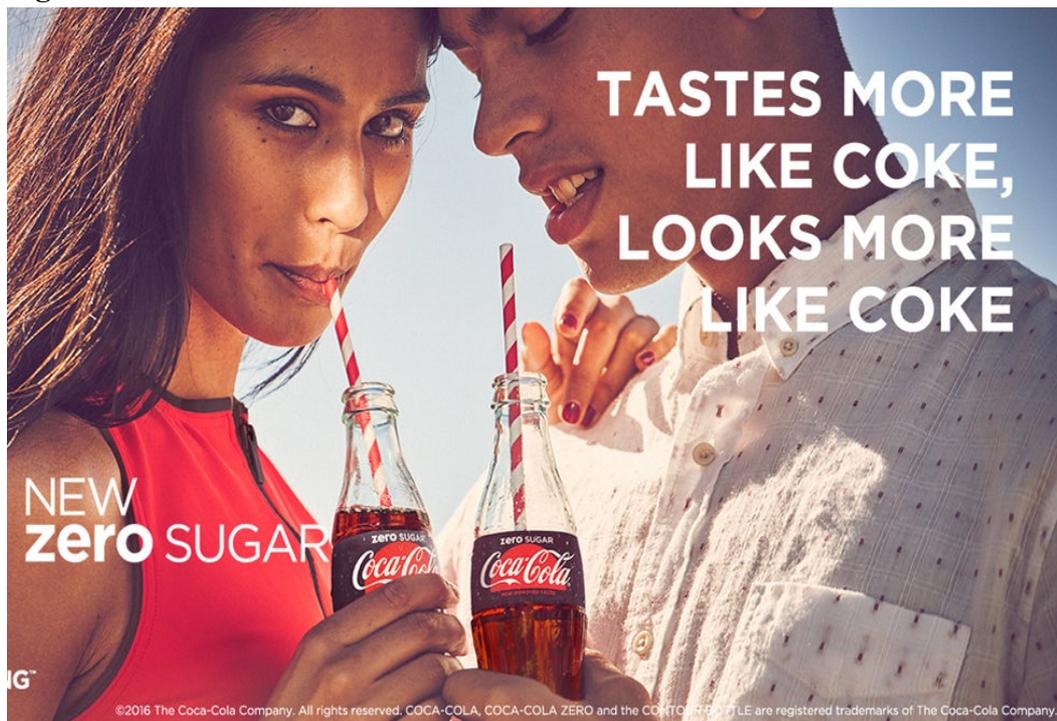
Colour

This ad contains three elementary colours (black, white, yellow and an non-primary one; brown). Yellow is used for a formal application such as high-quality stationery and degree

certificates. This colour is associated with the intellect, ideas and a searching mind – black and white refers to two absences of colour. They also refer to brightness. The player wears a black suit with white to draw attention to him. Yellow is considered a pure colour. The frame that separates the image of the player from the description about the watch is coloured green. It indicates the colour of setting. It also mean 'justice' and 'hope'.

4.4 Ad. (4)

Figure 5. Coca Cola advertisement in 2010



Images

This figure shows a Coca Cola ad issued in 2010. The main code in this ad entails the girl outfitted red and the boy, with two bottles of Coca Cola in their hands. Both are slim and dressed informally. The large picture of humans occupies almost two thirds of the space and may give a clear image of the product. As for the space, the advertiser has made an attempt to attract readers by placing two images of Coca Cola in the centre of this ad.

Placement of signs

Two images of Coca Cola are in the centre of this ad. Above that two human images are recognized. The huge decorated human images conquer three-quarters of the ad. A slight piece is dedicated to verbal signs. That proposes that this human image is the dominant incomes of transmission data.

Given and New in Advertising

The image of Coca Cola is the *Given* for the reason that it is a component of acquaintance in this ad. The *New* is represented visually by the image of humans. The writing on front-page above the image is divided into two parts; the word Coke is the Given and the rest "TASTE MORE", "LOOKS MORE", "NEW ZERO SUGAR" are the New.

Visual Modality

High modality in visuals means that things or people look 'realistic'; the way they would look if one saw them in real life. This ad contains a realistic photo of the human image (the boy and the girl) and the product (Coca Cola).

Ideal and Real

This ad shows a 'Real'. The upper part of the ad comprises of a photo of humans and the lowest fragment offers the realistic aspect and a 'Real' image of the product. The body also signifies real evidence about the product which is Coca Cola. The product itself and the figure are a Real part of this ad.

Framing

There is no split-up in this ad through frame outlines. The non-appearance of edging pressures group individuality. No bordering makes certain the lack of parting between units of the ad.

The Size of Frame and Social Distance

The photographed boy and girl are depicted in a personal way and the advertiser used the close shot (or 'close-up') which shows head and shoulders of the subject. Hence, it may make a relatively intimate relation between the image and the receivers.

Power and Angle

In this ad, the photographed girl is looking towards receivers. Hence, she is not depicted as exercising symbolic power on receivers, while the boy is not looking directly. Consequently, he is portrayed as exercising representative power on the receiver.

The Image Act and the Gaze

When participants look at the receivers, they connect the participants with the viewer. In this ad, the girl is looking directly at viewers. Hence, contact is established. These kinds of pictures address the receivers directly.

Words

a. Capital and Bold

This ad has no headline. There are two phrases. Each phrase consists of four capital and bold words "TASTES MORE LIKE COKE", "LOOKS MORE LIKE COKE". These two phrases are of the same rhyme, to draw the receiver's attention and thus lead receivers to go on reading unconsciously to know more about the product. The phrases look like a song which makes it easy when it is read, and that will make the ad reach its goal of persuading readers to buy it. The other phrase consists of three capital and bold letters "NEW ZERO SUGAR". It is placed at the bottom of the ad and it focuses on the specific word which is "Zero" because it is written bolder than the other two words. It has meaning and that is why the two persons are slim. It makes receivers know that this drink is for those who are interested in dieting.

b. Language: Formal and informal

The image of Coca Cola is a written text which is considered as informal because it contains syntax, words, the language of everyday terms that are utilized to communicate meaning within a marketing message. Equal power, frequent contact, and high effective involvement are the typical situation of language used in this ad.

Colours

Red is the main colour in this ad which is rather caustic, given that the Coca Cola drink contains this colour. The girl is dressed red to go with the colour of Coca Cola. Her nails are also painted in red. The two bottles between their hands are coloured red to reinforce this claim. The straw which they drink with is coloured red and white. The girl's hair and lips are coloured between red and brown to go with the colour of Coca Cola. Also, there is a red circle around the bottle at the bottom of the image. It is supposed that red is an expressively powerful colour. It is regarded as a perfect colour to surround the bottle of Coca Cola. Using the red colour in this ad also represents ideational function, because it denotes the special drink which is the Coca Cola product as its image, with the same colour, and it signals its identity.

The other dominant colour is white which refers to innocence or purity. The four phrases in this ad are written in white. The golden and light brown colours are also utilized in this ad which in turn implies the ironic given that the absolute colour of the product.

Conclusion

The analysis concentrated on two elements of the communicative affair in ads: text and image. Though this analysis is far from comprehensive, it is recommended here that counting the analysis of signs builds on the method projected by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006). The analysis strategies (images, words, and colours) include broad basics of elevation which are drawn upon within this ads treatise.

The result of this study shows some points of differences and similarities before and after the invention of Google in 2000. The differences are:

1. Concerning images, in the first two ads, before Google's invention, images are placed in the centre, with no framing, high modality and close-up, depicting power with Ideal participants. The other two ads, after Google's invention, are placed in the bottom and centre with high modality Real photographs of participants, not positing power in receivers, with framing and looking directly on receivers.
2. Concerning words and meaning, ads before (2000) are formal while after that they are informal.
3. The third point concerning colours is that ads before 2000 have some sort of emotional impact (red, blue) as in the second ad of the Polar Bear, while after 2000 there is an intent impact as the other two ads. The concluding point is that the discourse of ads is not in any sense neutral.

The similarities through these two periods are that both periods have Given and New. In both ads red is the primary colour but for different purposes. Additionally, images in all ads occupy three quarter of the size in comparison with texts.



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