

Car Baby

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Society is bombarded with subliminal messages in television advertisements every day. Consumers see different images that trigger many emotions in the brain. Now, it seems that television is a very important part of people's lives. Every home has television sets practically in every room. It is more likely to see them placed in living rooms and bedrooms. Now, even more common, they are in view of dining tables. There is no denying that we see commercials every day. A very popular slogan society has come to know is by Nationwide Insurance. "Nationwide is on your side," can be heard at the end of Nationwide's television commercials. In the television commercial "Baby" by Nationwide Insurance (2013), consumers are given the message that a car is now a valuable member of their family, which conveys society as being materialistic through subliminal messages.

The commercial begins with a blue Nationwide insurance logo flag flown up in the air. This gives the consumer first glimpse of a subliminal message. They are reminded of their pride and patriotism as they see the flag flying high. Countries show their pride by flying their flags on federal buildings. This triggers a memory in viewers of belonging to a country and a sense of pride as the Nationwide flag is on the screen. The angle of the camera has the viewers looking up at the flag. Fowles (1998) mentions in "Advertising's Fifteen Basic Appeals":

. . . the viewing angle which the audience has on the ad's subjects is informative. If the subject are photographed or filmed from below and thus are looking down at you much as the Green Giant does, then the need to be guided is a good candidate for the ad's emotional appeal[.] If, on the other hand, the subjects are shot from above and appear differential, as is often the case with children or female models, then other needs are being appealed to. (4. A Need for Guidance

section)

This means that if individuals are looking up at an object or figure, they are given the sense of following or being like a child looking up at someone or something to inspire them or lead them. That is the appeal seen and felt by the view as the view looks at the flag.

In the next scene, there is a young man, played by Tate Ellington, giving a cute giant baby a bath to simulate washing a car. The young man is using a water hose and a sponge on the baby while in front of a beautiful picture-perfect house. The baby is smiling and happy. The baby symbolizes a car. Another man is walking his dog and looks at Tate Ellington washing the giant baby. This scene gives the consumer a feeling of approval as the man who walks by is staring at the giant baby. Values of young men are belittled through this advertisement; it shows that society is materialistic because a car is valued like a member of the family. Kavanaugh (1986) states this best in "Idols of the Marketplace" when he says: "If we are taught to relate to persons as if they were expendable objects and to relate to things as if they were substitute persons, we are led into the distressing inversion that the [P]ope alludes to when he speaks of becoming slaves to products or slaves to production systems" (Cultural Ground section). This is how a car is turned into a baby that is to be cared for and loved as if it were human. It implies that a car is worth as much as a real baby. There the car has become a part of the family and makes the viewer think that a man loves his car as much as his children. Through this ad, consumers are given the image that a precious life is just like a car. This conveys that consumers' lives are worth as much as a material objects.

The following scenes in the commercial are of the car being in danger. The next image fed to consumers is of the giant baby almost being hit by a shopping cart, and Tate runs to stop the shopping cart from hitting the baby. Afterwards, Tate is seen opening the garage door and

bending down eagerly looking inside where the giant baby is. It seems like both are smiling and happy to see each other. Then the consumer is hit with a scene of the giant baby crying. The baby is in front of a yellow fire-hydrant which is gushing with water. The giant baby looks back at Tate, and then there is a close-up of Tate's face concerned with what just happened. Finally, the image of a blue new mustang that has hit a yellow fire hydrant is given. Now the viewers see what the giant baby has been representing all along. Afterwards, Tate is shown in a service center lobby waiting worriedly for his vehicle. Dwayne Bernes, the consumer service specialist, comes to Tate and walks him into the shop area. A smile comes to Tate's face when he sees his giant baby once more happily playing with a giant tire.

Throughout this part of the commercial, the consumer is going through the same emotional feelings as Tate: being worried for the baby as the shopping cart almost hits it and then when the giant baby is crying in front of the fire hydrant. In turn, it implies that a father figure will try to prevent injuries to his baby, the same as he would for his car. Yet, the accident reminds the viewer that he or she has nothing to worry about when "Nationwide is on your side." Fear was transferred to the viewer through the ad when the car was wrecked and the giant baby was crying. Yet, at the end, the image of Nationwide insurance logo is shown to remind consumers that by purchasing their insurance, the consumer will be protected. The company's slogan "Nationwide is on your side," is heard at the end.

In this television commercial, the consumer hears the familiar voice of Julia Roberts saying, "In a nation, we know how you feel about your car. So when coverage really counts, count on Nationwide Insurance. Because what is precious to you, is precious to us. Just another way of how we put members first. Because we don't have shareholders. Join the Nation" (Nationwide, 2013)

This message provides viewers with the sense of belonging as long as they “join the nation” (Nationwide, 2013). What is being said to the consumer portrays this insurance company as caring; it is a human characteristic given to a company. Nationwide implies that consumers value cars as a precious commodity. Nationwide also implies that they understand the consumer and defines the company as having the same feelings as the consumer, once again, giving human characteristics to the company. As this all goes on in the background, the song “Love is Strange” by Mickey and Sylvia is played. The song has an impact on the consumer by triggering warm feelings, since the only words heard of the entire song are “love- love is strange. Baby.” These words relate to the images shown in the ad. This is an older song that adults can relate to. In addition, this ad is geared toward a parental, older figure. With this song, consumers may have flashbacks of being young and caring for a child, in this case, car.

Nationwide’s commercial has a lot of different images that are demeaning to society. Not only did it portray a young man as being materialistic, only caring for his car, but it also compared the precious life of a child to a car. This implies that human life has the same worth as a car. In the “Power of Images: Creating the Myths of Our Time” Davis (1992), media specialist, writes that “Television’s most important stories are those not verbalized-the stories and myths hidden in its constant flow of images.” This also hits on the fact that consumers are being fed concealed messages through advertisements, no longer using only words, to sell the product. Society and human life should not be portrayed this way. Human life is precious and valuable, and a car can be replaced.

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