The Role of Aesthetic Communication in Advertising

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Abstract

What roles do aesthetic categories play in advertising imagery? How does aesthetic communication affect advertising? In light of such questions, this paper aims to point out the importance of aesthetic communication in advertising. It set off from a contextual discussion on the particularities of aesthetic communication in advertising imagery. Next, it elucidates the conceptual frame of such advertising component. To further highlight the aesthetic communication functions, this paper proceeds to revealing the primary aesthetic categories specific to advertising imagery. On the positive side, it points out the beauty, the sublime, the graciousness, the humour, the poetic etc. On the negative side, it reveals the ugliness, the grotesque, the monstrous etc. In the end, conclusive remarks reiterate the role of aesthetic communication in advertising.

Keywords: Aesthetic communication; advertising imagery; aesthetic categories.

1 Introduction

In this paper we aim to develop an interdisciplinary exploratory research regarding the role of aesthetic communication in advertising. For this purpose we use qualitative research methods specific for aesthetics, advertising design and communication studies, consisting of participant observation, content analysis and interpretation of offline and online advertising imagery. Our research will begin by highlight the conceptual frame and the specific of aesthetic communication in advertising imagery, further it will discuss the related aesthetic categories, and finally it will underlining some conclusions.

The scientific relevance of the approached subject consist in the increasing importance of the aesthetic components in advertising imagery of the recent years, contributing to the success and effectiveness of an advertisement. Furthermore, the aesthetic and stylistic components of advertising ensure the difference between qualitative advertising images and ordinary or kitsch advertising images, their correct application being a key requirement for the advertising design. Thus, to get an audience to pay attention and interest, advertising should deliver a coherent and pertinent message. It should also be aesthetically appealing. Its aesthetic dimension, design originality, and stylistic value may contribute to the practical efficiency of advertising. Such factors define inasmuch as they inform. In our opinion, besides the purely aesthetic value which convey innovative graphics and original design, aesthetic aspects entail a communication function associated to the symbolic reference which gets displayed on the structural-formal and compositional organisational levels of the advertising. Thus, the higher the symbolic and aesthetic codifications are, the more complex the advertising message is. A visual message conveyed through artistic language makes advertising communication efficient (Bonaiuto, Giannini & Chiodetti, 2001). It complements the verbal language and the accompanying audio tracks of the advertising.

2 Aesthetic communication in advertising imagery

Besides the representational depiction of signs, we are also able to distinguish different aesthetic components of the advertising imagery such as form, composition, texture, chromatic palette. The graphic design of the advertising imagery requires artistic creativity and originality. Under a structural aspect, the design of the advertising imagery abides by a series of aesthetic principles: order, proportion, ratio, equivalence, size, unity, variety etc. (Vit & Gomez-Palacio, 2012, pp. 34-38). Along these mentioned components, aesthetic communication in advertising involves applying aesthetically specific values, shapes and categories. These relay a pleasing and at the same time high-end quality aspect. Though, the advertising imagery must definitely not remain a pure aesthetic object, its practical value being validated by its capacity to capture audiences interest. To be able to represent a product when discussing the advertising imagery, numerous aesthetic issues must be considered, aspects that are not always familiar to the general audience, but which reacts when it receives them.

A successful advertising imagery, from the aesthetic point of view, will capture audience attention with its form and content. Thus, the content of the advertising imagery is relevant for the sent message, object or product it advertises for, encoding more or less complex significations, as social, economic, political, religious etc. The image's content is more often symbolically moulded in accordance with the

aesthetic vision of the creative team; it's symbolic dimension, alongside the aesthetic one, manifests a psychological impact on the audience (Wozniak, Budelman & Kim, 2010, p. 43). The shape of the advertising image fulfils the role of visually externalizing the content aided by an ensemble of techniques, processes and graphic means. The form is thus the expressive element that aesthetically transfigures the content, attributing profile, and expressivity depending upon different artistic means, most notably being the style and the aesthetic categories. We surely find the form of the advertising image, where the case may be, as being original, thus artistic expressive, pronouncedly recognizable, spectacular, unique or it can be standard (easily mistaken for other shapes), expressionless, ordinary, often incapable to be visually impressive. Even though, when the advertising imagery are, ultimately, an industrial product, we find originality as the main factor that ensures visual identity, thus, at first stage, the impact of advertising images are due to the aesthetic expressiveness of their.

The stylization of the advertising imagery entails structural moulding by means of specific artistic expression in accordance with the general aesthetic vision of the creation team. From this point of view, we can sustain, that regardless of its value or depiction, any advertising image is expressed through artistic language, more or less standardized. The style of the imagery confers a tailored attribute, distinct, unique, advancing the visual identity and recognition quality of the particular image discussed. Originality in regards to design has the capability to become artistic imagery, expanding to an metaphoric or symbolic representative quality, with aesthetic value (McNeil, 2010, p. 14). In this context, the advertising imagery is engrafted from the aesthetic content of its components, expressed in various artistic styles specific for fine art (Hetsroni & Tukachinsky, 2005) with re-designated and re-signified intent.

The aesthetic of the advertising imagery must consider a complete series of ground principles of design regarding compositional elements, the most important being (McNeil, 2010, p. 14-15): the unity of the image; the harmony, the compatibility, and the succession arrangement of its elements; the accent, regularly focusing in on a particular element, privileging its depiction compared to the whole of the other elements, and it can be, for instance, a particular character, an object, a colour. We can also mention: the contrast and the variety of dimensions, shapes and colours that confer particularity; the equilibrium, namely equally sized and shaped elements on both sides of the image; the colour, necessary to lift and highlight certain elements or products, the capture and guide attention, unleashing emotiveness, able to communicate a defined state; the background and the spaces, which are basic instruments in creating an impactful layout. Accompanying these elements, we further add: the format, overlap of layers on the image to highlight essential information, the use of zooming techniques to avoid losing the panoramic effect in advertisements, stationary photography or frames, ensuring image structure coherence.

Visual techniques, moreover, represent a merge of diverse and different percentage of these elements and seldom prove to be found in a singular depiction in the aesthetic of the advertising imagery. Furthermore, when discussing the basal aesthetic components of the advertising imagery, we need to underline (Vit & Gomez-Palacio, 2012, pp. 34-38): surface graphics, sizing, profiling, partition, media texture, pictorial fields, printed photography, framing - varying according to the style used, positioning or outlining, shooting angles and electing the objective - decisive in representing image

quality. We identify the usage of a multitude of visual aesthetic representations, the most notable being: positioning and representation of the brand, of the slogan and of the title, typically found in the upper register of the image; of the main body of the informative text; the graphics of the logo permissive to be interpreted as signature of the advertising; figurative representations like objects, characters, situations that outline the content.

Composition is one of the fundamental artistic instruments, proving an important role in orienting the perception of the image; it must be constituted in such a manner to determine the receptor to select the key information surfaces. G. Péninou, considering the reading paradigm, identifies four configurations when discussing the advertising imagery (1983, pp. 185-212), the first two being: "focused construction" (characteristic, colour, luminosity, drawing to eye to the strategic point of the image); "axial construction" (main information body is placed in the centre of the image) and "perspective construction" (perspective décor, the foreground presents the central element). The other two consist of: "sequential construction" (sequentially canvasing the image, conclusively, the focus centres on the main idea, more often we encounter a Z formation, flowing from the upper left to the upper right to ascend on lower left and product presentation lower right) (Péninou, 1983).

According to Alain Joannes (2009, p. 87), the image, depending on certain characteristics, is able to convey different emotional messages to the receptor. Thus, the vast "size" of the image can generate a control, domination impression, in opposition, a small scale image creates an intimacy, proximity, safety but at the same time demure impression. The "luminosity" of the image, an essential characteristic, is able to spontaneously capture attention, but also conceivable complex associations in the receptor's mind, signifying knowledge, mystery etc. The "composition", if too dynamic, clustered, detail-heavy determines a suffocating impression, opposed to vertical lines used to convey stability but also rigidity. "Texture" in imagery, expresses the realism or idealism degree. A fundamental place and role we find for colours as well when discussing the configuration of the image, their psychological and physiologic effects being multiple. The entirety of these characteristics are contoured by different aesthetic mouldings. The emotional content of advertisement imagery in divers, able to determine positive as much as negative emotions (Bonaiuto, Giannini & Chiodetti, 2001), alongside each other we mention happiness, enthusiasm, nervousness, discouragement, disgust, phobia, fear etc.

 An advertising image that lifts itself aesthetically has a strong visual identity, captures attention and facilitates recognition (Hirschman, 1986), whilst a superficial or improper image can bring about a rejection attitude. Thus, aesthetic communication in advertising offers indirect clues regarding the specificity of the product and contributes to create a first impression, able to negatively or positively influence the subsequent perception at the audience level.

3   Discussion: Aesthetic categories specific to advertising imagery

Aesthetic categories are notions of maximal coverage applicable in characterizing the artistic but as much the extra-aesthetic field; these categories cannot adequately be defined, however we all perceive them (Achiței, 1988, p. 93). Though, aesthetic categories have and adjectival origin, representing essential or specific qualities of the aesthetic object form, in our case, the advertising imagery, conveying a certain structure, representation, dimension, volume, colour etc., being concurrently the

launching element of aesthetic attitude. In regards to the later, aesthetic categories designate the conceptual apparatus identified a judgment of taste predication. Therefore, aesthetic categories present a dual nature, defined by factual objectiveness (referring to a fact, situation, character, object etc.) but also a conceptual and idealistic value, able to allude, in a metaphoric manner, to indirect significations observed by means of aesthetic sensitivity. Except the beauty, the aesthetic category par excellence, the other categories represent the transfer of notions from different fields into the aesthetic sphere. For instance, the sublime is taken from religion and ethics, the tragic and absurd from philosophy. Inoculating of the aesthetic categories at an advertising image and the reception of them are conditioned by numerous factors regarding the audience: age, lifestyle, culture, artistic education, mentality, state of mind, acknowledged values, socio-economic factors etc. (Achiţei, 1988, p. 90).

The beauty is the main aesthetic category, the other categories representing variants of it: the positive or preponderantly positive ones, as the graciousness, the sublime, the poetic, the humor, the heroism etc., accompanied by the negative or preponderantly negative ones, as the ugliness, the bizarre, the obscene, the grotesque, the horror, or the neutral ones, as the agreeable or the interesting. We manage to find these aesthetic categories in advertising adapted for each of its dimensions: textual, auditory, visual. Certainly, here we are concerned only with the visual dimension of the aesthetic categories specific to advertising imagery. We mention that these aesthetic categories are never to be found in their pure depiction or isolated in the advertising imagery, a certain aesthetic category being associated in cases with other categories. As an example, the beauty can be complemented by elements of the poetic, of the interesting or of the pathetic. The tragic, the humour, the sublime, the ugliness, the absurd are also candidates for a dose of the pathetic. In equal measure, they determine different amounts and degrees, sometimes discrete, restrained, other times exuberant or even ostentatious. Each category is perceived in a different manner, thus distinguishing between the beauty, the tragic or the sublime emotion in an advertising image.

Specialist literature falls often times in methodical difficulty to accurately define the aesthetic categories. In the following lines, we shall nevertheless intend to offer a synthetic approximation of their specific (Achiţei, 1988; Scruton, 2011) with reference to advertising imagery:

The beauty, most important aesthetic category, iterates the following attributes: perfection, determination, splendor, glow, harmony, shape balance and equilibrium, symmetry, proportion, synthesis between spiritual and material, external-internal synthesis, quality in general, (Moutsopoulos, 1976, pp. 37-38; Solomon, Ashmore & Longo, 1992). Advertising imagery specific beauty main variants are: the marvelous, depicting miracles put into fruition by means of otherworldly forces; the pretty or the cute, meaning ambiguous attributes of beauty, not capable of revealing its beauty attributes convincingly enough; the picturesque, more specific for natural beauty, expressing the nature in advertising imagery by harmonious and balanced shaper. We can also mention as variants of beauty: the idyllic (shapes inducing an emotional ideal of happiness), the miraculous, the enchanting, the magical (advertising imagery often times specifically renders an ideal world, an edenic, fairy-tale or imaginary world).

The graciousness denotes skilfulness, extreme sublime, finesse, elegance, naturalness, nobility, characterized by elongated continuity of graphic trajectories. Of substantial value in this part we accent

the tempo of graciousness, situated between the exaggerated slowing down (affection, preciousness) and exuberant precipitation (Moutsopoulos, 1976, p. 52). The most importnat variants of the gratiousness in advertising imagery are: finesse, delicate, suave, diaphanous, tenderness, frail, slenderness (for instance, often depicted in perfume advertising imagery).

The poetic is the aesthetic category positioned between the elegiac and the graciousness, residing in metaphorical or allusive depiction of emotional significance expressing exuberance, happiness, freedom, innocence, tenderness. In a wide sense, the poetic confers plastic expressiveness to advertising imagery, connected to the actual aesthetic and style specific.

The pathetic indicates an appropriation of an object in an ostentatious manner, aiming to impress and provoke strong emotions. It offers and conveys an ostentatious expressivity in advertising imagery, generating a state of enthusiasm (occasionally false) articulated with grandiloquence.

The interesting is the aesthetic category through which "the contradictory side of the artistic image known and the unknown are expressed, its appearance and essence, of the new and novel" (Achiţei, 1988, p. 118), intending to rouse audience perception and interest, potentiating the appreciative attitude. Regarding the shape and content in advertising imagery, the interesting manifests as a refusal of monotony, platitude, and ordinary.

The agreeable designates "what pleases all senses on a sensation level" (Achiţei, 1988, p. 118), enchanting without reaching deeper areas of perception, For example, we can certainly identify agreeable colours, faces or characters in the advertising imagery.

The sublime expresses supreme advancement, pre-eminence to ordinary, maximum of perfection, grandeur, exaltation, the grand and the powerful in an extended sense, dynamic state (in advertisement imagery often being associated with nature), virtue, shape simplicity, shape amplitude (Moutsopoulos, 1976, pp. 44-45). Also associated with the concept of the absolute and moral or religious values, thus archetypes, more specifically the ones associated with the sacred, are more often represented through the discussed aesthetic category on the advertising imagery level. Variants of the sublime that appear often in advertising are: the momentary, the stately, the heroic, the magnificent, the solemn, the admirable, the luxurious.

The tragic is a category situated at the outer edges of the aesthetic with pronounced philosophical and ethical resonance, depicting the disappearance or destruction of certain human or non-human values and ideals "which yet have not depleted their potential resources" (Achiţei, 1988, p. 149). Tragic expresses conflict, instability and antinomical situations. It is present in numerous advertising images associated with campaigns against discrimination, domestic violence, child abuse, smoking etc. As variations of the tragic, we mention the dramatic and the melodramatic. The dramatic depicts an conflictual state or value, not necessarily on the verge of extinction, for instance advertising images used in environmental awareness campaigns. The melodramatic in advertising imagery express human problems in exaggerated emotional manner, sometimes with false pathos, for example when depicting the social status or role of different categories of the population, as unemployed, homemakers, marginalized etc.

The humour, one of the most often encountered aesthetic categories in advertising imagery, denotes the phenomena that arouse laughter as a result of dissonance or inadequacy between two aspects:

appearance-essence, whole-part, form-content, value-non-value, and means-end. The advertising imagery often makes use of the humour depicted as situational or character comedy. As manifestations of the humour in advertising imagery we mention: the funny, the ironic, the amusing, the ridiculous, the sarcasm, the satirical, the zany, the parodic and the tragic-comical (ambiguity of tragic and comical relation), also the silliness (Catanescu & Tom, 2001). As a graphic configuration, we notice the encounter of comics, cartoons and caricatures in the advertising images, used for humour effect created by referring to a specific physical or behavioural trait of a person (for instance, oversizing or considerably diminishing physiological details, amplifying unnatural human inter-relationships). In advertising, the referral to the humour is a recurrent practice, besides its aesthetic value, being a cultural and social construction (Gulas & Weinberger, 2006, p. 125).

The absurd is an aesthetic category with a pronounced philosophical character, expressing paradoxical, antinomical situations, the illogical but also the alienation, feebleness, agony, the irrational. For example, advertising campaigns against discrimination or violence of any type regularly depict images of absurd situations.

The ugliness, though debatable in its affiliation to any aesthetic norm or value, is nevertheless acknowledged as aesthetic category opposed to the beauty and different form the paraesthetic and kitsch. Being one of the hardest categories to define, the ugliness can be depicted as negating any of the valences of beauty (Moutsopoulos, 1976, p. 41-42). Generally, the aesthetic representation of the ugly brings the absence of balance and equilibrium, lack of shape integrity, also negative traits in people, mentalities and attitudes, often being related with ethical values. It is important to mention, when looking at the advertising imagery, that the ugly here does not mean lack of aesthetic expressiveness, but quite the opposite, a shocking expressivity, out of the ordinary, disregarding and rejecting standardized, official forms, being associated with a constructive criticism significations. Thus, unconventional advertising contains images determined by this aesthetic category, also worth mentioning are the environmental awareness advertising campaigns that illustrated images of pollution.

The advertising imagery also offers aesthetic categories inclined with negative signification, more or less pronounced: the banal (in opposition to the pathetic, representing dull, boring shapes which do not bother but alike do not delight), the bizarre (withdrawal from mundane principles), the vetust (depicting forms that do not actively partake in the active aesthetic times). Other negative aesthetic categories in advertising imagery are: the trivial, the obscene, the grotesque (in opposition to the sublime, expressing both, the moral and physical ugliness, disproportionate situations and finally also ridiculing ideals), the horror, the monstrous, the garish. We often encounter these categories being utilised in the design of advertising imagery with a violent expressiveness of form and content, highly impactful on the audience, aiming to shock in order to capture attention. The adherence to certain aesthetic norms, values and conventions alongside the representation techniques of these aesthetic categories in advertising imagery define the factor that differentiates them from the paraesthetic elements.

4 Conclusions

The starting principle in applying aesthetic categories to the advertising imagery is that specifically, this type of visual communication must be conceived as targeting a wide variety of audiences, with different aesthetic taste and education. In advertising imagery, the role of aesthetic communication, mediated by aesthetic forms, values, and categories, consists not only in configuration of a specific disposition of the audience. Aesthetic communication in advertising imagery is complementing the message transmission function and can configure aesthetic emotions and occurrences. We can sustain that, originality, stylistic quality and artistic expressiveness of the advertising imagery are due to exactly the applying of demarcated aesthetic values and categories. The remaining components of advertising, as verbal language, slogan, sounds, are certainly as important, and adjoin the harmonious junction of these components to optimise the performance and reception of the message, but this aspect was not the objective of this study. Originally designed advertising imagery, presenting unique aesthetic attributes is perfectly suited to capture interest and attention, rapidly communicating pertinent information. The aesthetic components are decisive in this aspect; semantic valences of the imagery with aesthetic value being able to positively determinate the audience attention. In order to be both expressive and successful, the advertisement imagery must not only convey information, but define an aesthetic function, and determine a positive reaction on the audience. Furthermore, when various aspects of aesthetic communication are properly and correctly expressed in advertising imagery, they can refine and expand aesthetic taste and order.

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