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Vocabulary Definition

【1】 Advertising Image: Specifically refers to an image that contains the main commercial product and is intended to sell the product. It usually appears in poster, advertising video, Banner, etc.

【2】 Advertising Symbol/Element: In this article, we only discuss the items located in the advertising image, other than the main product object (non-color, composition, and text elements) that are used to assist the product and enhance the atmosphere.

Introduction

This study further focuses on the exploration of the themes of consumerism and capitalism from the perspective of image deconstruction. The recent experience of participating in a commercial advertising design project has given rise to new thoughts for me regarding the special design rules of advertising images. For this reason, I have initiated a research project targeting egg products. By collecting feedback from the audience and analyzing how each symbolic element in the advertising image guides them to form associations and endows the product with different values and meanings. The results indicate that the symbols in the image not only influence the audience's understanding of the product but also play a significant role in their consumption choices. This paper aims to deconstruct the symbolic elements in advertising images in order to re-examine what we truly purchase in our consumption behavior?

Analyze how visual symbols are communicated on advertising images and how they influence consumers' product perceptions and consumption decisions?

& How does the study of these symbols engage consumers through emotional connections and cultural values?

This experiment was influenced by the concept of encoding and decoding first proposed by Stuart Hall in "Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse" in 1973, thereby paying more attention to the intentions of the encoder's deliberate and intentional layout of symbolic elements in advertising images. From the perspective of the encoder's identity in advertising images, this experiment manipulates advertising language (symbolic elements) and randomly selects eggs as the research object because it is such a common, simple, and everyday item. Next, an attempt is made to consider the simplest and most original commercial layout style for the placement and arrangement of symbols and product positions. Therefore, considering that products are often located in the center of the layout with a relatively large size (for easy viewing of product details), symbolic elements usually serve as auxiliary functions and are typically placed around the central product (creating and highlighting the special atmosphere of its brand or conveying its brand values). In this context, it occurred to me that this is very similar to the concept of "Frame," whose function is to decorate the central painting. Thus, in the following visual experiment, Frame = symbolic elements (with the function of decorating the main subject), and painting = eggs (core content - product). The following six images incorporate symbolic elements extracted from different types of advertising categories, such as the iconic H logo and horse head symbol symbolizing nobility and luxury in luxury brand Hermès; the symbols of "butterfly" and "flower" often seen in female perfume products symbolizing softness and beauty; the symbols of shoes and leather gloves in men's clothing product advertisements symbolizing charm and gentlemanliness, etc.



Six images: Symbols are selected from different types of advertising images, and the contextualized experimental object, the egg, is placed under different symbolic frameworks.

Through the study of the symbolic framework, the following questions are further explored: Has the egg been endowed with different values? Is this egg still an ordinary egg? When people need to choose from these egg products, will they, due to the values represented by the symbols, shift to consuming symbols rather than basing their choice on their real personal needs? Just as Guy Debord said in his book "The Society of the Spectacle": "The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images" (Debord, 1994, p. 12), that is, in modern society, the connections between people are gradually replaced by consumption symbols. People establish self-identification indirectly through symbols and images, thereby inducing them to pay for symbols rather than actual needs.

Re-think about what exactly we aim to purchase?

Stuart Hall in "Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse" pointed out that "There is no necessary correspondence between encoding and decoding" (Hall, 1973, p. 11). On the contrary, contrary to Hall's viewpoint, this study contends that the deliberateness and guidance of symbol arrangement in advertising images significantly influence the audience, and consumers influenced by capitalist symbolic consumerism still predominate. The coexistence of products and symbols within an image is bound to enhance the possibility of the audience associating their relationship. Although he emphasizes that the audience has the subjective will to choose not to identify and oppose acceptance rights and that (mis)understandings may exist in different contextual backgrounds. In Barbara Kruger's work "I shop therefore I am", she even more critically examines consumerism in capitalist society. She explicitly states that contemporary consumers, under the inducement of capitalism, establish their identities and values more based on the goods they purchase. She noted: "I work with pictures and words because I think they have the ability to tell us and remind us where we're come from and where we're going" (Kruger, 1990, p. 20). She hopes to use her works to caution against the identity loss brought about by consumerism and the manipulation of individuals by advertising language, and also hopes to prompt people to consider whether they can avoid the same pitfalls and move towards a different future. The critical perspective she adopts and her aversion and distaste for symbolic consumption are consistent with the critical perspective this paper intends to prove, that symbols have a strong correlation with products. Based on this, the visual experiment of this study aims to reveal the essence of consumption behavior through symbols and intends to prompt the audience to reflect on the profound influence of symbols on consumption behavior. As a visual communication designer, through visual symbols, words, etc., a new perspective is provided for the audience to re-think: What exactly do we aim to purchase?

Explore how the idea of symbolic consumerism can be challenged through design and visual expression, and how design can prompt audiences to reflect on consumer behavior?

Moreover, Hans Haacke's work "A Breed Apart 1978" critically assesses capitalism by replicating the advertising layout of the British car brand Land Rover at that time and retaining the layout structure of its commercial advertisement. On this basis, the text within is modified to expose the truth contrary to the brand's philosophy. Influenced by his work, I aspire to conceive more ingeniously in visual forms and convey the viewpoints of the anti-consumerism movement more successfully and effectively in the future. The current visual experiments are still insufficient for effective communication. It is hoped that more in-depth research and more effective visual designs can be presented subsequently. Future explorations of issues could further investigate how brand symbols (such as logos, slogans, packaging designs, etc.) affect consumers' brand identification and loyalty? Research the significance and influence of symbols in different cultural backgrounds? For instance, the interpretation of specific symbols may vary in different cultures, which influences the market acceptance of products and consumers' purchasing behaviors.

Bibliography

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