

Advertising:

Selling Dreams and Saving the World

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Advertising is ubiquitous; it infiltrates our life and all of the spaces in which we move. It interrupts our television viewing, it fills the pages of our newspapers and magazines, it glares down at us from billboards and flashing lights and it clogs up our computers with spam e-mails and pop-ups which congratulate us on winning competitions we didn't even know we'd entered. Its form may change and its appearance may alter, but all advertising has the same aim: to convince you that you need to swap your money for whatever the advertisers are offering, to persuade you that you would be better off if you exchanged your hard earned cash for the product that is made to look as tempting and necessary as possible.

The last hundred years have brought about changes in all aspects of our daily lives, advertising included. Advertising is an age old concept; everybody who has ever sold anything has had to engage in advertising of some form or another. The last hundred years, however, have witnessed the development of three different yet related techniques when it comes to the (not so) subtle art of persuasion which we will now explain and explore.

The Birth of Public Relations

When the First World War ended, Sigmund Freud's nephew, Edward Bernays, realised that the propaganda techniques that had been used during the war could be employed in peace time as well. Bernays had been working for the War Department's Committee on Public Information, the propaganda arm of the US war effort (1), but now he concentrated his efforts elsewhere. Propaganda was given a new name: Public Relations, or PR for short. It was also given a new purpose: to sell products. Bernays became one of the main architects of the modern techniques of mass-consumer persuasion, using every trick in the book, from celebrity endorsement and outrageous PR stunts, to eroticising the motorcar. (2)

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Edward Bernays - © Scanpix

Bernays' most inventive turn was to take the ideas of his then little-known uncle and use them in this new industry. Sigmund Freud invented the process of psychoanalysis, a way of allowing psychologists to tap into the unconscious thoughts and desires of their patients in order to cure them of mental illness (3). Bernays used the idea that people could be controlled by their irrational unconscious desires in

order to link certain ideas with certain products. You no longer had to offer people what they needed; by linking your brand with their deeper hopes and fears, you could persuade them to buy what they dreamt of. Equipped with our subconscious wish-lists, we could go shopping for the life we had seen portrayed in the adverts (4).

The best example of this occurred in the 1920's. Bernays was hired to expand the sales of Lucky Strike cigarettes amongst women. At that time, smoking was considered to be a luxury that only men should indulge in. Recognizing that women were still riding high on the suffrage movement, Bernays used this as the basis for his new campaign. He consulted Dr. A.A. Brill, a psychoanalyst, to find a way

of encouraging women to break the taboo and begin to smoke. Dr. Brill determined that cigarettes could be used to represent "torches of freedom" for women. Bernays then persuaded some women to light up during the 1929 Easter Day Parade in New York. The event caused a national stir and stories appeared in newspapers throughout the country.

Though not doing away with the taboo completely, Bernays' efforts had a lasting effect on women smoking (5). He had linked the process of inhaling the smoke from some burning leaves with freedom and equality for women; on the face of it a completely illogical connection! This caused a revolution in advertising which we are still witnessing the effects of today.

This also had political consequences. People could now define and express themselves through the products they owned, creating a new consumer culture and encouraging the pursuit of happiness that could keep people docile and politically inactive (6).

To persuade those who were still interested in politics, politicians could also use the same PR techniques as were being used in advertising; Bernays was also employed by the then US President Calvin Coolidge in order to portray him as a more sympathetic figure to the American voting public. He did this by inviting the top entertainment stars of the day to the White House and made sure that the press was there to document the event.

The Search for Identity

As the century continued, people changed and advertising had to follow suit. The economic boom that reached its peak in the 1960's and the early 70's allowed people the time and space to "discover" themselves as individuals. The hippie movement encouraged self "actualization" and people were encouraged to get in touch with their inner selves. The advertisers were left scratching their heads – how could they sell mass produced products to people who were trying to define themselves as individuals?

In 1978 Stanford Research Institute was asked by several leading corporations to find a way to read, measure and fulfill

"Light a Lucky and you'll never miss sweets that make you fat"

Constance Talmadge
Constance Talmadge,
Charming Motion
Picture Star

INSTEAD of eating between meals... instead of fattening sweets... beautiful women keep youthful slenderness these days by smoking Luckies. The smartest and loveliest women of the modern stage take this means of keeping slender... when others nibble fattening sweets, they light a Lucky!

Lucky Strike is a delightful blend of the world's finest tobaccos. These tobaccos are toasted—a costly extra process which develops and improves the flavor. That's why Luckies are a delightful alternative for fattening sweets. That's why there's real health in Lucky Strike. That's why folks say: "It's good to smoke Luckies."

For years this has been no secret to those men who keep fit and trim. They know that Luckies steady their nerves and do not harm their physical condition. They know that Lucky Strike is the favorite cigarette of many prominent athletes, who must keep in good shape. They respect the opinions of 20,679 physicians who maintain that Luckies are less irritating to the throat than other cigarettes.

A reasonable proportion of sugar in the diet is recommended, but the authorities are overwhelming that too many fattening sweets are harmful and that too many such are eaten by the American people. So, for moderation's sake we say:—

"REACH FOR A LUCKY INSTEAD OF A SWEET."

"It's toasted"
No Throat Irritation—No Cough.

LUCKY STRIKE CIGARETTES
"IT'S TOASTED"

Reach for a Lucky instead of a sweet.

© 1929, The American Tobacco Co., Manufacturers

Want to catch radio hook-up every Saturday night through the National Broadcasting Company's network. The Lucky Strike Dance Orchestra in "The Tunes that made Broadway Broadway."

Lucky Strike advertisement, 1929 - © Scanpix

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the desires of consumers. This was the start of market research and lifestyle marketing, techniques which are still widely used today. An example of this can be seen in the new campaign for Hewlett Packard computers, with the slogan, "The computer has become personal again".

Trying to Save the World – Playing on Your Guilty Conscience

In the 21st Century, there can be no doubt that global warming and climate change is something everybody is aware of. As with the belief in self awareness in the 60's and 70's, when an idea becomes an integral part of national and international culture, advertisers need to respond to this and make sure that they use these ideas to appeal to potential customers.

Of course, this need to appear environmentally friendly is particularly tricky for the companies who sell the products that are perceived to be the cause of the problem: car manufacturers and oil companies. This has led to the process of "greenwashing". We all know that "whitewashing" involves covering up facts or evidence that could aid in finding someone guilty of a crime. Replace "white" with "green" and you have the process whereby corporations try, with the help of advertisers, to appear environmentally friendly.

Another related concept here is that of "rebranding". When a brand needs to change its image in order to make it more attractive to potential customers, it has to "rebrand". These two concepts, greenwashing and rebranding, are perfectly illustrated in the new advertising campaign from BP. This used to stand for "British Petroleum". It now stands for "Beyond Petroleum", a rebrand that attempts to persuade people that this is an energy company, not an oil company. Unfortunately, BP's investment in alternative energy sources is nothing compared to its investment in looking for new sources of oil. (7)

"Ethical shopping" is another well known concept which advertisers play on in order to prick our social consciences and get us to part with our money. This involves the concept of "voting with your wallet" and websites such as betterworldshopper.com (8) provide

This text is intended to be an introduction to the topic of advertising with the intention of fulfilling the following curriculum goals:

VG2 Engelsk Læreplan

Språk og språklæring

Mål for opplæringen er at eleven skal kunne

- gjøre rede for grunnleggende trekk ved engelsk språkbruk og språkstruktur
- gjøre rede for grunnleggende prinsipper for oppbygning av tekster i ulike sjangrer
- analysere språklige virkemidler i ulike typer tekster

Kommunikasjon

Mål for opplæringen er at eleven skal kunne

- forstå og drøfte lengre framstillinger om allmenne og faglige emner

Kultur, samfunn og litteratur

Mål for opplæringen er at eleven skal kunne

- drøfte noen internasjonale og globale utfordringer

VG3 Engelsk Læreplan

– Samfunnsfaglig og Litteratur og Kultur

Språk og språklæring

Mål for opplæringen er at eleven skal kunne

- drøfte sammenhengen mellom form, innhold og stilnivå i setninger i samfunnsfaglige tekster
- analysere språklige virkemidler i tekster i ulike sjangrer og vurdere virkningen av dem

Kommunikasjon

Mål for opplæringen er at eleven skal kunne

- bruke hensiktsmessig og situasjonstilpasset språk i ulike muntlige og skriftlige sjangrer
- beherske formell og uformell språkbruk i ulike sammenhenger
- drøfte lange og språklig krevende tekster med samfunnsfaglig perspektiv

Samfunnsfaglig Engelsk

Kultur, samfunn og litteratur

Mål for opplæringen er at eleven skal kunne

- drøfte spørsmål knyttet til sosiale og økonomiske forhold i noen engelskspråklige land

Engelskspråklig Litteratur og Kultur

Kultur, samfunn og litteratur

Mål for opplæringen er at eleven skal kunne

- tolke litterære tekster og andre kulturuttrykk i et kulturhistorisk og samfunnsmessig perspektiv

consumers with information about which companies meet their social responsibilities, such as taking into consideration human rights, animal rights and environmental concerns when producing their products.

Many companies have now tried to jump on this ethical bandwagon. A good example here is that of shoes. Look inside any pair of trainers and you will probably find that it has been made in

some far away Asian country. This can only mean one thing you say to yourself – sweatshops! Nike has often been criticised for its lack of ethics (9), most notably perhaps in Michael Moore's 1996 film, The Big One (10), where Moore unsuccessfully tries to get the CEO of Nike to visit one of his own factories in Indonesia. To counteract this and give consumers the possibility of making a responsible choice when buying shoes, new brands have been launched, for

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example “No Sweat”. They claim not to use sweatshops, but you should not believe everything that a slogan or a brand name suggests; a closer look at the information they provide on their own website reveals that the workers in their Indonesian factory are far from happy (11).

To bring things right up to date, advertisers are now starting to play on the fact that some people have had enough of being asked to save the world and others don't believe that climate change is caused by humans at all (12). These people have money too and hence they are a target for the ever vigilant advertisers. This approach is being favoured by some car manufacturers, where many brands have undergone a process of greenwashing as described earlier. Some brands, however, attempt to make fun of the “hysteria” that surrounds climate change. This can be seen in the advertisements for Ford's Fiesta Zetec Climate, with the slogan, “Most people would prefer a hot climate” (13).

References

- (1) http://www.prmuseum.com/bernays/bernays_1918.html
- (2) http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcfour/documentaries/features/century_of_the_self_episode_1.shtml
- (3) <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychoanalysis>
- (4) <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2002/mar/10/medicalscience.highereducation>
- (5) http://www.prmuseum.com/bernays/bernays_1929.html
- (6) http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcfour/documentaries/features/century_of_the_self_episode_1.shtml
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- (9) <http://www.icmrindia.org/casestudies/catalogue/Business%20Ethics/BECG018.htm>
- (10) <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0124295/>
- (11) http://www.adbusters.org/blogs/blackspot/greenwashing_its_no_sweat.html
- (12) <http://climatedenial.org>
- (13) <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/gallery/2008/jan/24/travelandtransport.climatechange?picture=332212889>

EXERCISES

Understanding the Text

- (1) Find the word in the first paragraph which means “omnipresent”.
- (2) Which “subtle art” is mentioned in the second paragraph?
- (3) What was the new name given to propaganda and who coined this phrase?
- (4) How were cigarettes marketed in the 1920's?
- (5) Look at the paragraph that begins with the words “This also had political consequences”. Find the word in this paragraph that means “passive” or “quiet”.
- (6) What was the problem for advertisers in the 1960's and how did they combat this?
- (7) What are oil and car companies having to do in order to appeal to environmentally aware consumers?
- (8) Which brand of shoes is often criticised for not fulfilling its social responsibilities?
- (9) What is the latest trend in advertising that is being favoured by some car manufacturers?

Discussion

- (1) Many countries ban TV advertising for alcohol or tobacco. Do you agree with this? Can you think of any other products which you think should have an advertising ban?
- (2) Do you take into account how a corporation treats its workers when buying products?
- (3) Think of some of your favourite brands – of clothes, electrical gadgets, cars etc. Can you identify exactly what it is that have made these brands your favourites? Do you go shopping for the life you see portrayed in advertisements?
- (4) Section 2.2 of the Advertising Standards Authority's code of practice in the UK says “All marketing communications should be prepared with a sense of responsibility to consumers and to society.” Should this include responsibility to the environment?

The Language of Advertisements

- (1) Advertisers often favour certain adjectives when trying to sell their products. Find some advertisements in a magazine, newspaper or on the internet and identify some of the adjectives used to describe the product that is being advertised.

- (2) Think about advertisements in general. Which adjectives do you think are most commonly used in advertising? Make a list and then compare it with the list given by this website: <http://www.linguarama.com/ps/293-6.htm>

Analysing Advertisements

Find an advertisement that interests you in a magazine, newspaper or on the internet. Complete the following tasks:

- (1) *The Advertiser and the Target Audience:* What is the advertisement for and who do you think the advertisement is aimed at? Remember everything in the advertisement will be geared towards the target audience.
 - (2) *The Slogan:* What is the slogan? What types of sentences are used in the slogan: declarative, interrogative or imperative? Is there anything else notable about the slogan?
 - (3) *The Picture:* What impact does the picture/s have on you? Why do you think the picture has been chosen? Try to relate it to the message/product.
 - (4) *The Text*
- (A) Words:
- Find at least five words in your advert that you consider to be important.
 - What types of words are they (nouns, pronouns, adverbs, adjectives, verbs, prepositions, conjunctions, interjections)?
 - What connotations do these words inspire? What do they make you think of?
- (B) Structure / Patterns:
- Can you find repetition of any words? Why do you think these words are repeated?
 - Can you find repetition of any grammatical patterns? Why do you think these patterns have been repeated?
 - What types of sentences are used in your advertisements? Declarative, interrogative or imperative? Why have they been used?
 - Can you find any other interesting linguistics features, for example word play, rhyme, figurative language, direct address, common expressions etc?