

## **Semiotic Textual Analysis**

### **Assignment 1**

In today's technologically advanced world products and concepts are continually being invented and produced and most are so far advanced and beyond our imaginations and dreams that they could become overwhelming. Whether it is cars, household appliances, or clothing, there is always an abundance of 'newly improved products' on the market that are yearning to be consumed. Thousands of years ago retailers arrived at the conclusion that the only way to lure buyers into purchasing these products was by letting the public know what was available and at what price. Today, it is not the price that counts but the motivation behind the purchase, the status of owning or using that specific product and the need to have the ultimate lifestyle or identity. It is the cunning work of advertising that has created a new era in life, a culture in its own right and an ever growing materialistic world. Advertisements attempt to link their products to one or other desirable identity by using ideological messages and meaning. Advertisements are thus responsible for the shaping of not only our personal identities but our social identities as well. The aim of this essay is to divulge and expose these manipulations by analyzing one advertisement that embodies all of these influential criteria by using the terms and techniques of semiotic analysis.

My chosen advertisement is Promoting 'Proudly South African Products'. There is a proliferation of encoded meanings and messages in it. Semiology started out as being an analysis of language and today has been promoted to analyzing all sign systems and how they work. Thus semiology is a fundamental spoke in the wheel of analyzing. Semiology is defined as the "science of signs, or study of sign systems...which work through certain rules and structures."(O'Shaughnessy and Stadler, 2002, p80) These sign systems will only be successful when they are shared and understood by many. Culturally, there has to be a similar interest shared in the codes as well as a vast and similar knowledge of what these signs may be suggesting. Messages are sent to the intended target market via the sender/advertiser, through a system of signs. The signifier and the signified are used to launch the message, the signifier being the material form and the signified being the concepts put forth. In the advertisement I have chosen, the signifier is the photographs of

the boy and the signified is the message that if you choose 'Proudly South African Products' you will be helping provide youngsters, such as the little boy depicted here, to receive an education and thus be helping all other underprivileged people in South Africa.

Denotation is defined as "a purely descriptive level" (O'Shaughnessy and Stadler, 2002, p83) on this level one does not delve into an in depth analysis but rather sticks to describing what is there. It is as close to "value-free as possible" (O'Shaughnessy and Stadler, 2002, p83) My chosen advertisement is extremely well presented. The page is separated or split into two, each half presenting a different image. Both images are photos of the same young boy but they differ in presentation. The top image portrays a very dirty and poverty stricken boy who has an incredibly forlorn and distressing expression on his face. His clothes are shabby and grubby and his face is grimy with dirt. We see that the wall in front of which he stands is cracked and aged. The lighting is dark, clarity is hazy and the camera angle is straight on so the young boy is looking directly at the reader because they are at the same level of eye contact. The photo underneath the latter one is of the same young boy but with many variations. This boy is smiling cheerfully showing a mouth full of bright white teeth. His clothes, although the same items as in the above photo, are clean, crisp and white. The lighting in this shot is sharp and illuminates his entire face. He is also staring forward at the reader's eye level. In the top left hand corner of the advertisement is a slogan saying "It's your choice" and in the bottom right hand corner is a slogan saying "Choose Proudly South African"

This advertisement is abundant in connotations as I will be further discussing. Connotations are those things that the viewer perceives in an image, reminding the viewer of certain values and feelings etc. The target market of this advert is adults because it is the older generation who would make use of the South African products and services. Thus we can connote that the image will appeal to an older group consisting mainly of parents due to the use of a young child. Firstly, the fact that the advertisement is divided into two separate portions immediately informs us that there are two separate or opposing ideas and the presence of a choice. The use of a young boy is to emphasize youngster's innocence and naivety and to play on adult's compassion. Seeing the top

photo is disturbing because it resembles something that no adult would want for their children and so, many adults may experience a moment of protectiveness towards the young boy. The sad look on the boy's face is heart wrenching and thus evokes sympathy in the reader. The fact that he is looking so intensely and directly at the camera (the reader) makes one feel as if he is calling out to you for help. This forges a relationship between the reader and the photo instilling a sense of personal responsibility in the reader towards helping the child and all children and less fortunate people like him.

The photo underneath conjures up the opposite feelings in the reader. A photo of a happy young schoolboy dressed in clean, crisp clothing, with clean braided hair in what seems to be a safe environment due to the clean, newly painted wall makes the reader feel at ease, as if all is as it should be. He now wears a tie which is green and is thus symbolic of the brand's colour. The bright light in this photo illuminates his face, thus emphasizing his cleanliness as the light shines on his forehead and nose. It also symbolizes the fact that he is radiantly happy. These two photos both resemble family photos as if they are being taken on the first day of school for instance. This fact further establishes feelings of tenderness towards the young poverty stricken boy because he is disadvantaged and enhances feelings of wanting to reach out and help all little boys just like him- and if the advert says that by buying South African products will help readers to lend a hand then obviously the products must be purchased. These two opposing images work creatively together to convey meaning. Thus the advert aptly appeals to its target market and evokes the exact response that was intended.

Further categories can be brought into the analysis when looking at signs. They are Iconic signs, indexical signs and symbolic signs. Iconic signs are those that “resemble what they signify.” The photographs are thus iconic as they resemble exactly what they are meant to. Indexical signs are “signs that indicate or point to something else.” (O’Shaughnessy and Stadler, 2002, p84) The internet address is indexical as it “points us to a location in cyberspace in which more information about the” Proudly South African Products can be found. The symbols at the bottom of the advertisement are indexical because they point to the sponsors, strategic partners etc. Symbolic signs are “signs that stand in for, but

have no resemblance to, their signified.”(O’Shaughnessy and Stadler, 2002, p84) The sponsors at the bottom of the page are also symbolic as they are showing the reader all the options of South African products but they don’t actually have anything to do with the concept of the advertisement. The tick within the circle disguised as a South African flag is symbolic as well as indexical because the circle symbolizes the South African flag but does not directly resemble it.

This advertisement plays on the reader’s values and beliefs. It is relying on the fact that we as humans, by nature, will choose right over wrong. This is known as ideology, “Set of values and beliefs and feelings that together, offer a view of the world” This advertisement works on the reader’s guilt. The advertisement asks the reader to use South African products because by so doing we can help boost the economy and provide more opportunities. This is a sweeping statement that implies that “you have the power” when in actual fact you don’t. This means that if we use South African products then we could be helping a young innocent child out, just like the one in the photo. Thus we see how the advertiser plays on our commiseration. Although the advertiser claims to be giving us a choice- “It’s your choice...” in actual fact he/she has already made the choice for us. By placing this last statement, which is inscribed in a block of bright green, in the section with the poverty stricken boy and then adding a similar looking block of green with the words, “Choose proudly South African” in the section with the more wealthy boy, we are forced to accept defeat by purchasing the products. The entire image resembles a Questionnaire where you have two options and two boxes in which to tick your answer. In this case the box is already ticked for us. The green of the two blocks of writing are connected and further more we see a connection in the wealthy boy’s tie-it too is green. Thus our decision has been made for us, choice was never an option because who wants to have a young boy go through so much pain. The fact that the tick is within the circle resembling the South African flag in the bottom green block once again reiterates the choice that has to be made. “It’s as simple as that”

It is extremely important to regard the context in which the advert is found. Being South African allows us to relate to the young African boy because of his race. Due to

apartheid, we may feel even more sympathy towards the young boy and the hardships he may have endured, pushing us to use The South African products... At the same time South Africa's population is mostly African and so because the little boy is African, this advert will appeal to a wider target market. This advert was taken out of the You magazine which is an exceptionally popular magazine. Not only does it come out weekly, as a consequence allowing for more exposure of the advert but it is a South African magazine and so once again the advert appeals to the accurate target market.

In conclusion, it has been shown how this advertisement, its images as well as its texts, work systematically together to sell its anticipated service. By drawing on feelings of guilt, responsibility and patriotism towards one's country we see how the advert is victorious because it works. It offers consumers an incentive to buy their products- consuming them would improve lives ubiquitously. At the same time as offering motivation, it also provides a good excuse to use the products more frequently. It is imperative to note though, that this advert has cultural constraints because if you do not share in the South African beliefs, then this advert may render useless. However in the context it is found the advert is triumphant in the task it sets for itself. It accomplishes its goal by combining all the different sign systems and putting them to good use. So we can see how semiology is a helpful method of taking apart images. It serves as a guide through all the mazes of meanings and stresses the relation of one text to others and to society as a whole –It allows us to see meaning as socially constructed. A powerful yet deceiving advert once again prevails.