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"Rear Assist": A Semiotic Analysis of Volkswagen Rear-view Mirror Ad Campaign

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Abstract

Semiotics is the theory of tokens, intended to be "tokens". The notations record all forms of human communication. Dyer points out that semiotics is a science that studies the social symbols of human life, it reveals the intrinsic relationship between elements and functions in the symbolic system. Advertising is not simply the cost of marketing to realize the value of the product. However, the active capital that creates the "cultural added value" of the product. In a sense, advertising is an effort to sublimate a product into a cultural symbol, and it is the process of sublimation that has brought about a dramatic jump in the value of a good. Therefore, advertising as a medium, its main function is to promote their marketing purposes and activities, and communicate with the audience. However, no matter how the form or the content of advertising change the duty of advertising is still communication and promoting, it affects purchasing decisions of consumers, so it is necessary to know how advertising communicates and how it affects consumers. This essay will begin with a contextual information which is the brief about the campaign and then will move on to look at specific semiotic analysis of the campaign. Three main parts which are denotation and connotation, paradigmatic and syntagmatic, rhetoric will be analyzed critically. Following these analysis, the essay will have a conclusion to summarize the whole analysis.

Keywords

Semiotic, paradigmatic and syntagmatic, advertising

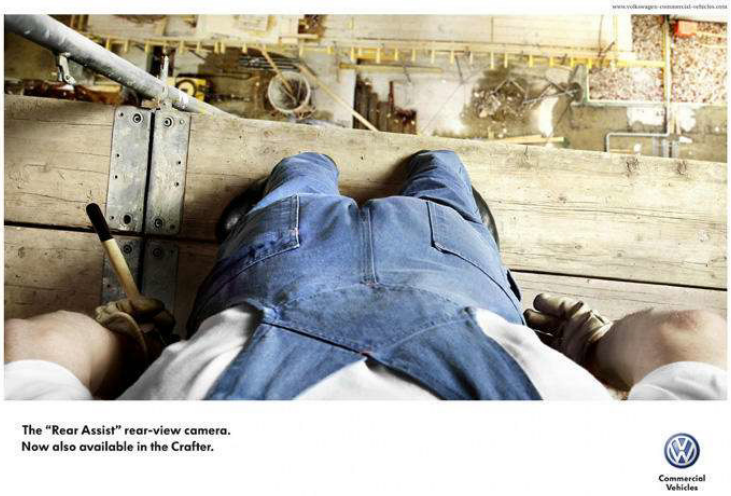
This campaign of the Volkswagen Rear-view Mirror is the Print advertising campaign which will be analyzed. This rear-view mirror advertisement was found on the Official Website of the Cannes International Advertising Festival which was published by GRABARZ & PARTNER, an advertising agency based in Hamburg, Germany. The Volkswagen print ad was named one of the 2011 Cannes Advertising Festival Plane Gold Awards (AdForum, 2011). Moreover, the copywriter is Sitthichai Okkararojkij, who wrote the slogan "Rear view vehicle system to help you find the danger in advance". In addition, in the history of the Volkswagen brand, their ads or campaigns like to highlight the advantages of car performance in their ads to grab the attention of viewers and encourage them to buy products. Therefore, the purpose of "early detection of danger" will also be included. It was launched in October 2009 in Germany (AdForum, 2011). The target consumers are general public. Volkswagen Rear-view Mirror is a kind of general public of the company and the campaign is more likely to emphasize the point "in advance" which is different from competitive advantages of other, such as clear and brilliant.

1. Semiotics and Advertising

As Volkswagen has always been the brand image. "Techcare" is the abbreviation of Technologize and care, which means that the public care of the whole process of worry-free standardization". As people pay more attention to the performance of the automobile, the demand for the safety of the automobile will be high. The agency will use

this activity to express the core competitiveness of the product and briefly introduce that because people of different occupations will work at work ignoring sight blinds, for example, Crafter cannot see no safety fence behind, Caravelle ignores sharp tools behind and transporter ignores red paint buckets. The agency utilizes this campaign to express the brief of this campaign given by the agency is that people can notice danger and avoid the danger in advance. The core idea 'in advance' can induce customers to purchase and use them, so it was important to leave an unique and special image into customers minds.

It is reasonable to analyses an ad from identifying signs by using semiotic analysis, as Page (2009, p. 90) argued that semiotic analysis which was founded by Saussure is the science of sign systems. Saussure divided a sign into signifier which is the physical form in reality, such as a sound or a text, and signified which is the mental concept or the idea (Jensen, 1991). Although both signifier and signpost are like two sides of a coin (sign), Saussure pointed out that signifier and signified relationship are not one-to-one and arbitrary (Storey, 2015). Therefore, choosing and combining different signs in your ads should be carefully considered because of the arbitrary nature of the signs.



Source: The Volkswagen Rear Assist Ads

Figure 1. The "Rear Assist" rear-view camera now also available in the crafter.

Source: The Volkswagen Rear Assist Ads

Figure 2. The "Rear Assist" rear-view camera now also available in the crafter.

Source: The Volkswagen Rear Assist Ads

Figure 3. The "Rear Assist" rear-view camera now also available in the crafter.

According to Bignell (2002), Saussure breaks a symbol into two parts: "signifier" and "signifier". "Signifier" exists in the material world. This is the physical form of the sign. In addition, Barthes defines the term "epitaxy" as the first sign, it refers to the literal meaning of objective existence (Storey, 2015, p. 118).

Firstly, in the first print ads, the signifier refer to people's back, at the same time the signifier 'people's back' produces the signified 'people's back', signifier is a physical sense (objectively) clothes, signified clothing is a mental concept, signifier and signified denote a blue back pocket with two pockets. So now the work clothes are to be worn on the body, it refers to the social culture, the clothes connote it is a uniform, people generally wear work clothes are working. In Barthes' opinion, this denotes only the primary signification (Storey, 2015). There are other denotations, such as the person who hold tools in his hand and wearing gloves. Similarly, there are some same denotations in second and third ad, and these denotations are also a person's back which resemble the first one that of wearing clothes, signified clothing is a mental concept, signifier and signified denote a green and white back pocket with two pockets respectively. So now the work clothes are to be worn on the body, referring to the social culture, the clothes connote it is a uniform, people generally wear work clothes are working. However, the only different denotation is the Crafter replaces the second "Caravelle" and the third "Transporter" respectively.

Connotation is the second-order signifying system (Storey, 2015). It employs the denoted signs associating with cultural information that the signs carry (McRury, 2009). In first ads, a person hold tools and wear gloves working in a high-rise building without rails, it can indicate that the worker is working on unsafe high buildings. The high-rise without fencing is a metaphor for danger. In addition, the backside implies mystery and vision of blind spots, dangerous everywhere in life, people should be self-protection precautionary heart while changing the world from a different point of view not to be immutable. Advertising use in such a way that metaphor people in the car when it is difficult to find the danger behind.

In second ads, it is close with the first one, the back of a hand-held tool and a gloved worker alludes to blind spots of sight that are hard to find, and a sharp tool in a flower-filled garden Behind the gardener, sharp tools represent dangers, suggesting that gardeners ignore the dangers behind their work, the most dangerous thing to do at work is getting hurt by sharp tools for a worker. The third one, a person's back, who dressed in a white overalls with a brush in his hand, a red paint bucket and ladder behind him, and an inconspicuous angle to the worker's eyes in the back, it was a very unsatisfactory thing for a painter to get paint on his clothes, so the use of paint buckets metaphor the dangers of not being easily found behind painters, and it is an icon sign.

Dyer (1982) pointed out that the meaning of signs can only analyze the structural relationship with other signs. The concept of a composite structure describes the meaning of the different semiology combined (Storey, 2015,

p. 117). Paradigmatic refers to that the signs in the same associative set are similar at signifier level, signified level or both while syntagmatic refers to that a sign cooperates with other selected signs (Dyer, 1982). For one hand, in paradigmatic, signs are mutually substitutes and the meaning would change if the substitutes altered (Storey, 2015). However, in syntagmatic, signs are mutually complement and the meaningfulness would be extended or abridged if the signs were added or deleted (Storey, 2015).

2. Semiotic Thought Analysis of Volkswagen Advertising

2.1. Image Symbol

In the Volkswagen print ads, various elements in the image are connected by vectors. Advertising, the first thing that catches your eye is the picture are backside, with the character's local waist-to-feet position showing a quiet and mysterious hand standing at the bottom of the picture with a variety of tools representing their danger, making people full of infinite reverie. According to Danesi (1995), as a form of combining with art, advertisement is usually of connotation. The creative director chooses to use the back of the person to highlight the blind spot, and on the other hand, the alternative is because of the danger posed by the dangerous tools behind the driving process. The usage of metaphor, which will be mentioned in the rhetoric part, makes information transmission more vivid. Thus, choosing people's back and sharp tools are able to express the message explicitly. Product image or emotional transfer process unconsciously linked to our minds (Lichtlé & Marie When, 2007), readers find the identity of Volkswagen's personalities and colors, they may not describe too much why Volkswagen is a painter, landscape architect, and architect. However, people unconsciously attracted by the colors on their ads accepted the important role and entertaining that Volkswagen was advertising. Will also unconsciously to explore the relationship between color and character, the secret behind the color.

In this advertisement, the mysterious picture atmosphere is occupied by red, green and yellow. The function of the ideology of advertisement is to require the reader to recognize the connotation of the advertisement and transform its connotation into the deepest meaning of the advertisement. Red paint bucket will make people think of the blood, but also a metaphor for a dangerous car accident occurred. According to Lichtlé and Marie (2007), people like very bright colors. Bright blue in particular can generate a strong purchase intention. In Volkswagen's print campaign, blue is in stark contrast to the yellowish color in this ad. The contrast of colors brings more mysterious effect to the audience and arouses the magical atmosphere in the picture, with a variety of eye-catching colors to show the body, strong color in the first time to seize people's attention and curiosity. The body refers to the goods, colors become the packaging of goods, this is the logic of the image age, creative advertising is also the reason.

According to Dyer (1982), the characteristics of the image, the reproduction function is divided into narrative reproduction and conceptual reproduction. Product image or emotional transfer process unconsciously linked to our minds (Lichtlé & MarieWhen, 2007), readers find the identity of Volkswagen's personalities and colors, they may not describe too much why Volkswagen is a painter, landscape architect, and architect. However, people unconsciously attracted by the colors on their ads accepted the important role and entertaining that Volkswagen was advertising. Will also unconsciously to explore the relationship between color and character, the secret behind the color.

2.2. Color Symbols

In this advertisement, the mysterious picture atmosphere is occupied by red, green and yellow. The function of the ideology of advertisement is to require the reader to recognize the connotation of the advertisement and transform its connotation into the deepest meaning of the advertisement. Red paint bucket will make people think of the blood, but also a metaphor for a dangerous car accident occurred. Although this ad may seem difficult to understand, its mystical prominence makes it unnoticed to explore the meaning of advertising, the meaning of colors, and admire the underlying meaning. The interrelationship between text and images can reduce the arbitrariness of signs and can lead people to receive expressed messages. There is only one slogan in print ads, "Rear Assist", Rear-view Mirror. The word is attached to the back of the person, and the word "Rear Assist" relates to the rear view mirror. Slogan with other signs can be induced. People have the idea that the product can help drivers to observe easily overlooked perspective crisis, which in order to identify driving danger in advance to highlight the role of the rear-view mirror. If only "Rear Assist" slogan, it is difficult to understand how the product reflects the protection. Therefore, these visual elements can supplement more information to clarify the ambiguous text meaning. Due to the interaction between text and images, specific information can be conveyed through advertisements, and people

can also receive the correct information and avoid other meanings.

However, different readers' perceptions and reactions have different effects and outcomes. The design of advertisements uses the metaphorical approach to demonstrate the creative impact Volkswagen has on people's lives and aims to achieve the marketing objective through this action. However, this act has failed somewhat. It is too metaphorical to make the public feel difficult to understand and thus cannot find its effectiveness in advertising. In addition, the image of the logo cannot clearly show the relevant content on the Volkswagen. So, this ad design with a certain degree of ambiguity, the expression is not accurate enough.

Rhetoric in advertising is very important because it is the carrier of ideology (Blakely, 2011, p. 687). Blakely (2011) argues that speakers are more likely to translate ideology into values. Focusing on words and images is about respecting ads as a whole, which itself contains a linguistic form (Johnson, 2007, p. 6). Therefore, the proper use of rhetoric in advertising is a good way to convey the ideology of advertising. Rhetorical skills can also be more useful in conveying the brand's meaning. For instance, the relation between the image of people's back (dangerous tools) and the image of product is visual metaphor. The back means people who cannot notice the blind spot, different tools metaphor the dangerous which could occur when drivers ignore the blind spot. In this series ad, the first thing that catches consumers eyes are the people' back who wearing different color piece of the close-ups. The colors are blue, green and white respectively. This seemingly does not have a connection with Volkswagen, but the characters in the picture are backside, with the character's local waist-to-feet position showing a quiet and mysterious hand standing at the bottom of the picture with a variety of tools representing their own creativity, making people full of infinite reverie.

The three ads are a back of worker. Workers usually ignore the dangerous which is as same as that in the ads, when they are put into work. It is tricky for the reader at their first sight. However, it could be normally recognized by interpreted in figurative and non-literal way. There are two elements directing people to link the worker's back with the ‘Rear-view Mirror’. The first one is the back, the second one is the dangerous tools which are behind the worker. With effect of these elements, people would consider the worker's back as a kind of mirror. As a result, the image of the product could remind people that the back represents the product which could be uses in advance to protect themselves. Eventually, people could easily understand that the ad is the product of rear-view mirror. The purpose of the visual metaphor in this campaign is that the product is replaced by the worker's back to increase mysteries of the ads. In short, there is a linking between literal and figurative meaning of the images.

2.3. Typographic Symbols

Of note in this Volkswagen print ad is the ingenious layout of this ad. Scott points out that typography is linked to advertising messages in a specific way. Hartmut (2013, p. 383) also pointed out that typesetting and text design has the important function of delivering meaning and persuasion. Volkswagen ads, the characters are arranged in the lower part of the figure in the background and the upper half of the various tools environment, highlighting its mysterious qualities. It implements an interesting typesetting pattern, evoke the curiosity of the audience, won the audience's attention and exploration. As a result, the audience to accept this ad is no longer a passive acceptance, but takes the initiative to accept to explore. In the process of exploring the process of remembering the Volkswagen brand. Scott claims that a recognizable typography style guides viewers to what they want as advertisers. Volkswagen print ads in this fantasy typographic style contains a vivid image of the product. The short and clear sentences in the picture make it easier for the audience to read and also help the audience to understand various meanings in the picture, playing a guiding role, which effectively improves brand awareness. Is conducive to the promotion of the brand Volkswagen, effective sales.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, the article analyzes this series of advertisements from a semiotic point of view. By means of signifiers and meanings, the article finds out some important signs of extension and connotation in the part of extension and connotation. For example, the back of a person represents a dangerous environment, the blind spot, and contains the mirror. After learning about each of the two print ads, it is necessary to examine why the symbols were selected by the creators and how they were combined to convey the specific message. In paradigm and composition, two problems have been solved. The most important choice is the danger of people's back and back. The reason for choosing is the similarity between the mirror and the product and its characteristics. The combination of all the signs conveys the message that the product prevents people from penetrating the hazard by re-mirroring the product

in advance. The next part is rhetoric, then the myth. In the field of language, rhetoric is used to express definite meanings in a fun way. However, we need to pay attention to the differences between Eastern and Western cultures in the understanding of advertisements. People's understanding of reading advertising can also bring about a different cultural understanding. This can bring more positive impact to the brand. These advertisements gradually became symbols of high culture, high skills and high value in advertising (Page, 2006, p. 96). Therefore, some good metaphors can give the audience a better visual experience in conveying the meaning of advertising. Especially in print design, good composition and font selection can bring different flavors to print ads. The most important function of advertising is to sell products to potential customers. The combination of this series of elements, myths and technical clever use, and good marketing strategies can attract consumers' attention more effectively and persuade them to complete the purchase.

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