

How effective are the M.S adverts?

We have recently been looking at three adverts that promote the awareness of a disease called MS or Multiple sclerosis; this disease is caused by scabs or imperfections on the covering of the nerves known as the myelin sheath. This prevents messages from the brain successfully reaching their destination causing problems.

Multiple sclerosis is a chronic, often disabling disease of the central nervous system.

Symptoms may be mild such as numbness in the limbs or severe paralysis or loss of vision. Most people with MS are diagnosed between the ages of 20 and 40 but the unpredictable physical and emotional effects can be lifelong. The progress, severity and specific symptoms of MS in any one person cannot yet be predicted, but advances in research and treatment are giving hope to those affected by the disease.

The National Multiple Sclerosis Society is dedicated to ending the devastating effects of multiple sclerosis. They are a non-profit organization that tries to gain awareness so people will pledge money or support. These three adverts appeared in the Guardian newspaper, a respected broadsheet and also on billboards. Even though these adverts may have been aimed at sophisticated people they appeal to a large audience and the language is simple and easy to read which makes these adverts have a universal appeal. The adverts appeared several years ago to raise awareness of the disease; sales and donations are of secondary issue.

The first advert is an introductory advert, it introduces the reader to the disease and tells anyone who has no idea about the illness all the basic symptoms, and you don't really need to know much about MS it's all explained. The heading at the top of the page is a rhetorical question,

“What's MS like?”

It is in white print on a black background so it immediately jumps out at the reader, after reading the heading we wonder about the answer and call to mind whatever we know about the disease. Then comes the answer to the question, the answer is that MS is totally unpredictable. We are told to close our eyes and stick a pin in the page, this is a clever idea by the advertiser, using a children's game like 'Pin the tail on the donkey', a game with which most people are familiar. This also helps convey the random nature of the disease and how one never knows when and which symptoms will affect them. Then underneath in large, bold, black print on a white background is the phrase “Every day for the rest of your life”, this has quite a big impact on the reader as we learn MS is incurable and the sufferer may have something different wrong with them every day till they die, each and every day may be tainted by the disease.

The picture is very emotive, the man is normal, not deformed or odd to look at, he looks like any ordinary person, which tells us that the disease may affect anyone. The man looks out at us, the reader and we cannot avoid his direct stare, he has a serious expression which reinforces the fact that the disease is serious and the advert is covering a serious topic. The picture appears to be a passport picture, very simple and straight forward, the photo is creased which makes the picture very personal, like it's been folded and put in somebody's wallet, like it's someone's son or husband again this helps us realize the disease can strike anyone. The folds may also represent the imperfection MS

causes or the cross a sufferer may have to bear. On the picture is a catalogue of symptoms but no consequences or effects like the other two adverts we have studied. This advert is merely to educate us about the symptoms of the disease. It provokes us to imagine what it would be like living with the disease, and how the disease is so random; other diseases may have symptoms which are nearly always the same. On the advert there are so many different symptoms,

“Today you can't climb the stairs”,

This is mentioned twice, maybe because mobility and freedom is so important to us all, no one likes to depend on others and the disease may make a person become immobile. Another is “Today you can't move” this is yet another example of the disease affecting a person's mobility.

At the bottom of the advert is the Multiple Sclerosis Society's logo, the logo makes the reader remember the company and reassures the reader that it is a registered charity, it makes the reader trust the charity as they're registered. The logo consists of a large white bold MS on a black background. There is a gap in the M which had been put there on purpose, this gap could represent the gap in a sufferer's life, maybe the instability a sufferer is faced with, or it could even represent the scab and imperfection on the myelin sheath which causes the disease. Also at the bottom is the factual information it is in very small print and we almost don't see it, this is because the purpose of these adverts is to promote awareness it isn't really concentrated on making money. We are told in very simple language where to phone if we would like to donate any money to the charity.

Then at the very bottom of the page is the slogan of the charity,

“The MS society providing the strength to fight MS”,

This lets us know that sufferers need support. We notice how it doesn't say “the strength to beat MS” because at the moment the disease is incurable.

Then we come to the second advert, it is a picture of a black man, which tells us the disease affects all races, and again the person looks out at the reader. Like the last advert again the advert is very direct, straight to the point it gets straight to the point which makes it very hard hitting. It is very hard to avoid the man's direct gaze that makes us feel uncomfortable which is probably the intended effect. We cannot shed the stare, just like he can't shed the illness. This second advert followed on from the first, the first only explored the symptoms of the disease and we were left to imagine the effects of the disease on the sufferer's life. The second advert is very similar to the first in many ways, only it goes a little further and mentions the consequences of the illness. A very conventional font style has been used once again; anything else like a fancy or fun font would be inappropriate for the serious message. The headings are in a larger font and in contrasting colours, at the top of the page there is a rhetorical question,

“Having a bad day?

Let me tell you

About some of mine”.

The print is white on black and then black on white that makes the headings jump out at the reader. This question makes us feel guilty as we put all our minor problems into perspective, our worries seem very trivial compared with those of the MS sufferers.

Next comes a series of diary entries taken randomly from a typical month in the life of this man. The dates and symptoms are underlined so immediately our focus is switched to them and we can see there is no structured pattern, if we care to read on there are

consequences to these symptoms. The first underlined comment makes us wonder how the symptoms affect the man, those people around him and his job, the first diary entry reads,

“Monday 3rd: I woke up partially blind. I knew the blindness wasn’t permanent but the fear of never knowing when I’d see again was difficult to control”,

This is very clever of the advertiser, as the reader of the newspaper can immediately have something to relate to, people who buy the newspaper obviously enjoy reading and it makes them wonder what it would be like not to be able to read, not to be able to see. Being in the format of a diary we feel like we are intruding on someone’s personal life, the writing is on the mans forehead, on his mind, this makes us feel like were reading his innermost thoughts we feel almost voyeuristic.

“Wednesday 14th: Last night I couldn’t have sex. My girlfriends very understanding but what if it goes on for weeks”,

Here we see the worry, panic and alarm the disease causes the sufferer, how they can never plan ahead or get on with their lives, the disease is always there, a constant hindrance, we also wonder what stresses and strains it may place on the sufferers relationships with others and how it isn’t only the person with MS who feels the effects.

“The day was going well until I wet myself”,

He uses blunt colloquial language which makes us a little amused, it is odd to think a grown man would be capable of such a childish act but immediately we imagine the great indignity that must have been involved and how the sufferer must feel helpless, devoid of all control. In this advert we learn how sufferers are powerless and have no control over anything, not their job, lifestyle or relationships. We learn the man has a social life but MS also gets in the way of him enjoying himself,

“My legs packed up in the cinema this afternoon. If my mate hadn’t have been there to help id probably still be there ready for the evening show”,

Again the advert uses humour to make the situation less embarrassing, he almost tries to laugh it off which suggests that things like this happen all the time and are a regular occurrence. It also suggests one must have a good sense of humour and a very strong personality to be able to cope with the disease successfully.

At the bottom of the picture is yet another rhetorical question,

“Still having a bad day”,

The answer almost certainly must be no. The lettering is not as large as the other question but it is still obtains the readers attention, it is in white bold print on a black background.

It makes the reader feel incredibly guilty, our problems seem miniscule and inconsequential compared to this mans daily toil. The question makes us look inward at ourselves and our own lives and helps change our outlook. The picture has the same creases as the first and the advertiser uses the same unavoidable gaze, it is almost as if the photo has been folded away in a drawer and forgotten about, but the sufferers will not let themselves or their disease be forgotten about. The logo also has the same logo as the other and at the bottom in the same small print and format are the details of the charity. This advert like the one before is promoting awareness and not asking for money primarily, if the reader wished to learn more about the disease it may require a further donation.

The third and final advert is in exactly the same format as the second. Although this time there is a strong emphasis on the unpredictable nature of the disease, this is because

it is the third and final installment in this trilogy of adverts. In the other two adverts we are first introduced to the disease and its symptoms and then made aware of the consequences. By the time we read this last advert we are fully aware and clued up on MS, so now we can put ourselves in the place of a sufferer and we can almost see the world through their eyes. Again the headline is in large bold font and to make it stand out it is white on black,

“I used to wish my life
Wasn’t so predictable”

Immediately we can relate to her as it is a common feeling but in the context of this advert it makes us think we take our stability for granted. We should be grateful to have a routine. Under the white writing are the words,

“Now if only it was”,

It's as if the woman regrets wasting time wishing she had a less predictable life when she should have been grateful for the life she led. We learn how an MS sufferer longs for the everyday routine and predictability we all take for granted. We understand the woman in the picture used to be like us, yearning for a change in our boring lives but we should be grateful for our good health. The advertiser has again used the direct gaze of the picture and the creased look. The ladies large sad eyes almost plead with the reader and we feel a pang of empathy for the sufferer.

In one of the diary entries we hear how even when a victim of MS has a good day things soon change and everyday activities that we take for granted have serious repercussions, “I felt really good this morning. I went for a long walk during my lunch break, I got so exhausted I had to take the day off work to recover”.

Even when she feels good and tries to be normal for just one day it backfires and has serious repercussions. We also wonder how a sufferer manages to hold down a job, each day there may be something different wrong with them which makes us wonder how their employers can rely on them. There must also be a world of scepticism that the sufferer must face every day, hopefully these adverts also teach people not to be too sceptical and realize how helpless the sufferer actually is.

The advert is also slightly comical, like the previous one. The woman tells the reader how she falls over a dustbin on her way to work and fell flat on her face, a consequence of having blurred vision, it is quite comical but we can imagine how humiliating that must have been and that the consequences of MS must cause some huge embarrassments. Another consequence in this advert and the last is slurred speech, leading people to believe the sufferer is drunk, this must have potentially disastrous consequences for the person's job and social life and must be very embarrassing.

This advert also has the small print and the logo that seems to be common to all the adverts.

All three adverts are very effective in conveying their message of the MS society. Each of the adverts plays heavily on the reader's conscience making us think our problems are insignificant compared to the perpetual problems faced by the victim of MS. We learn how they yearn for stability and a predictable life, things we all take for granted. MS sufferers wake up every morning not knowing what's in store for them and what symptoms they will have to endure, we also can imagine the profuse effect the disease has on the whole lifestyle of the victim, their jobs, loved ones and social life. After reading and studying the adverts I now know much more about the disease, I feel much

less ignorant and the adverts have had the desired effect. By reading the adverts I can empathize with sufferers because they're normal people just like you or I, the adverts are extremely effective in promoting awareness.