

Media Presentation

Me and Rosie read the media section of last Monday's Guardian, and decided to base this talk on advertising to co-inside with the Advertising Producer's Association's publishing of the top 50 adverts for this year. The event took place at the Victoria and Albert museum in London last week, and public screenings begin on October 10th and 11th.

Advertising is now a recognisable part of popular culture. It has transgressed from mere 30-second television slots into elements of contemporary culture that appeal to peer groups and to individual personalities. Adverts that were released 5 years ago would pale in comparison to modern day ones not just because of the development of technology, but because modern adverts are able to identify and subjectively target audiences. This expansion means that adverts are able to become more artistic and self-conscious, more aesthetic and ultimately, more effective. This growth is only possible through the amount of media marketing and advertising that audiences are subjected to these days. Audiences are increasingly media literate – able to read texts in more refined ways, and capable of recognising concepts such as intertextuality, genre and institution.

With advertising corporations being aware of this, they can exploit audiences – making ever more witty and intelligent commercials. By doing this, commercials can become more accessible and can blur the lines between selling point and entertainment. The integration of celebrities into commercials not only provides a sense of endorsement for the viewer, but a link between popular culture and product or service sales. Entertainers such as Peter Kay appearing in adverts for John Smiths - all of which incidentally appear in the top 50 - incorporate aspects of themselves into them, creating a bond between their profession and lifestyle and the product for sale. This ideology can link not just fans of the celebrities to the featured products, but entire peer groups.

Still using Peter Kay as an example, he represents a factor of stereotypical British society. He is a Northern, bitter drinking man, that the depiction of him in the John Smith's adverts shows as insensitive, clumsy and stupid. Now this portrayal can be viewed in two ways. Either as a negative stereotype, demonstrated simply for comedy value or as a parody of the negative stereotype in which the ideas associated with them are depicted so vividly, that it makes the stereotype meaningless and stupid, thus taking all of the offensiveness and meaning out of it. So through these adverts and illustrations of social class, people are able to view the commercial much more deeply than as just a sale gimmick or joke.

Products like beer or cars that compete in a regular mainstream market can offer little in the way of differentiation from competitors, so it is up to marketing companies to re-brand them and make them popular through doing so. A method that many companies such as Stella Artois and Budweiser use is to advertise them as status symbols – products that seem to sell or want to be affiliated with a certain type of lifestyle. The reality behind beer marketing is that the products main consumer - the clichéd 'lager louts' are undesirable from a marketing point of view, and so Stella and Budweiser have modified their status from being simply beer to a factor of modern life. This was done through numerous advertising campaigns such as the 'wassup' campaign where men were pictured relaxing and having fun, and the ongoing 'reassuringly expensive' Stella campaign, that through its series of comedic sketches delivers the message that the cheap beer that these 'louts' drink is separated from their own brand. Despite this, Stella and Budweiser are still appealing to their target audiences, and continuing to sell their product. It is apparent that the re-branding of certain products can have such an effect that the government has had to launch initiatives to prevent the public from being manipulated unfairly. This of course refers to the recent 'Death Re-Packaged' television adverts that persuade the public not to be mis-led by the 'Mild' of 'Lights' suffixes on cigarettes, because they are just as deadly as ordinary ones.

Car commercials mainly serve to impress an audience that is uneducated in the field of cars. They are technically impressive, using a wide range of graphic manipulation and technology. A commercial that has dominated the competition is the Honda 'Cog' advert in which a series of items relay a domino effect. The advert epitomizes the length companies will go to in order to visually impress and astound an audience, whilst also delivering a message about the brand itself – that Honda strive to be ahead of the competition. This particular commercial is the perfect example of how advertising can be embraced by society and placed into high culture. With adverts becoming more and more artistic, many of them make the transition into higher culture – changing them into features of

contemporary art. The 'Cog' advert has done so, winning awards at Cannes and even having DVD copies of the commercial being included in newspapers. This can make the product more appealing to different social classes.

The Honda Corporation is not one usually viewed as being a feature of the high-class elite but more of a middle class car manufacturer. However if their conceptual adverts are adopted by higher culture, then the product will be too – raising the profile of the company. The actual construction of these adverts has changed also to make them even more attractive. The influence of cult television shows such as MTV has made commercials reminiscent of music videos – fast paced and designed for maximum impact in a short amount of time. The use of this is essential to the modern consumer that was raised on television only to have a low concentration threshold and high brand awareness. Ineffective adverts involve reflection and thought in order to be absorbed. Adverts like the infamous 'Gold Blend' series employ narrative devices similar to those used in soap operas, with cliffhangers and resolutions, strengthening the bond between popular culture and advertising.

With television becoming so influential today, many have begun to question whether television is right in its representation of our society in adverts.