Advertising discourse and mediation: from conception to reception

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Abstract

Nowadays, we are really witnessing an all-embracing decompartementalisation dynamic at once geographical, sectorial and cultural which has brought about mutations at all levels : political, economic and ecological. These changes are likely to have the marketing officials confounded and confused as to which most efficient strategy to adopt. Indeed, there is a dilemma regarding the selection of the lines of force of an advertising compaign as many thought-provoking questions arise such as : how could advertising play an intervening part facing these mutations while placing Man at the heart of communication ?

Keywords :

Advertising conception, mutations, mediation, Object, Subject.

الملخص

نشهد اليوم ديناميكية شاملة لفك الحيز جغرافية وقطاعية وثقافية في آن واحد أدت إلى حدوث طفرات على جميع المستويات: السياسية والاقتصادية والبيئية. من المحتمل أن تؤدي هذه التغييرات إلى إرباك مسؤولي التسويق بشأن الإستراتيجية الأكثر فاعلية التي يجب تبنيها. في الواقع ، هناك معضلة فيما يتعلق باختيار خطوط القوة للحملة الإعلانية حيث تظهر العديد من الأسئلة المحفزة للتفكير مثل: كيف يمكن للإعلان أن يلعب دور الوسيط في مواجهة هذه الطفرات بينما يضع الإنسان في قلب العملية الاتصالية ؟

الكلمات المفتاحية:

. مفهوم الإعلان ، الطفرات ، الوساطة ، الشيء ، الشخص

Introduction

The expression of the advertising message obeys a delimited framework: that of the poster format or the spot frame. Paradoxically, however, it is this spatial framework itself, which is relatively restricted, that makes the poster or advertisement a place of escape rather than confinement. Indeed, like the screen frame of the cinema, it favours the journey outside the space-time confines since it is centrifugal and not closed.

The reader's gaze starts from the centre and continues its journey, mentally, through the cultural meanderings without coming up against a (physical) frame that blocks its way. It does not function like the frame of a painting, which has the property of setting itself up as a kind of border that acts on the gaze and pushes it to converge towards the centre of the work of art. In short, it is not centripetal and this property makes it an enriching factor in the reading of any advertising medium because it encourages dreaming, escapism and watermark reading.

Issue: Our interest in this article is based on the observation that advertising, given its properties, has an undeniable impact on the eventual consumer and on his behaviour. And since man is the core of society, advertising can affect him and change his cultural traits.

Research questions and hypotheses:

How would it manage to keep man at the centre of all communication and touch his affects in order to trigger the act of purchase? How can advertising become a unifying element for the members of a society? What is the relationship between advertising and mediation?

We will therefore try to show that in order to succeed in conveying an adequate message, the advertising discourse must be situated at the centre of several disciplines. As a design project, its conception reconciles observation, understanding of the world and action on it.

Research objective: To shed some light on the mediating nature of advertising discourse and its impact on people and society.

Methodology: A descriptive analytical methodology was adopted.

1/ Mediation as an identifying feature of design

a-Design as a creative process: between the technically structural and the affectively cultural

In his essay, "Small philosophy of design", Vilém FLUSSER already defended a thesis that some would call "provocative" when he wrote: "our future will be above all a matter of design". We find nothing shocking about this insofar as we believe that modern man, in his daily life, cannot escape the influence of design.

Design is omnipresent because it is the result of ideas that are rooted in science, art, economics and politics: parameters that are essential to everyone's existence.

However, the "design object", around which our lives revolve, cannot be considered in its objective, neutral value without taking into account the "object of design" which is, in a general way, the "well-being" of Man. In other words, any design made by a designer must put people at the centre. The "object of design" is therefore the reason or rather the purpose for which the product has been designed, whereas the "object design" represents the process of creation.

Indeed, behind every denotative description of the design object lies another connotative one, which the consumer projects onto the object.

In fact, it is a question of an incessant back and forth movement, very often unconscious, between the technically structural and the affectively cultural. It is an irrational operation which takes place without our knowledge but which is of capital importance since it is most often the basis for the adoption or rejection of the product by the consumer. This is why the designer must not be satisfied with designing structurally beautiful products but must make references to the cultural system for which they are intended.

Combining the intellectual and the sensitive, knowledge and creation, design lies at the interface of several disciplines. Without being an engineer, sociologist or anthropologist, the designer must have a specific and global vision and be informed about the parameters and techniques related to these disciplines on which any design project is based. This is an epistemology specific to design which combines praxis, thought and social involvement. This tends to transform the tension and opposition that often exists between theory and practice into complementarity. It is this mediation that makes up the very identity of design.
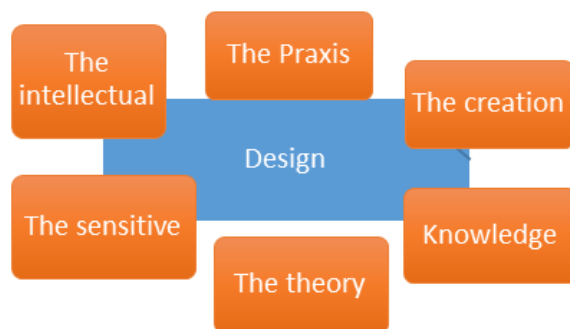
Fig 1 : Design across disciplines

In fact, over the last few decades, the notion of mediation has been at the centre of a number of research projects in many disciplines. According to Universalis, this notion has several meanings, ranging from animal mediation to chemical mediation, arbitration, conflict resolution and intercession. We have retained in particular those related to the link, negotiation and compromise. Moreover, for the past few decades, the notion of mediation has been at the centre of several research projects in many disciplines. It is used in the discourse of trade unionists, socio-culturalists, education professionals, etc. This notion thus characterises activities related to social relations and providing solutions to the various problems that may affect them. So how can advertising play the role of mediator?

b- The advertising message: a double articulation

The advertising image is no exception to this rule. As a design project, its conception reconciles observation, understanding of the world and action on it. As a figure of the capitalist economic system, it guides the basis of the social exchange in which the limits between Subjects and Objects are drawn. That is, it gives meaning to products by informing us about how they are used. It establishes certain consumer practices and guides our experiences of use. Its mediating role is very important nowadays. It has to do with connection, negotiation and compromise. Advertising must take into account several factors without neglecting the importance of the human being.

It is in this perspective that the advertising message conveyed should be endowed with at least a double semantic articulation to have a better chance of touching the consumer's affect. It must therefore "drain around its immediate raw meaning, cultural resonances that considerably enrich the information delivered"[1] and allow him to "enter the images" rather than remain "in front of them" as Serge Tisseron says in the preface of his book "Le bonheur dans l'image" (translated as The happiness in the image).

R. Ruyer believes that the language of advertising can only be ranked alongside the great "foods of psychic nutrition" such as literature, entertainment, cinema, etc. By "touching" the product through advertising language, people give it "meaning" and thus transform its simple use into an "experience of the mind", as Roland Barthes pointed out. It is a specific and heterogeneous language composed of different signs: iconic, plastic and linguistic signs. These three essential components, i.e. image, text and sound (in the case of an audiovisual commercial), represent the basis on which the advertising discourse is founded. They include colours, lines, symbols used, shapes, words (e.g. slogan) etc., i.e. all the elements that make up the advertisement and

which are accessible to the receiver through one of his five senses.   It is the interaction between these different types of signs that forms the message to be disseminated.

It is a scientific and artistic approach at the same time. It is reasoned analysis-synthesis and uses theoretical and practical tools borrowed from the various disciplines related to advertising design. However, in this process anchored in reality and pragmatics, sublimation and the imaginary are also invited. Indeed, advertising discourse mediates between an imaginary world, that of dreams, impulses and desires, and that of reality governed by the rigour of scientific standards. It is based on two major means of persuasion: deduction and seduction. There is a tendency to oppose these two means. However, it turns out that they are complementary

2/Advertising: between the consumer and the product
a- For an affective image of the product

The advertiser acts as a mediator between the product and the consumer by concealing the technical structure and highlighting the secondary meanings of the product that are likely to affect the user. This is why the advertising discourse, a real link between the product and the potential user, must draw its persuasive force from soothing and comforting secular values such as the notions of family, authenticity, security, happiness, etc., because, although the consumer is active, the initiative for the message belongs to the advertiser. The latter must aim at persuasion and seduction in order to trigger consent resulting from a certain emotional charge aroused in the receiver.
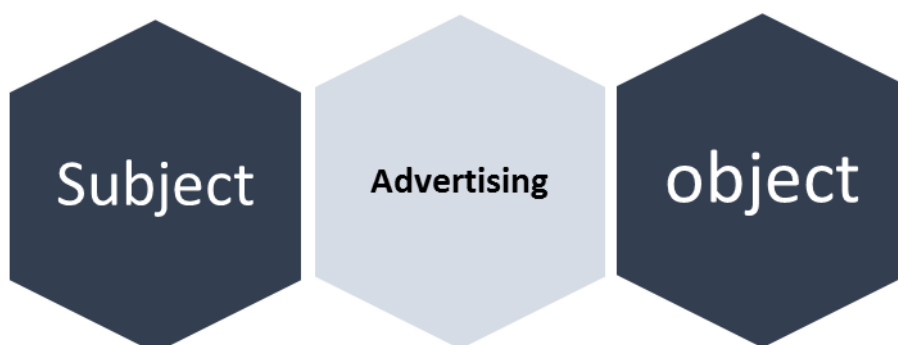

Fig 2 : Fig 2: Advertising: between Subjects and Objects

Thus, advertising as a medium between the product and the eventual purchaser ceases to be a mere marketing technique and becomes a process which enables us to adapt our surrounding world to the image of our inner world through conscious or unconscious psychic operations which it supports.

In fact, the advertising message as an auditory or visual image, i.e. material, is transformed into a sort of transformable space capable of generating in us an affective image that suits our psychological aspirations. We cease to be simply "in front of" and become "inside".

In fact, any successful advertising message must be capable of this alchemy, otherwise it would not affect our emotions and therefore our choices as consumers. It is in this sense that Serge Tisseron wrote: "an image in which we do not enter cannot, afterwards, nourish our personal syntheses, and, through them, inspire our gestures, our attitudes and our choices. Only those images we agree to enter can then be constituted as a screen for thought and participate in the

symbolic operations by which we attempt to master both our inner world and the surrounding world."[2] That is to say that advertising discourse, in order to convey its message, relies on aesthetic and intellectual pleasure.

b- Aesthetic and intellectual pleasures

In advertising, aesthetic pleasure is conceived in the harmonisation and balance between the visual, the textual, the music, the beauty of the atmosphere, the colours, etc. It is with these material and sensory supports that advertising takes us further than itself. We all have an advertisement that is engraved in our memory, an advertisement that has touched us and continues to do so, a product that we like and that we buy: not only because it is functional, but because it represents us. Advertising aims to draw the consumer into the structure of its meanings and then to encourage him or her to decode its visual and linguistic signs and to experience the pleasure of discovering its meaning.

Intellectual or cognitive pleasure can be understood as the joy of discovering the meaning of the advertising message. In many advertisements, the message is presented as an enigma, the decoding of which awakens the creativity of the reader, who is entrusted with the task of reception, i.e. the interpretation or recreation of the meaning. This pleasure is manifested in all the peripherals of advertising, and is no less important than aesthetic pleasure. It occurs through images, logos, slogans and music and appeals to the emotions of the spectators. It is not a question of opposing these two sides of pleasure, the sensitive and the intellectual, which would be linked to the long and perpetual tradition of a separation between sensitivity and understanding. On the contrary, it is about reconciling them and overcoming their antagonism. This process of sublimation and transformation allows the reasoned elements to go beyond their characteristics and take shape in the project's form. It is not about creating an artistic project but rather an aesthetic experience.

These two worlds coexist in the advertising image; they dialogue and can episodically borrow methods from each other. Indeed, advertising images form real worlds, inhabit us, transform us, help us to perceive and dream. Advertising images are thus able to solicit our attention, to spur our emotions, to influence our thinking... They are capable of shaking us with an enormous avalanche of emotions, sensations and feelings. This is the power that an image intrinsically possesses. This power goes beyond all limits. A single image can make you surrender to a kind of dream within this objective world by enveloping you in an aura of mental images that eventually invade and overwhelm the external perceptual content. There is an unconscious continuity between perception and dream. We go from a concrete image, by degrees, to images painted by our affects.
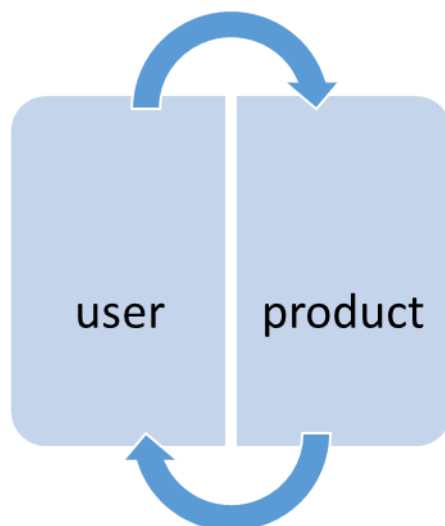
Fig3 : exchanges between the user and the product

The advertising image looks at us, watches us. It speaks about us. It does not see us as we are but as we would like to be. It seems to know us better than we know ourselves and aspires to fill our gaps and desires. It implants itself in us and tends to direct our choices. Our mentality is moulded, our tastes reformed, our ideas suggested by people we don't even know. Advertising therefore has a double effect on us. It captivates unconsciously because it has the advantage of concealing its communication within perception. It captivates consciously, i.e. by acting on our reason or by conveying emotion.

3/Advertising as a unifying element between members of society

a- The cultural and social significance of advertising

In addition to its declared economic function, "imaged" advertising fulfils other latent, non-visible functions whose influence on the collective mentality and therefore on mass culture is no longer in doubt. This is becoming a necessity nowadays if we want to adapt to the new data imposed by globalisation.

This may seem paradoxical, but it is not when we realise that every culture is not made up of fixed and unchanging features, but of very flexible values and phenomena. Culture is structurally evolutionary because it must favour the adaptation of the individual to the multitude and richness of the environments and conditions in which he or she evolves. Culture should neither prevent change from within nor exclude "borrowing" from outside, but should serve and help to adapt to the conditions of the environment.

The plasticity of culture should allow it to dive into the mould of multicultural globalisation without damage, as it is capable of an evolutionary dialectic that does not contradict community values.

Although the situation is very complex, one thing is certain: the Tunisian advertiser must take into account the cultural environment in order to understand the way societies function, which is largely motivated by cultural determinants in any purchasing and consumption experience.

Indeed, it would be wise for him to always have in mind, before starting the design of his posters, the following six questions: Who is buying? What? Where? When? How? Why?

The cultural and social impact of advertising on everyday life is undeniable. There is an interaction between the advertising image and the citizen. We cannot summarise the effects of advertising solely in terms of its impact on economic life. It is capable of profoundly transforming the everyday environment of modern man, both in the city and in the countryside. The links between advertising and mass culture in this complex interplay of mutual influences are well known.

The influence of advertising on culture is not limited to the visible phenomena of social behaviour. It also affects implicit elements that constitute "the real roots of social identity", as Nathalie Prime and Jean-Claude Usinier put it. Indeed, they use the analogy of the iceberg to distinguish the explicit from the implicit in culture. They believe that the cultural elements that appear on the surface, such as language, habits, clothing, know-how, family, religion, education, etc., generate in the minds of the "carriers" of culture elements that are said to be "implicit" and that concern values, mental states and cognitive processes as well as myths, beliefs and representations.

b-Brand image

The authors of "Marketing International" say that: "The system of values-attitudes constitutes the framework of moral references in the different areas of life invested with meaning by society. Then come all the mental states and cognitive operations as they have been stimulated by society in its natural environment: learning, memory, sensory perception, affects or knowledge. Finally, at the deepest level of culture are the myths, beliefs and deep special representations"[3].

Wearing a particular brand of clothing, drinking a particular beverage, owning a particular brand of mobile phone influences people's attitudes, feelings and representations and tends to associate the user with the product by creating a kind of "social alchemy" related to the "brand image".

David Victoroff states that "brand stereotypes are highly valued collective representations that are generally consistent and stable. Loaded with ideals, aspirations and obscure feelings, they are to some extent similar to the myths of archaic peoples[4]".

The author of "La Publicité et l'Image" (the advertising and the image) not only believes that the "brand image" has a close relationship with myths, but that it also contributes to creating them, since he states that advertising participates in the emergence of a modern mythology: "the mythology of the everyday object"[5].

Modern man's vision of the world and his perception of it are largely dependent on the "stereotyped images" that advertising does not fail to display all around him. When we know that "perception is the way in which man interprets his environment"[6], it is easy to understand the embarrassment in which modern man finds himself plunged with this profusion of "brand images" proposed by advertising.

More than ever we need all our senses and all our mental faculties to be able to perceive and judge the world with discernment and clarity, out of this imbroglio in which advertising messages throw us. Perception is not only about reactions to physical sensations, but also about the capacity of our mental faculties to interpret the stimuli that present themselves to them. "The environment is recorded and processed by the perceiver"[7].

The advertiser, having understood the impact that perception can have on human behaviour, has continued to provide us with empowering slogans and brand images to steer our worldview and mass culture in calculated directions. Indeed, it is almost proven that consumers react to marketing strategies based on their perception.

A look at the behaviour of people today, especially young people, leads us to believe that the influence of advertising is moral, cultural and psychological. Indeed, it helps to replace the "traditional" value system with a new table of "modern" values that revolve around notions such as happiness, modernity, leisure or health, while proposing adjusted models of behaviour and shaping a new "in" lifestyle and a new mass culture.

It also helps to fill a certain ideological vacuum created by the partial collapse of the left/right, east/west political debate that was sustained by the "cold war" and whose acuteness was felt with the collapse of the Berlin Wall. Thus, advertising appears to be the unifying element of the members of society because it aims at social integration and belonging to a group with the same values.

c- The advertising image and the stereotyped image

Advertising uses the major means of collective dissemination to replace "subcultures" with new symbolic values, common to the entire social group and built on the ruins of the value systems of the subgroups. Its battle horse is undoubtedly the "brand image".

This concept of "stereotyped image" is at the very heart of an exclusive culture because it is based on a process of identification of the individual with his or her "in-group" in relation to the individuals who make up the "out-groups", and a link is slyly woven between the members of the same group, favouring the synchronisation of behaviours through expressions such as "our values", "our world view", "our principles", etc. When we speak of culture, are we not talking about a "community" where individuals are united by common traits before each one elaborates his or her own experience within the social continuum?

Culture is above all collective. It is acquired and transmitted through a learning process called "socialisation", which itself relies on agents such as the family, school, associations, business, religious groups, the media, etc.

Nathalie Prime and Jean Claude Usinier, believe that: "Culture involves a process of production of meanings (values, norms, shared behaviours) coupled with a process of selection (not all elements of "reality" are necessarily invested with meaning, and the same elements can be the object of very different meanings depending on the culture). Culture is fundamentally an information system that creates, sends, stores and processes meanings about what is perceived as reality within the group. The meanings are acquired and define the integration of the world (at the implicit level) and the shared practices (at the explicit level) within the community of reference.[8]

Some of these agents of "socialisation", such as the family and the school, favour the learning of the history and values of the "community", while others, such as the media and institutions, do not fail to open up to the extra-mural cultural universe.

Results

This research has led to certain results related to the mediating character of advertising discourse. This character extends over three axes:

-Advertising discourse as a mediator between several disciplines.

-Advertising discourse as a mediator between a product and the target.

-Advertising discourse as a unifying element between the members of a society.

Indeed, to have a better chance of reaching the potential consumer, the advertising message must have at least a double semantic articulation. It captivates us unconsciously by targeting the consumer's affects through the phenomenon of perception and consciously by acting on our reason or by conveying emotion.

Advertising represents a unifying element between the members of a society allowing social integration and belonging to a group with the same values by proposing models of standard behaviour and a new mass culture: It is an undeniable agent of socialisation.

Recommendation

We believe that the stereotypical images that participate in establishing this new mass culture represent a very important axis that requires further development and that could guide us towards interesting results for our research.

Conclusion

In this context of mutations on all levels, caused by globalisation, the advertising message no longer has only economic aims but also tries to bring a little warmth to a world that lacks it by enhancing the objects it highlights. Advertising contributes to the "nourishment" of everyday life, on all levels, and is inspired by it at the same time.

Whether explicit or implicit, the cultural traits of a society are to some extent dependent on the influence of advertising on behaviour. The advertising image plays an important role in shaping people's worldviews by providing them with brand images and stereotypes

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