

The Power of Advertisements

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Abstract

In this media literary analysis essay, there are two different ads which express two different emotions; emotional transfer and fear. This compares both of them by looking at how an advertisement can express different feelings towards their audience with their words, music, the way they act, or the way it was shot, and how it still manages to grab the reader's attention differently. Thai Life Insurance produced an ad showing how a man in his thirties helps the same people and others who cross his way each day; we can see how he makes an impact in other people's lives, for example by helping the little girl get an education. Meanwhile, in the second ad, The Precinct Studios made their audience think the mom is taking good care of her son, especially since we can see that they are well dressed and that it looks like they live in an upper-middle-class home, but shows the opposite and compares heroin to fast food. Advertisements will make us feel because they know how to grab their audience's attention by manipulating and getting them by using emotional transfer and fear based on how they present their work.

Keywords; Media Analysis, Advertisements, fast food, drugs, education, addiction, emotional transfer, fear, happiness, helping, and receiving

The Power of Advertisements

Today, many companies are trying to sell their products all over the world through technology such as computers, cellphones, television, radios, billboards and more.

Advertisements make us feel a particular way because they know how to grab their audience's attention by manipulating and getting them by using emotions based on how they present their work. Advertisements can be dangerous in our society today since they can create some negative emotions and manipulate us to buy a product or idea when we aren't thinking more into depth but just making decisions based on our emotions. In both a Thai Life Insurance ad and a Precinct Studios public service announcement emotional transfer is used to get viewers to buy into either a good or bad feeling about the products they are presenting. By doing this, our emotions become what are being bought and sold, leading us away from making decisions based on thoughtfulness and logic.

The video ad for Thai Life Insurance (2014) has six different scenes set in an urban area. A man in his thirties is wearing a white-long-sleeve button up shirt, black slacks and a black backpack walking along the sidewalk. He notices a pipe leaking and grabs the nearest flower pot to help revive the plant. He then sees a lady in her fifties struggling to push her vendor cart, so he runs towards her to help. The man gives a homeless dog his piece of chicken as the dog places his paw on his thigh. The ad shows a man who is cooking in a muscle shirt that shakes his head with disagreement. In the next scene, he stops to read the ladies and little girls cardboard sign that says: "For Education." He reaches for his brown wallet and takes two pink dollar bills that are worth a hundred dollars and places it into the girls' cup. The little girl bows her head to thank him, but a man in his sunglass shop shakes his head with disagreement as he is holding a newspaper. They then show how he places some bananas on someone's apartment door which

ends up being an old lady around her eighties who opens her door and spots the bananas that are on her doorknob. The narrator asks, “What does he get in return, for doing this every day?” (Thai Life Insurance, 2014). As they show the next day repeating, something unusual happens. The man walks towards the lady and her daughter looking down at his wallet taking the money out of his wallet. He looks up and does not see her in her usual spot and turns to look at the mom. Then the little girl screams “Mom!” They both turn around and see that she's in a school uniform. The narrator says, “What he does receive are emotions” (Thai Life Insurance, 2014). It's the third day, and once again they repeat his day, and the narrator says, “Receives what money can't buy” (Thai Life Insurance, 2014). They then show the little girl showing her mom how to count with her hands with excitement. In the end, the screen turns blue and has white letters in Thai it read “Thai Life Insurance, Believe in Good” (Thai Life Insurance, 2014).

This ad shows us the power of kindness and how to give and receive without expecting anything in return. We understand how generous this man is toward everyone he comes across, no matter what his circumstances are because it's something that is coming from his heart. We can also see how people's facial expression and moods change as he does these things, but also how this advertisement shows how we would like our world to be. We never know the impact we have on a person's life by simply being kind. In the end, they say, “Thai Life Insurance, Believe in Good,” implying that their insurance will take good care of them and make their members their lives better. In Lopez's (2004) “Advertising Analysis,” we can see how emotional transfer is used in this advertisement through

the process of generating emotions to transfer them to a product. For example, a Coke ad shows happy, beautiful people but tells us nothing about the product. The point is to

make you feel good and to transfer that feeling to the brand or product. This is the number one and most important process of media manipulation (p.2).

Thai Life Insurance uses this in the music they play and the happiness and tenderness in the scenes, but also through our desire of a better world. This leads us to assume that the company also believes in and supports those ideas. We experience the happy emotions watching this ad, and we, whether consciously or unconsciously, associate that with the company. We transfer our happy emotions to this company.

Another ad, done by Precinct Studios, uses the same techniques, but in the opposite way. In this public services announcement by The Precinct Studios (2011), the scene was shot in a quiet, suspenseful, dark dining room. The dining room looks spotless as we see the shadow of someone's legs on the wood floor. The shadows slowly disappear and we see the person's legs wearing brown boots that look like Uggs. The camera slowly turns toward the dining room where a boy around five years old with dirty blond hair, wearing a navy blue shirt is sitting with his left hand on his head thinking while coloring in his coloring book. A lady with short black hair, wearing a sky-blue sweater and a white shirt underneath, pulls the chair out to sit down with her him. This makes their audience assume she is his mom since they are the only ones in that scene and she is also carrying a bag like she is bringing him some fast food to eat. She holds a brown paper lunch bag and places it on the table with her left hand. She opens the bag with a serious look on her face, takes out a spoon and lays it on the table, and we hear it bang. The camera points towards the round wooden table where she also takes out aluminum foil and a syringe with an orange cap on it. At this point we realize she's getting out heroin to shoot up. They then show the kid scribbling with force with a red crayon as he is sticking out his tongue in concentration. The lady opens the aluminum foil packet. Then the camera turns toward the little

boy scribbling extra loud with frustration—his mom who is heating the spoon with the lighter grabs a black band, ties it on his arm, grabs the needle and places a napkin like a bib on her son. Her son looks at her; they both reach forward, grab a burger, and take a bite. The screen then turns black and has white words that say,

You wouldn't inject your children with junk

So why are you feeding it to them?

Childhood Obesity

Break the habit (The Precinct Studios, 2011).

At the end of The Precinct Studios (2011) ad, they make their audience feel anxious as they think she is going to inject her son with heroin but also feel relief as the mom and son finally bite into their burgers. However, it also leaves them questioning themselves especially if they are a parent.

According to Fowels (1996) in "Advertising's Fifteen Basic Appeals," he states,

The opposite of the need to nurture is the need to be nurtured: to be protected, shielded, guided. We may be loath to admit it, but the child lingers on inside every adult—and a good thing it does, or we would not be instructable [sic] in our advancing years (p. 6).

This advertisement switches what Fowels states and shows us the opposite as we look at the scene where the mom is at the same table with her son as she is about to shoot up her son with heroin. That scene is horrifying and makes the audience question her. We can see why they would do this as we finish looking at the video and know that she is not drugging her son as they bite into the burger but then realize what they are trying to express. They compare the most addictive drug, heroin, to fast food. This ad is focusing on all the parents who are feeding their children fast food instead of making them a healthy, homemade, cooked meal, and saying they

are doing the same harm as if they had given them drugs. This advertisement does make the audience think about how much damage they are doing and they may rethink it. This is another example of emotional transfer, except in this case, the emotions are negative and fearful. Even if we don't buy into such a drastic comparison, by making us imagine the parent shooting a kid up with heroin, we carry that negative association with us. As they say, "there are some things you can't unsee." The group has transferred the negative emotion to us in terms of feeding kids fast food.

Our society views the Thai Life Insurance advertisement as an ideal of how we should treat people, but also shows how we should appreciate everything we have and be grateful we are able to go to school because not everyone around the world has the same free privileges. Meanwhile, the second ad implies we need to make better choices for our children because fast food can cause the same harm as any addictive drug. It is an ad that is surprising with its negative emotions and images. According to Davis (1992),

we see almost no advertisements and few new stories that shed negative light on corporations or businesses. This is not to suggest that all of these organizations are bad. It is worth nothing, however, that most corporate images appear in ads purchased or stories placed by the businesses themselves, so it's hardly surprising that the messages we hear are relentlessly positive" ("Myth #6," para. 15).

Some companies try to trick us into paying for things we don't need. They use psychology against us by exploiting our vulnerability to different types of happy emotions and ideals. The fast food ad also does this, but by reversing the idea: how it shouldn't be. Both advertisements express some common purpose. The first ad uses emotional transfer of happiness and the second advertisement uses that of fear, about which Lopez (2004) says, "Fear messages are directed at

our insecurities, ... This is a very common technique and extra attention is required to resist these messages” (p.2). We should be cautious about the advertisements we watch or read so we won't get tricked into believing or buying what they are trying to pitch just through emotional transfer. Sometimes advertisements like the two described here buy us with their imagery and give us both negative and positive effects. In the first advertisement they buy us with the music they play in the background, the story they tell and our emotions; this is very problematic. After we finish watching advertisements, are we really looking beyond their story and research the company, or are we just doing it based on our emotions? For example, the end of the Thai Life Insurance (2014) ad made us feel happy as we saw the little girl in her school uniform, but is Thai Life Insurance really as giving as the character they show in the ad? More importantly, does that ideal behavior come to mind as people in Thailand shop for insurance? Do buyers, consciously or not, choose an insurance company that implies they are good and generous without knowing the truth?

Meanwhile other advertisements, such as The Precinct Studios (2011) help us see the danger of fast food by expressing how addictive it is by comparing it to heroin. This is grabbing parents' attention who are feeding their children fast food without realizing the side effects such as obesity. Using these negative emotions also moves us to buy into their idea. Choosing to use heroin—one of the most dreaded drugs—and imply it's being given to a small child is horrifying. By associating that dreadful image with fast food, our emotions are once again subtly and subversively tied to the product.

Advertisers know how to draw their audiences into their products using different techniques, and while their messages may be inspiring or a worthy cause, as consumers we need to be aware of how they are pulling on our emotions so that we make sure and draw our own

conclusions about companies and products. Through emotional transfer, we can easily be pulled into the emotion—either positive or negative—and fail to do our research and make our own decisions. That is one of the strongest powers of advertising.

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