

Merry Materialism

Alexander Corwin

El Paso Community College

Author Note

This paper was prepared for English 1301 CRN: 11429, taught by Professor Wood

Abstract

This paper takes a look at the advertisement "Amazon Holidays 2018" from Amazon and considers the subliminal points made in the ad, discussing how Amazon uses emotions of the consumer to sell their products and their ordering services. The main points focused on are how Amazon takes advantage of the feelings associated with the holidays to sell more of their product. This causes people focus on the materialism that has now been associated with the holidays, rather than family and actual togetherness. By suggesting that an order from Amazon spreads happiness and love and shows compassion, it is also suggesting that one cannot express those feelings without ordering from Amazon, and shaping these kind of thoughts is detrimental to our society. In addition, by playing on positive emotion as more people become aware that their emotions are being preyed upon, it can cause people to shield these emotions and become more distant from one another.

Keywords: Media Analysis, Advertising, Amazon Commercial, Emotions, Holidays.

Merry Materialism

The technologically advanced world we live in today offers quick one stop shopping for any and everything you may want or need—the internet. Now, combine this with the age-old idea that the Holidays is the time to buy gifts for any person we happen to come into contact with and we have the basis for the advertisement “Amazon Holidays 2018” from Amazon (2018). When initially viewed this commercial is uplifting, happy, and gives off a sense of togetherness that the holidays bring. With a closer look and an objective mind, the advertisement is really pushing the idea that a box from Amazon is what causes togetherness and happiness, and without it our holiday will be empty.

The advertisement opens on a little girl making a gingerbread house with another little girl when an Amazon box singing “Can You Feel It?” by The Jacksons catches her attention. It cuts to a woman in a cubicle that sees a dolly full of singing boxes coming down her aisle which causes a smile to run across her face. Boxes being delivered continue to catch the attention of everyone, including animals. A woman tells her Alexa, another Amazon product, to “turn on the lights,” and extravagant Christmas lights illuminate a snow-covered cabin. The boxes continue singing and making people in a warehouse, a man de-icing his windshield, and a nurse in a hospital smile. The nurse was tending to a sick child, who was sleeping and has machines all around him with a singing Amazon box next to his bed. The child awakens and smiles at the box. An old man sitting in an office in a small store with papers staked all around him gets an Amazon box and gives a hearty laugh. A large truck packed with these boxes is opened on the street and catches the attention of everyone around, including a father, a baby and some construction workers, again causing smiles. Two people carrying these boxes walk past one another in a busy building and look back at each other in a love-at-first-sight kind of way. The

camera pans out of a snow globe with a city inside to the little girl from the beginning getting ready to sleep, and she hushes her singing Amazon box who finishes the song as she stares contently into the snow globe.

Many of the images play on basic human emotions, and the most obvious is the feeling of happiness. Many of us associate happiness with the holidays, regardless of which holiday may be celebrated, and many of us also associate gift buying with the holidays as well. The usage of an uplifting song like “Can You Feel It?” that uses such lyrics as “the whole world’s coming together now, can you feel it?” triggers a feeling of happiness and peace. Coupled with the images of people smiling when an Amazon box is seen singing, the song conveys the message that it’s the Amazon box spreading the happiness, as no one is happy until they see the box. Of course, in a somewhat subliminal way, it is not the box making people smile but the fact that the holidays are near, and the boxes presumably contain some gift for someone. The usage of associating emotion with an advertisement is not uncommon, Dachis (2011) states, “there are all kinds of ads, but in general they all aim to keep you from thinking, and, instead, make your buying choices based on an emotional response” (“How Manipulative Advertising Works,” para. 1). The emotional response that Amazon wants the consumer to feel when receiving a package from Amazon is not just happiness, but that feeling of bliss and peace associated with the holidays, and thus causes people to associate happiness and togetherness with Amazon rather than family and actual togetherness.

When we examine a little deeper, Amazon is saying even more about the happiness ordering from them brings: they are saying they can make even the most depressing situations and the most down and out people happier. This is conveyed when the nurse puts the Amazon box next to the sick boy’s hospital bed. She turns and smiles at the box, and the boy awakes and

smiles at the box as well. This suggests that a very depressing situation like a child sick in the hospital at the holidays can be made much better by receiving an order from Amazon. There are Christmas decorations all around the boy's bed, but this scene suggests that it was not complete or happy enough without the Amazon box. When the boy smiles at it, it also suggests that even though he is sick in a hospital at Christmas time, he can be happy because he got something from Amazon. This not only plays on the emotion of happiness, but also pulls on the heartstrings, making people feel as if ordering from Amazon can give a sick child a merry Christmas.

Additionally, this ad suggests that Amazon spreads love, not only through the song about togetherness, but through the scene when a man and a woman pass each other with a shopping box and lock eyes with one another, suggesting love at first sight. The idea of love at first sight is portrayed in many movies, and the idea of two strangers passing a locking eyes is very easily picked up on. This scene suggests that the two strangers only noticed each other because they were both carrying Amazon boxes, and thanks to Amazon, the two may have experienced their first connection with one another. It seems that many people now associate love with the reception of some kind of gift, and this ad promotes that idea, rather than the true feelings of love that one can experience.

Much of the advertisement itself is subliminal, the feelings caring about the child in the hospital and the connection the two strangers shared are examples of this. However, that is the point, as Godrej (2006) said "much effort is expended upon trying to sink boreholes into the vast iceberg of the subconscious mind" ("Repeat after me," para. 4). Amazon attempted this, and not only during the holidays when most of us are not only vulnerable to a convenient way to shop, but also when we are also more vulnerable to our emotions. This ad promotes that materialism goes hand in hand with happiness, love, and compassion, and that may be precisely why the true

expression of these feelings has become more and more difficult to spot in everyday life. By preying on positive emotion and making people feel like they are being taken advantage of for their positive feelings, the more distant people will become from each other, and with that, the togetherness that Amazon suggests it brings, will continue to slowly fade away.

References

Amazon [Advertisement], (2018, November) *Amazon holidays 2018* [Video file]. Retrieved from

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l41wmQVg1Ls>

Dachis, Adam. (2011), How advertising manipulates your choices (and What to Do About It),

Life Hacker, <https://lifelife.com/how-advertising-manipulates-your-choices-and-spending-h-30812671>

Godrej, Dinyar. (2006), Captive: How the ad industry pins us down, *New Internationalist*,

<https://newint.org/features/2006/09/01/keynote/>