Advertising Techniques

Analysing the persuasive techniques

It is confusing when setting out to analyse advertisements, as there are so many aspects to consider. It may be helpful to approach adverts in this way; start with the distant perspective and focus on what overt persuasion is being used and what connotations the images have and then zoom in to a close-up and denotate then back out again on to the distant perspective bringing in ideas about representation, wider political concerns, brand image and so on. Adverts can then be examined for the following elements.

* Persuasive tools
* Signs and persuasive devices
* Ultimate meaning

**PERSUASIVE TOOLS**

  PERSUASIVE DEVICES

Advertisers use persuasive tools to encourage consumers to buy and target the audience. These are humour, repetition, shock, sex, stereotypes, intertextuality (referring to other texts or genres), music, and elite people. In TV advertising look out for the use of film language. Look for signifiers to encourage a certain emotional response, mise-en-scene (clothing, shot type, setting, lighting) to enhance negative or positive connotations. In the initial distant perspective the scrutiniser is looking for some of the more obvious ploys being used to grab the attention and create meaning, such as:

HUMOUR Aspects of humour such as ambiguity and punning add layers of meaning to a text and will make it more satisfying to decode and consequently more memorable. For instance, Guinness, “Not everything in black and white makes sense.” The slapstick humour of the “You’ve been tangoed” advertising made them notable and imitable. The latest controversial “slag of all snack” from pot noodle now has cult status.

REPETITION Slogans, images and brand names can be repeated and will give greater credibility to a campaign. Slogans remain in the memory long after the advertising campaign has finished. Everyone knows “Have you been tangoed” or “ a mars a day helps you work, rest and play”.

SHOCK TACTICS Both Benetton and Barnados are two of many companies who know that shock tactics grab not only the attention of the consumer but also that of the media and in doing so increase the effectiveness of the campaign many times over.

SEX One of the most basic human needs and one of the most effective persuasive tools is sex, we see images of sexy men and women all around us, thus creating pressure to be beautiful (as advertisers see beauty) and more demand for beauty products. Products are represented as being able to give us sex appeal, if we buy the right phone we’ll be sexy, if we wear the right perfume/aftershave we’ll be sexy.

TIME AND SPACE SAVERS

In advertising time and space is at a premium. You don’t waste time with too much text nor do you waste money with an advert that needs to be huge. The following tools are used as time/space savers.

STEREOTYPES These are useful in ads because they are easily identifiable and the stereotype tends to bring with it certain messages. They are a short cut that can add immediate meaning. Stereotypes tend to be accepted without much questioning; this often allows us to accept the message contained within the advertisement without much questioning.

INTERTEXTUALITY Using other texts to create or add immediate meaning to an advertisement is a useful device. Films, TV parody all help to add ideology and attract an audience.

MUSIC This can be used in a number of ways as an attention grabber, as a narrative short hand and an emotive device. Advertisers often use music to target audiences. Advertisers have become fond of using older tracks to promote nostalgic, happy memories in older consumers too or to create a feeling of tradition.

ELITE PERSONS Famous people are used to endorse products and if the audience admire that person or aspire to be like them they will be more likely to buy the product. Good example of this is Gary Lineker and Walkers crisps or David Beckham in Adidas adverts.

**SIGNS**

Moving in closer to the text it is possible to get at signifiers and decode the more subtle meaning from the advert.

POSITION SIGNS The position of the camera always gives the audience a particular point of view, this could be meaningful. E.g. if the picture is taken from a low angle the subject in the advert will be imbued with authority. Proxemics: the placing of the people could be symbolic. If a male is situated closer in the frame than a female, he has more status.

TREATMENT SIGNS The type, angle, strength of the lighting, overall colour of the image, focus, composition and framing all affect the meaning.

CONTENT SIGNS People, objects, clothes, sounds etc. It is self evident that who or what the image contains will communicate this greatest part of the overall message.

**PERSUASIVE DEVICES**

At this point in the analysis, the viewer moves again to a distant perspective and it is possible to take an overall meaning from the narrative that has been looked at. It’s as if you’ve zoomed back out again. At this point have a look to see what the overall message could be, it will be a little different from what you first perceived, it will now have a theme of some kind which may belong to these categories or to one you decide upon yourself.

REWARD AND PUNISHMENT

These are probably the most important persuasive devices in advertising. Physical rewards are offered like “buy one get one free” or the face cream that will keep you “young looking”. More frequently psychological rewards are offered; Whiskers cat food has added vitamins, you will be a good owner if you feed this to your cat. The other side of the coin also applies (as always) if you don’t use Whiskers you will be a bad owner and your cat will be unhealthy.

NEEDS, FEARS AND ASPIRATIONS.

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is relevant here.

**Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs**

In 1954, Austrian Psychologist Abram Maslow put forward the idea of a hierarchy of human needs; his concept is that each stage of the hierarchy needs to be satisfied before the next stage can be addressed. Starting at the lowest stage the hierarchy is as follows:

**Physiological needs**: food, drink, sleep, sex, relief from pain.

**Safety needs: security**, protection, order and freedom from danger.

**Love and Belonging needs:** friends, companions, being part of a group or family.

**Esteem needs:** respect, confidence based on the good opinion of others, admiration, self-confidence, self– acceptance, self-worth.

**Self actualisation needs:** fulfil one’s potential, develop potential, do what you are best suited for, discover the truth about yourself, create beauty, produce order, promote justice.

Advertiser’s play on the need to be safe, secure, part of a relationship, part of a group, accepted etc. Insurance schemes, Pension plans often use security as a persuasive device. Fashion ads often use the desire to part of a group, to belong, to persuade. People also need esteem and aspirations they need to feel they are important and as such they are offered opulent lifestyles with products such as Renault Clio (Nicole and Papa in their lovely French chateau). Consumers are often lulled into believing they are buying into a better life in this way.

VALUE MESSAGES

Many advertisers carry with them a message about life that cannot be denied, e.g. “Love hurts” and the advertiser will attempt to persuade you that the advert is undeniable too just by using these types of phrases.

**HOMEWORK**

**Now you can look a little more deeply into adverts. Do some research and answer these questions.**

1. Find an advertising campaign that uses humour as its main persuasive device. Write down the target audience for the advert.
2. Write down five slogans for product recently advertised.
3. Which advertisers have used shock tactics lately and why are they shocking?
4. Collect five examples of sex being used as a persuasive device in adverts.
5. Write down as many stereotypes found in advertising as you can, try to link them to actual campaigns.
6. Find an example of intertextuality in an advert.
7. Find as many different uses for music in adverts as you can.
8. Give an example of an elite person in a current advertising campaign.
9. Find five examples of “reward and punishment” persuasion in current campaigns.
10. Pick a brand named product and collect adverts, videotape adverts of the product.