

“WHAT YOU CALL LOVE WAS INVENTED BY GUYS LIKE ME TO SELL NYLONS”

Introduction to advertising theory

Advertisements or ‘Ads’ usually appear in media of all types - such as printed magazines and outdoor posters or social media channels like Facebook or Instagram. Usually these messages are broadcast many times to a specific audience to increase their impact on the viewer. In order to analyse how effective they are advertising theory breaks down this production process into a number of specific areas. For example, consumers are considered ‘audiences’ and are analysed through ‘audience reception theory.’ The repetition of advertisement placement and exposure is explored through ‘repetition theory’. There is also ‘marketing communication theory’, ‘graphic design theory’, ‘colour theory’ and ‘typographic theory’

The majority of these ‘sub-theories’ explore and support the idea that in order for advertising to be effective in a capitalistic society it relies on practices such as: publicity, branding and marketing. However, advertising theory also explores advertising’s effects on society, both negative and positive.

Advertising is a means of communication aimed at persuading consumers to respond to a broadcast message. Usually these branded messages are designed to persuade us (the consumer) to buy a certain product or service. However, they can also inform citizens about political parties, or, charities or services. Although advertising has been described as “the sponsored art of capitalism” and has been used effectively to communicate in a capitalist society such as we have in the U.K., it is important to remember that advertising can also sell ideas, concepts and ideologies such as fascism or communism. In most western countries advertising is used to promote consumerism; in communist countries such as North Korea, advertising is used to promote an ideology and is referred to in the West as ‘propaganda.’

KEY IDEAS

Advertising is one of the UK's top creative industries and is a vital component of the country's creative economy: in the UK £16 billion pounds is spent on the creation and broadcast of advertising messages per annum and this generates over £100 billion pounds in contribution to the GDP. Some agencies based in the UK are: BBH; AMV BBDO; Ogilvy; and Karmarama and they create brands and advertising campaigns for broadcast across the globe.

Creating messages for a brand is the role of a marketing department. The marketing department and the advertising agency work together using many different strategies to create a marketing plan. The Art Director and Copywriter usually work inside the ad agency and apply advertising tools and techniques to design a message.

Advertising messages have an influence on society because most consumers in cities see over 5,000 messages a day. These ads reflect what is currently happening in society. In today's society advertising relies heavily on stereotypes and subtle inferences of stereotypes. Gender, racial and class-related stereotypes are also used. These stereotypes can often be considered negative as they re-enforce ideas that young people often call "old-fashioned," or these ideas can also be seen to be detrimental and harmful to members of society. This can be studied through 'gender theory' or 'theories of race and racism.'

KEY READINGS

Aitchinson, J. (2004) *Cutting edge advertising: How to create the world's best print for brands in the 21st century*, 2nd ed. Pennsylvania State University: Prentice Hall

Hegarty, J. (2011). *Hegarty on advertising*. London: Thames & Hudson. Available from: hegartyonadvertising.com/assets/pdf/hegarty-extract.pdf

Jones, C. W. (2019). Racism and classism in Mexican advertising. In: Olteanu, A., Stables, A., and Borçun, D. (eds.) *Meanings & Co. The interdisciplinarity of communication, semiotics and multimodality*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 213 – 266.

Rodgers, S. and Thornson, E. (2019) *Advertising theory*. London: Routledge.

Jones, C. W. (2019) *How advertising through the ages has shaped Christmas*. The Conversation. Available from: tiny.cc/nf90iz

ACTIVITIES

1. Open a newspaper or magazine. Select a print ad. Consider the design of this advertisement. What effect does the typeface/ image/ layout have on its message? Discuss.
2. Select an existing brand such as *Coca-Cola* and write a script for a 30 second TV ad, explaining how the brand is trying to tackle climate change.
3. Look at a Women's magazine such as *Cosmopolitan*. Can you see adverts that are specifically targeting single women? Older women? What messages are they communicating? How are they doing this?