

Media Coursework – How Media Texts Persuade Us

Everyday we encounter media texts. Many of these have a set audience and purpose. They influence our views on issues and use several techniques to convey a message. Many deliberately set out to persuade or influence our opinions. Throughout this assignment I will look at three different media texts: Daily Mirror (You Silly Spanker), Magazine Advert – Barnado's Baby, and a moving image entitled, "Search for the hero inside yourself." In each of these cases I will analyse the audience at which it is aimed, the purpose, presentation (format), fact and opinion and other techniques found which also persuade us.

The newspaper article entitled "You Silly Spanker" was published in the Daily Mirror, on Wednesday 30 October 1996. It entails the Education Secretary Gillian Shephard and leader of the Tories and Prime Minister at the time, John Major. Mrs. Shephard at 8:10 am suggested on a radio programme that corporal punishment should return. Deeply concerned about the outcome this comment, Major gave Gillian the "political thrashing of her life".

The Daily Mirror is traditionally a Labour Party supporting paper and the article was naturally aimed at Labour supporters. It could appeal to various age ranges. This is due to the use of the language, which is more colloquial. Perhaps it would be more appealing for the over eighteens who are more likely to be informed about politics, because of their ability to vote. I think it would appeal to both genders but it could be argued that the article appeals mainly to men. This is because the article ridicules women and the significance of their roles in government (after all Major undermines Shephard's opinion). It has been adapted to appeal to Labour supporters rather than Conservatives. It portrays Labour as being a reasonable party. For example the incident is described as "another symptom of Government's drift and weakness." This represents and draws attention to the chaotic government. The conflict itself represents the disunited Government and a PM who is not in control. This satisfies Labour's eagerness to find a reason to disapprove of the Conservatives. The way "Silly Gilly" is ridiculed, and how Major is portrayed as a man of quick temper ("raging Major"), contrasts with the superior comments of the Labour Party.

The article has many purposes – to inform us, to persuade us and to entertain. Although tabloid papers entertain is, the article does also inform us of the situation at hand even if it is biased. It also describes the state of the Government. We see that the article informs, because it describes the current issues, affairs and debates. It gives a brief summary of the incident in general. The headline itself tells us of the day's events, for instance we see that "furious PM gives Gilly 10 minute savaging on phone" This is of a humorous nature, but deals with the facts briefly, in a dramatic and sensational way, without being too logical or being over informative.

The article also uses a number of methods in order to persuade us that the Conservatives should not be in power. For example reference to:

"Government in chaos"

This draws attention and places emphasis on the unreasonable government as does the description "raging Major". The conflict is represented in such a way that the government looks to be at war with itself ("clash"). Therefore this places Labour in a positive light. Furthermore, the article entertains us. We see the incident as childish. Therefore we tend to place a negative light upon the Conservatives. There is a bitter irony used to ridicule Shephard: The journalists quote David Blunkett as saying that she has been "slapped down". This portrays "Gilly" as a small child, which is ironic as she is the one who is in favour of corporal punishment. Consequently this irony is sardonic and humorous. The melodramatic tone and humorous use of the language also entertains the targeted audience. For example "The day's drama" stresses and exaggerates the severity of the situation.

Furthermore, the article is presented in a dramatic way. The format makes the article more approachable and appealing. The paragraphs are short and keep to the point. The strong contrast of the

black and white for the headline is eye-catching and stands out. The paragraphs heading (Raging, warned) also make the article dramatic and sensational.

The language that has been specifically selected also makes the piece dramatic. For example, the prominent subheading indicates how she was given the “thrashing of her political life.” This portrays John Major as a man to quickly lose his temper.

The word savaging is very violent, aggressive and emotive. The choice of words tends to come across as exaggerated for a dramatic effect, as we are informed how she is given the “thrashing of her political life.” This, yet again, represents a chaotic government and suggests that the Education Secretary has been humiliated.

Internal rhyme is used when referring to Mrs. Shephard – “Silly Gilly”. The colloquial language adds an informal tone to the article, and makes her look like a small child punished for her defiance:

“Gaffe, blunder, mistake”

This makes Mrs. Shephard look ridiculous as does the line “slapped down”, which makes her look like the small child, and she is portrayed as the victim of her own suggestion. Therefore she looks like the victim of her own suggestion. This irony is very bitter and sardonic.

The way in which the incident has been described is melodramatic. The newspapers indict how this was “the call she dreaded.” This again is emotive, and gains enthusiasm from the reader. There are many collocation patterns within this article associated with corporal punishment. (For example bad behaviour, thrashing, spanker). These all make Mrs. Shephard look humiliated by John Major. The contrast for language used for Labour and the Conservatives portrays Labour as the reasonable party and is a device to persuade us that the Conservatives are not:

“Labour was jubilant at the Government's chaos.”

This contrasts with the language used to describe the conservatives – “clash”.

In the article there are many distinguishable facts and opinions. The facts give basic information, such as location and time etc. For example the piece of text says “at 9:00 am she left London to visit Heathside”. This is easily distinguished as fact because it can be proven, as can the following line:

“Aides range Mrs. Shephard's office at the Department of Education and Employment.”

This gives us a brief insight into the incident. However, there are many opinions throughout the article:

“Last night the Ministers dramatic public support for the can was WIDELY SEEN as a bid to woo the Tory...”

This simply is not specific enough and cannot be backed up by solid evidence. Did the journalists do a survey to gain an insight into other people's views? The emotions used could also be argued (raging, dread) because many were not there at the time, so the journalists seem to have made a guess at the nature of the phone call. Also it is very difficult to prove emotions. More likely however, is that the journalists have included such emotive language to make the tone much more exciting and passionate.

Generally, I feel the article consists of mainly opinion. Although it deals with many facts, most of them are just vague, short times and figures. Others are factual because someone said it. The article has used opinionated language to make the article appeal to Labour voters – “Labour was jubilant.” More specifically it sets out to persuade us that the Conservative Party cannot be taken seriously. The language is more persuasive and melodramatic which represents a political bias. One opinion that seemed more significant than the others was the speculation that suggested Mrs. Shephard was calculating to become leader. This, summarises the questionable truth/ reliability of the media and tabloid papers, and represents how news sources are cleverly trying to attain targeted opinion.

As my second media text analysis I have chosen an advertisement from a Sunday broadsheet newspaper for the children's charity Barnados. The central picture is a very disturbing one. It shows a baby placed in dirty surroundings. The baby is situated at the centre of the advertisement. Its face shows anguish due to its contorted nature. The nappy (which suggests that he is a boy, because its blue) symbolises the expected innocence of babies. This contrasts with the picture as a whole, which shows its

innocence has been destroyed. Also, the baby's blonde hair and blue eyes represents innocence. At first the baby appears to be healthy, but we see how he is a victim of neglect. His legs are black, blue and mottled from the severe cold.

There are many drug-related objects surrounding the baby. The ligature is tightly wrapped around the arm causing it to go a noticeable red colour. The ligature is being pulled, in what seems to be a desperate attempt, from the mouth. There is a needle within the baby's hand and a spoon on the floor nearby. The damp, dirty and cold surroundings resemble that of a toilet. The dark background makes the baby stand out from the page drawing attention to the advertisement as a whole. It has peeling walls and unattractive water pipes in the background. My first impression is that of decay. This again contrasts with the baby, who appears to be a mere one year old. The dark eerie toilet-like surroundings are unsuitable for such a vulnerable child.

My immediate reaction was that of shock and disgust. You would not expect to find such a vulnerable child in such a disgusting setting. This is why the abnormality and disturbing picture stirs this reaction. We feel protective towards the baby when it has been placed in such dangerous circumstances. I feel a sense of deep sympathy towards the baby due to its destroyed innocence. I immediately feel anger towards those responsible for such a horrific situation.

There are four main places within the advert, which uses language. These are the headline, the logo incorporating a logo, the information of Barnado's work and the disclaimer. The headline:

“John Donaldson – age 23”

anchors the meaning of the campaign. It is at first sight intriguing because it appears to contradict the picture with the issue. However, the connection is revealed when reaching the information at the bottom right (information about Barnado's work). We understand the headline is saying, when John Donaldson was age 23 he became a drug addict because his abuse (“battering, neglect”) when a baby. The baby therefore represents John when he was 23 years of age. In addition, this message relates to the slogan “giving children back their future.” This implies that despite John's childhood, Barnado were able to provide help and support. It is clever because it plays with tenses to make it catchy. It is somewhat paradoxical (the slogan uses different tenses to make it contradictory). Additionally, we are somewhat intrigued when first encountering this, when we calculate the connection between the picture and the headline, this advertising technique is known as Involvement. The story of the advertisement as a whole is that due to the traumatic childhood John Donaldson may have experienced, this has affected his adulthood somewhat drastically, and thus we see that he has become a drug addict.

There is a logo, which is used alongside the slogan. It represents the image of a happy family, engaging in play with a child. This promotes the possibility of such happiness with Barnado's interesting factor of this advertisement because it contrasts with the first impression/message given when only looking at the baby. The positive image of the logo, and the slogan, justifies the use of the disturbing picture.

In the bottom right hand corner of the advertisement there are several paragraphs of writing, which contain both fact and opinion. For example – “battered as a child” is opinion dressed up as fact. However, fact is used when the Barnado's website is given. Also we

“Help thousands of children and their families at home”

This is factual information. This paragraph's intention is to persuade readers to give money. There is a disclaimer at the bottom left of the advertisement. Its purpose is to inform the audience that the baby is actually computer enhanced. This is perhaps included for legal reasons.

The advertisement has an intended user. It is seemingly aimed at older, more serious audience and this is why it is found in a broad sheet newspaper. Also it would be more shocking for children to see. Such a broad sheet newspaper suggests a sophisticated lifestyle (it advertises expensive cars etc) so may be aimed at a wealthier audience. Arguably, it may be aimed at a female audience. It stirs the maternal instinct

of a mother. In general, it may appeal to a parental audience because of their protective instinct towards children.

The advertisement has two obvious purposes. They are to persuade the audience to give money: “please help by giving a donation.” This has a pleading tone which is encouraging and persuasive. The other purpose is to inform the audience of Barnado’s valuable work with society.

Within this advertisement shock tactics and involvement are used. At first our attention is drawn through our immediate shock. This initial surprise is relevant to the advertisement’s purpose. The shock of seeing a baby take drugs is relevant because it represents John’s miserable childhood as well as his years spent as a drug addict. The advertiser due to our shock and disgust when looking at the picture grabs our attention. We are intrigued when reading the text. The shock that is felt from the advertiser caused a great deal of controversy, which led to further publicity. As a result the advertisement is very memorable.

The advertisement method known as Involvement is also used in the media advertisement. We become involved on the advert when we work out the link between the paradoxical headline and the picture. We are given a glimpse into John’s traumatic life. The shock of the picture and this use of involvement brings us to interact with the picture. We are shocked at our complacency hence the advertisement is memorable.

In my opinion the advertisement was suitable for public viewing because I feel the shocking picture is successful in persuading readers to give money. The end justifies the shocking reminder of child neglect and drug addiction. However, I feel the ad would be too shocking for children to see because they may not be mature enough to understand the purpose of the ad. They may perceive it in an incorrect light.

Many complaints were made to the Advertisement Standards Authority (ASA) about Barnado’s appeal. The ASA justified the advertisement saying that “using the stark image as a baby drives home its role as a safe haven.” The complaints referred to the newspaper campaign as offensive, but ASA believed Barnado were trying to convey a “serious and important message.” As a result of such complaints the Guardian replaced the image with that of a happier baby. I disagree with such complaints. I believe that the only way readers will acknowledge the severity of such situations concerning innocent babies is if they face up to the problems such as these occurring in society today. Remaining ignorant to such serious child abuse will not help the victims. Remaining oblivious to these circumstances will not spur people to donate money. Raising awareness through realistic pictures may encourage generous donations. I think that Barnado has considered the suitability of the advertisement because it had been placed in a broad sheet newspaper. Therefore Barnado had taken into account that the advert was not suitable for children:

“The advertisement was unlikely to cause serious or widespread offence, or undue distress.”

This is because Barnado had a valid point when using such a shocking image. This was to “raise awareness of the seriousness of drug abuse and the action that could be taken to prevent it.” As a result, the advertisement, in my opinion, is both effective and correctly used.

The third media text I shall analyse is a series of moving images, promoting the car model Peugeot, entitled “search for the hero inside yourself.” Throughout I will analyse the use of language (both onscreen and in the song lyrics), the use of sound effects and music, the different images used and for every other piece of media, the audience and purpose, fact and opinion used and the advertising techniques.

The advertisement lasts for 46 seconds and within this period there are 33 images. These images reflect either personal heroism or modern lifestyle or the images of the car itself. Heroism is when the man rescues the young girl from the approaching lorry. The implication is this that if you buy a Peugeot car, you can live a heroic lifestyle. A modern lifestyle is conveyed when the woman impulsively jumps across the table to seduce and perhaps propose to the man. This woman is portrayed as the pro-active figure in the relationship – hence she is a modern woman. Therefore, we see that one potential audience of the commercial are women (this is discussed later) She dares to defy the original/ classical stereotype that men are the main leaders in matters such as these. We also see a man daring to be different, by showing his

sensitive side in fainting at his babies' birth. Also the war paint used by the Indian warrior, echoes the red coat of the young girl and represents courage. (The Indians were victims of oppression, yet showed great courage despite this) These attributes are therefore things we associate with driving a Peugeot.

Throughout the advert we see the car from many different angles. The car, which is a sophisticated Peugeot 406 with the registration number MMV 801, is seen in many different locations. One of these is the reflection when the Peugeot passes a window; the other is a car passing over a secluded bridge. We also see the driver sitting inside the car at the opening stage of the advertisement. The camera pans into his eye, creating the eye as a close up. As a result this image of the man's eye allows us to see inside his mind. The car is also viewed when stationary at different intervals and camera angles – from the side with the Peugeot logo above and from above in the ending stages of the advertisement.

There are two important images seen in the advert. One of these is the filmic illusion similar to that used in the film *Schindler's List*. In the caption, as I have previously explained, a young girl is being rescued from an oncoming vehicle. The girl, dressed in a red coat, remains standing in the road and seem to be completely oblivious to the potential danger. The girl's red coat is the only image on the screen, which is seen in colour. The vibrant red symbolises danger that which is bravely looked by the heroic man who speeds to the girl's rescue by pushing her out of the way. This powerful image represents heroism and courage. The other is a brief image, flashed onto the screen for perhaps a couple of seconds. It shows the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1999, where a Chinese student protested by standing in front of a army vehicle. This is a topical illusion that is somewhat subliminal. Subliminal images such as these, which were shown on the screen for a split second, were however banned despite their effectiveness. The advertisement as a whole indicates that the type of person who drives a Peugeot would have such admirable attributes.

There is also the use of language present both on screen and in the song lyrics throughout the advert. The first words encountered allows us to make sense of the advertisement as a whole:

“The average person has 12,367 thoughts a day...here are just a few of them.

This gives a frame for all the images we are about to see. We, as a result, are able to make sense of the disparate range of images. Also this statement is an example of the pseudo science. At first this statement seems typical, with its use of scientific facts and figures, (and is opinion dressed up as fact, which subliminally influences our reaction and opinion of the advertisement) but later it is revealed to be somewhat contradictory/paradoxical. This is due to the concluding line at the end of the advert – “There is no such thing as an average person.” We are given a different interpretation of the word average – here it is mean, thus everyone has the capacity to be heroic.

There is also the language incorporated in the Peugeot slogan:

“The drive of your life.”

This suggests that with a Peugeot you can achieve a life of meaning and gain an adventurous lifestyle. Furthermore, we are presented with language in the lyrical content of the song. One particular line may have some sort of association with the key use for a Peugeot vehicle:

“ Search for the hero inside yourself ...until you find the key to your life.”

This again suggests a wonderful lifestyle, which can be attained through the ownership of a Peugeot 406. As a whole the lyrics throughout the song are very inspirational and powerful. They have an impact on the intended audience due to the dramatic tone used. This also has a double meaning, as it refers to the car key of the Peugeot, and which also, thanks to the Peugeot, means that on owning this car we can be seen as a member of society with the admirable attributes in the advertisement. (Such as courage)

There is music played along to the advertisement. It had a very positive effect on me because it is very upbeat. It is very catchy and powerful, perhaps due to the strong voice accompanying the music.

Another significant factor of a television commercial is the use of sound effects. At the opening stage of the advert, we have the effect purring like sound made by a synthesiser. This is a rhythmic occurring engine sound. Also, percussion instruments are also audible in the advert. The song, in my opinion, is very pop, with a young and vibrant style.

In a similar manner to the other media tests, the Peugeot advert has been marketed to appeal to a certain audience. The advert seems to appeal to an audience that have a younger outlook, and perhaps a more up to date perspective on life. The images used would support this theory (these images, as I have previously explained, show a modern lifestyle). In the category of gender, the advert seems to appeal to both genders, but perhaps it is more appealing to men. The images throughout the advert show men carrying out acts of courage. For example, there is a male warrior, a male footballer a male driver etc. However, the advert may appeal to women also, because it shows a modern, pro-active woman and a woman who has just given birth. The car along with the advert, appeals on the whole, to an audience who have a sophisticated lifestyle or those who desire such a lifestyle. Again, due to the images of heroism, it appeals to those who aspire to be heroic. The businessman shown in the commercial suggests that the Peugeot is arguably aimed at the executive type businessperson, thus a much wealthier class. The finely tuned engine, which we encounter, also hints that the audience may be youthful. I have concluded this because of the filmic illusion in the advert, which may appeal to youth who are attracted by film effects etc. Additionally, in the commercial, the young girl being rescued from the oncoming vehicle may promote the aspect of safety, so this may appeal to families, who are obviously known to protect children.

The moving image of the Peugeot also has a set purpose, either to entertain, persuade or to inform. The advert is somewhat entertaining, which is a vital aspect of television marketing. After the entire advert has to hold the audience's interest in order to promote the Peugeot. It does this through the combination of music and intriguing images. The moving image also informs us that the Peugeot is not mundane and is not average. Its understated appearance and sleek, streamlined, structure suggests that the Peugeot is classy. Most importantly though, the main purpose of the Peugeot 406 advert is to persuade. It aims to persuade the audience to buy a Peugeot car because we associate the heroic advert with driving a Peugeot car. Therefore this suggests that with a Peugeot car we can attain such a heroic lifestyle. It reinforces the Peugeot's company that the car is unique just like the drive/audience ("there is no such thing as the average person").

There are many different advertising techniques used in the promotion of this advert. These include shock tactics, spurious authority, pseudo science and use of audience involvement. In the advertisement "Search For The Hero Inside Yourself", our attitudes are exploited through the use of pseudo science. Facts and figures are used as the opening image of the advert, and these state how many thoughts an average person has a day. They make the products sound very advanced and impressive through this scientific literature. These figures seem to be opinion dressed up as fact because the statement is very hard to prove through the use of scientific evidence.

Furthermore, the advert takes us through the complex trail of thought of the man throughout the day. This is therefore involvement – we journey into his mind and gain an insight into the heroic lifestyle this Peugeot drive leads. This rouses our interest due to the complex/meaningful range of images making it memorable. We also encounter involvement when presented with the Tiananmen Square image. Hence we are drawn into the advert. Furthermore the contemporary filmic illusions of the Schindler's List girl are involvements used. In a similar manner to "Barnado's Baby" we see that this method is used upon working out the connection between the disparate ranges of images – this again involves us in the story of the advertisement.

Another common advertising technique is that of shock tactics – which we do actually see in the moving image. This is when the girl is rescued from the lorry. We are shocked to realise the potential danger she is in. The Tiananmen Square and holocaust images in the advert might also shock us.

Spurious authority – an advertising technique that is the endorsement of a product using a person with a celebrity status or someone with a prestigious personality, is also evident in the advertisement. The

sophisticated, suave man of authority dressed in a classy looking business suite in the advert endorses the car in this manner so that we identify it as sophisticated also.

Lastly, the advertisement, just like any other advert I have analysed is totally opinionated because of the ever-present use of pseudo science in the advert. This is opinion dressed up as fact, just like that seen in the Barnado's Baby.

In conclusion, all three pieces of media share many things in common. They all exploit our emotions and reaction to the advert, through the use of language, advertising technique and presentational devices. All are targeted at an audience and a specific purpose. For all three media, shock tactics were used. In the "Silly Spanker" article, we find the dramatic use of words shocking and somewhat sardonic. In Barnado's Baby, the image of the neglected baby is shocking just like the girl placed in danger and other images in the "Search For The Hero Inside Yourself" advert. In "You Silly Spanker" opinionated fact play on emotions, deviously influencing our opinion. This is also seen in Barnado's Baby and the moving image. Therefore media texts are always opinionated in some way and are devised to gain our approval. Companies place argument on a slant.

As my personal response, I preferred the moving image advert rather than the others. I found the combination of music, images and language somewhat intriguing. It was far more rewarding than the others when I understood the connection/purpose of the range of images used. The images were far more intellectually challenging, I felt, because they represented many different themes. They catered to appeal to many different audiences – for example, the reference to Tiananmen Square was also most subliminal and interesting to analyse because it was very anonymous (it required a huge response from the audience) and the repeated use of red caused me to question its significance. The Red Indian putting on war paint was not straight forward, but again, entailed a great deal of thought into the fact that these people were victims of oppression, therefore showed courage. I like the way the man cutting himself shaving echoes the image of a Red Indian applying war paint. Both the advert implies that they are brave and courageous characters in their own ways and in their own time. It appealed to women because of the baby's birth, to men due to football, and even to those familiar with contemporary movies. Therefore, I feel that the mixture of all these was more thought provoking than the others, perhaps also due to the advantage of a better visual stimulation.