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Provided in Cooperation with:

Czech journal of social sciences, business and economics

Reference: Vitkauskaitė, Ieva Semiotic analysis of Café Noir's commercial "The Mime's Date".

This Version is available at:

<http://hdl.handle.net/11159/554>

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Article history: Received 13 November 2014; last revision 27 January 2015; accepted 16 March 2015

SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF CAFÉ NOIR'S COMMERCIAL "THE MIME'S DATE"

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Abstract

This paper focuses on audiovisual commercial. The aim of the article is to apply semiotic analysis to Café Noir's video commercial "The Mime's Date". The first part of the article reviews the commercial and the way it is realised. The following part of the article analyses the commercial video "The Mime's Date" discussing the symbols and codes present in it and analysing their possible meanings. Advertising is an industry of promises. It promises more than the product advertised can give. The creators use a lot of signs and symbols in their works. The creators "play" with the psychology and the subconsciousness of people. The commercial "The Mime's Date" by Café Noir is not an exception. Having analysed this commercial video, the meaning of the visual message has been revealed. This commercial wants to create an illusion that coffee can "transport" everyone into a life full of luxury, elegance and pedantry. It also reveals that the coffee pod alone can seduce the opposite sex. Therefore, certain instances of contrafacts are prevailing in the situation.

Keywords: semiotic analysis, commercial video "The Mimes's Date", audiovisual commercial, analysis of commercial video, code, sign

JEL classification: M37, M39

Introduction

Advertising is one of the constituents of marketing. It helps to convey necessary information about a company and its products (Versli Lietuva 2014). The main goal of commercials is to promote sales of goods produced by a company as well as the services it provides, yet the most important part of this goal is to generate new needs within the society. Therefore, each type of advertising, especially commercial videos, conveys various meanings and values, manipulates the subconsciousness and the notions of the society, trying to convince that the product advertised is worth buying.

In order to understand the signs and values created by a visual message, the method of simple selection has been used to select the commercial "The Mime's Date" by the company Café Noir; its duration is 35 seconds. Semiotic analysis is applied to analyse this video commercial because this branch of science analyses signs and their systems. It aims at describing meanings (Varnauskas 2012).

The aim of the article is to analyse Café Noir's video commercial "The Mime's Date" on the basis of semiotics.

Advertising: the industry of promises

The entire commercial is aimed at a potential buyer of the advertised product/service. It is designed to create the need for that product/service and to manipulate human desires (Poneliene

2008:204). Therefore, the commercial is constantly promising something; it is the industry of promises *par excellence* (Milerius 2013:31). In order to attract the consumer in a faster and better way, the commercial promises a lot more than the advertised product can give (Milerius 2013:31). The commercial uses aesthetic means, methods of psychology and statistics; therefore, it is a blend of *art* and *science* (Beasley, Danesi 2002:2).

At the moment, there are various forms and means of advertising: the media, exhibitions, fairs, etc. (Versli Lietuva 2014). There are two main types of form:

- visual: the consumer sees the product/service, its logo, etc.
- verbal: a phrase uttered in the right tone or dialogue directing the consumer's attention to the product/service or the company itself or its trademark (Poneliën 2008:205).

Usually, the creators of commercials combine both types into one, thus creating what is called an audiovisual commercial (Poneliën 2008:205). This means that the message is conveyed employing both the visuals and the sound. In this way, it is possible to create more signs and symbols that would manipulate the senses of consumers and increase their desire to purchase the product. It does not matter which means will be used to affect the user; the most important thing is that users are affected, and that the product or its brand is stuck into one's subconsciousness (Smetonienė 2009:32). The creators "play" with the psychology and the subconsciousness of people. They usually employ "Epicurean themes – happiness, youthfulness, success, status, luxury, fashion, beauty" (Beasley, Danesi 2002:27). They tell the story about "the audience". The commercial "The Mime's Date" by Café Noir is not an exception; it also reflects luxury, beauty, youthfulness, etc. This commercial video has many encoded meanings. It promises the viewer "a different" life and "transports" the viewer to it.

Analysis of commercial video "Mime's date"

The video commercial is divided into four segments:

1. The first segment starts at the beginning of the commercial video and lasts until the shot in which everything is observed through binoculars (0:00 - 0:03);
2. The second segment starts in the room and ends with the shot in which a woman and a young man stand in the centre of the room (0:03 – 0:22);
3. The third segment starts with the shot in which the main role is played by the clown and ends when the clown starts to speak (0:22 – 0:26);
4. The fourth segment starts with the shot which depicts all the coffee products produced by the company and lasts until the end of the commercial video (0:27 – 0:35).

Each part of the commercial will be analysed separately connecting the analysis into one entity.

The first segment of the commercial video

After watching the first segment of the commercial, it is possible to notice the main symbol of the entire Café Noir company – the clown. This sign is considered to be an icon because this kind of signifier remains similar to its object: the circus clown. All this is revealed by the dress code. Clowns wear various outfits but their usual outfit includes striped clothes and overalls. They wear exclusive footwear, gloves and, usually, a hat. Moreover, all clowns wear make-up. This particular clown has one exceptional quality, i.e. he does not have a big round nose which is stereotypically an attribute of all circus clowns. This shows that this clown is not destined for entertainment and the circus. His main function is not to entertain the society, yet he can do what the society cannot do, for example, sit down on the hand of the town clock.

It is noteworthy that in the commercial, the clown becomes a symbolic sign. The clown has different meanings attributed to him. He becomes an observer watching over the city. He observes and supervises everything that is related to coffee. Here it is possible to observe the metaphor of the clown. He can be called the coffee clown. Assessing the dress code from a

different point of view, one can see that his two-coloured striped overalls reflect two types of coffee, i.e. black and white.

The creator of the commercial pays a lot of attention to projecting the image of observation. However, it is performed indirectly, by using the codes of space, colours and sound. Certain signs can be recognisable. In this way, it creates an unnerving feeling and mysteriousness; it shows that everyone is observed even though they do not notice it. It is attempted to create an intrigue towards the viewer.

The commercial is set during an autumn evening; it allows the creator to encourage the sense of mysteriousness and intrigue in the commercial. The selection of space is determined by the clock tower at the centre of the city; it is higher than any other building in the city and thus a fine place for watching people as the entire city can be visible from that spot. The town clock becomes an icon and a symbol in its own right.

The Moon can also be treated as part of the space code. The full moon is selected on purpose. It provides the sense of completion to the space. However, the full moon can be distinguished as a sign with a symbolic nature. Since the full moon is usually associated with mysteriousness, one can assume that something unbelievable, unusual and also frightening takes place during that night. When the full moon rises, one can expect various surprises and magic. This makes the clown–observer even more visible.

One can notice that in order to make the commercial more mysterious, the creator uses a certain effect, namely the rain, but the rain is more like fog. If there was no sound, it would be difficult to understand that it is actually raining. However, the decoding of sound reveals that the sound of rain is actually present. The sounds are carefully selected for the commercial.

The creator of animation consciously uses various signs, codes and metaphors in the commercial. A fine example of it would be the shot in which the clock and the clown are captured in full length. It can be noted that the time displayed on the clock is 9:55 PM; however, the sound of the clock striking hours indirectly indicates that the time during the given moment is 9:00 PM since the clock strikes only once in an hour. However, the creator wants to strengthen the effect of the sound thus adding one more vector, i.e. the city lamp. This is a case of manipulation of signs and codes. The street lamp is an icon, a symbol of the street and it can be interpreted in various ways. It can perform several functions: “to trick” the spectator into thinking that the actual time shown by the clock is 9:00 PM since the lighting of the scene directs the attention of the viewer to the lamp; another function could be to illuminate the scene for the clown. This proves once again that on an evening like this, everything is possible, especially when the coffee clown appears. However, it is possible to look at this scene from a different perspective. When the sound of the clock is heard, the clown moves. This can be interpreted as clinging to the clock hand which moves towards him, and the street lamp alone remains unmoved. A possible meaning of this symbol is that the street lamp lights up every hour.

It is difficult to see what the clown is holding in his hand but in the following shot, the connotation of the signifier, the binoculars, is created in the space of the shot. The signifier and the signified are encoded in the space of the shot. Therefore, the fact that the clown has noticed something interesting through his binoculars is revealed to the viewer. A certain form allows the viewer to realise that the observation is performed using the binoculars. It can be said that this shot is an icon. At the same time, the creator creates a specific *kontrafaktas*: the viewer identifies himself with the observer/the clown.

When analysing the extent to which the sound is used in the commercial, one can notice that sounds and music are created specifically for this commercial. It can be deduced from the fact that each sound matches the sight. Once the commercial starts, one can hear the usual sound of the clock which tolls on an hourly basis. It can be said that it is the sign of the sound, an icon, to be more precise. It slightly overshadows the sound of rain which can be immediately decoded as an iconic sign of sound.

The creator of the commercial makes the movements of the feet of the clown audible and thus evokes the connotation between the movements of the clock hands. All instances of music or, to be more precise, sounds create a special mood and emotion for the commercial video. The viewer is included; he wants to know what happens next.

As for the colour codes of the commercial, the use of black and white is prevailing. This colour pattern is used deliberately because it is the main colour pattern of the entire promotional campaign of Café Noir. The shades of black and white are dominant. These colours gain a symbolic meaning: they make the commercial more mysterious, magical, and also intrigue the viewer because they are used to seeing colourful images. It also creates an illusion that this video is created during the times when there was no cinema in Technicolor. It implies that during these times, coffee was advertised in better ways. Moreover, the symbolic meaning of colours can have certain connotations. In the meantime, the colour black symbolises black coffee, whereas the colour white symbolises the colour of milk. By mixing black coffee and milk, one can get various mixtures and shades of colours. This is reflected in the visual message as well.

The analysis of colours can reveal several meanings of colours. The colour white symbolises light and joy. It is also the colour of cleanliness, wisdom, celebration and elevation. The colour black symbolises sinfulness, wisdom and evil. The colour white symbolises harmony, neutrality and friendliness. Therefore, if we relate the meanings of these colours with the outfit of the clown, it can be said that it reflects the sinfulness and the badness related to his role as an observer. It can be said that this process is illegal. He is presumably committing a crime. However, the colour white in his outfit counterbalances the crime he is committing. It signifies that the crime is committed out of curiosity rather than bad intentions. He wants to be wise.

Moreover, the creator of the commercial does not pay great attention to the words of the characters. The meaning of the commercial and the storytelling is encoded with the images rather than words. However, the clown utters one question:

“Who’s there?”

It is a simple question which can be understood directly. There is no additional meaning encoded. Everything is simple. However, the sound code used by the creator loads this question with certain meanings. The tone of voice and the intonation of the clown indicate that he has seen something unusual and interesting. The viewer is intrigued; he anticipates and wants to know what happens next because he wants to see what the clown has seen. One could say that the clown’s voice is tempting. One can assume that the view will be related with temptations and seduction.

The second segment of the commercial video

The second segment of the commercial starts using the non-verbal language and signs. It helps to encode the signs but the sound signs are used for decoding.

One can hear the main sign of this part of the commercial: the coffee pod which is both an icon and a symbol. This sign can be attributed to the icon because the signifier is dependent on the signified. It can be said that when one sees the coffee pod in the commercial, it is possible to predict that coffee will be made out of this pod. However, a symbolic meaning is assigned to the pod: it is the seducer, the temptress, not just an item; it becomes the main object of seduction. The way in which the mime introduces the pod seduces the woman. Once she sees the coffee pod, she is fascinated by the man and by the things he does. Later, the woman starts to like the man. He seduces the woman and intrigues her with the coffee pod. Only later does she become interested in the coffee itself and the man.

Analysing the colour codes of the commercial, it becomes evident that, as in the first segment, the black-and-white is a prevailing colour pattern in this segment as well. However, two more characters appear. The dress code of the man reveals that he is a mime. It is revealed by his suit and white gloves. His body language helps to decode it as well. Mimes speak with their bodies

rather than by using words. The dress code also implies that the man can do something unusual and magical. The suit (only a part of the suit, to be precise, because he wears only a vest rather than a jacket) creates the sense of solidness and luxury. Neatly combed hair, white gloves, vest and tie show that this person is pedantic and appreciates good quality. His rolled up sleeves is a sign: an icon and a symbol. All of this implies to the viewer that he is a magician rather than a mime. All illusionists roll up their sleeves before doing a trick in order to prove that they do not hide anything in their sleeves. Therefore, the illusion is created that this man is an unusual one.

A flower blossom attached to the vest of the man symbolises his romantic nature. It can be understood as a homonym. The symbolic meaning of the flower is romanticism, a desire to attract attention of women and to be exceptional.

The clothes of the woman reveal that she is not a simple woman. She is an aristocratic, pedantic lady. All of this can be deducted from the luxurious dress of the woman, its colour, accessories, shoes, neatly combed hair and body language. She is lying elegantly on the couch and her facial expressions and body movement indicate that she is bored. This is also revealed by her dress code. The colour white creates a festive mood but also shows that the person needs something new in his/her life.

The analysis of the space code in this segment reveals that the things in the room are located in the background. The only exception is the couch the woman is lying on. It symbolises luxury and seduction because the woman is lying on it; it can also symbolise the Romantic Period. The things in the background are not brought into attention but they contribute to the sense of luxury and elegance. It can be said that it is home to an educated, wealthy man, because there is a globe next to the table as well as various luxurious things (for example, a stuffed bear which can also imply that the owner of the house loves hunting). The creator of the commercial highlights the characters of the commercial, and they are connected with the space only at the end of the commercial. However, they receive the largest amount of attention as they stay at the centre of the shot.

As in the first part of the commercial, the spoken text does not play a significant role in the commercial. The meaning of the commercial and the storytelling is encoded with the images rather than words. However, the woman says:

“I shouldn’t be there.”

It is a simple statement which can be understood directly. There is no meaning encoded. Everything is simple. However, the sound code used by the creator loads this question with certain meanings. The tone of voice and intonation implies that the woman is bored and not fascinated by the man. She is not interested. However, her voice tone and its sound also allure the man. It seems to be saying: “surprise me”.

If we connect the body language of the woman and the signs of voice into one, it is possible to distinguish a certain iconic and symbolic sign. The woman expresses her boredom but she also seduces the man and expects that he will surprise her in some way. The woman’s legs are a conventional sign indicating that she is seducing him. All of this intrigues the viewer.

The sound codes play a very important role analysing this part of the commercial. Only if the sounds are decoded is it possible to understand the meaning of the visuals. Iconic sounds like closing cabinet doors, pressing a button, etc. create a denotation of the object recreated. It can be said that even if one does not see the image and hears only the sounds, it is still not difficult to imagine certain objects. However, when the sound and body language codes are combined in the commercial video, it becomes easy for the viewer to decode the contents of the commercial. It is noteworthy that the creators of the commercial video speak French, which further strengthens the atmosphere of seduction, temptation and quality coffee prevailing in the video. The most prevailing notion is that Frenchmen are passionate lovers and good cooks. The French language supplements this video with certain taste.

It can be said that music that intermingles with domestic sounds lightens the mood as well. The feeling of luxury and mysteriousness is created. Each sound is in harmony with other sounds. The sound of an operating machine becomes one of the constituents of the musical part of this

video. The creator of the commercial carefully thought about each code, sign, even the sounds of music.

This segment of the commercial has one important signifier: the cup of coffee and coffee poured into it. If the coffee machine as an item is just an illusion, then the cup of coffee and the coffee poured into it at present is not an illusion. The sound of coffee being poured makes the image more prominent. In the subconsciousness, the viewer imagines the coffee machine. This evokes the images of the coffee-making process. This signifier is a sign and an icon because it has a direct connection with the object. It is a direct sign.

A transparent, small cup is a symbol which might be a conventional sign of espresso coffee. Usually, this type of coffee is poured into small cups. A transparent cup seems more impressive to the spectator. This is how the secret of coffee is revealed; everyone can see how the coffee is poured and how it looks like in the cup. An unusual way of holding the cup (it sits on the palm of the hand) reveals that this coffee is unusual; it is nothing like the coffee sold by other companies. This coffee is elegant; it is created for people who appreciate quality. The white clean glove unstained by coffee proves that coffee can become a symbol of pedantry, elegance and quality.

The creator of the commercial wants to return to the clown/the observer; he deliberately selects a different filming angle which reveals the entire space, emphasising large windows and the characters. Large windows are also a symbol. They denote space. One can assume that the room is in an ancient building somewhere in the Old Town. Therefore, the extent of luxury is fixed in the mind of the viewer. The woman's dress itself shown in full length in this shot reveals that there is a festive occasion happening on this evening. Therefore, if one wants to experience such luxury, it is necessary to purchase this coffee. The taste of this coffee can provide everything: luxury, sense of elegance and getting one's wishes fulfilled. In the commercial, the man seduces the woman precisely with coffee. *Kotrafaktai* are used to a greater extent. It offers the viewer to experience what they have not experienced before. The coffee creates a paradise where everyday things function in a magical way.

The movement back to the shot with the clown is emphasised by filming from the corridor in order for the doors of the room to be seen. It creates the illusion that this couple is being watched. The observer is the camera recording this scene. It is also noteworthy that during the second segment, the sound of rain cannot be heard but it appears again in the end. Attempts to return back to the observer known from the first segment of the commercial are made as well as to connect these parts into one entity thus showing that magic happens inside where it is warm and cosy. It can be said that it is a fine way to return back to the clown located on the hand of the clock.

The third segment of the commercial video

This part of the commercial emphasises the clown sitting on the clock hand. In this part, it is already possible to see the binoculars that are slightly more visible. Binoculars are a sign, an icon. All of this reminds the viewer that the previously seen image was created by the clown/the observer. If the clown was not an observer, no one would see that scene. The binoculars become a sign of observing, revelation.

It can be said that the text is emphasised in this segment of the commercial. The phrase of the clown – “This pod is very seductive” – emphasises that the coffee pod has seduced the woman. It is the pod, not the coffee itself that did it. As it has been mentioned before, the coffee pod is the main symbol of the commercial. This is once more confirmed by the phrase of the clown. In this way, one is encouraged to purchase not only the coffee but the coffee machine as well. Since this coffee is the best coffee from the machine.

The creator of the commercial keeps paying a lot of attention to the sound codes. The prevailing music creates an impressive mood. The voice and the intonation of the clown emphasise the words that have been uttered. He has revealed a secret but he also expresses

surprise and concern. The surprise is revealed by the non-verbal body language, namely the facial expression.

The fourth segment of the commercial video

This segment is not exceptional compared to other coffee commercials. Usually all commercial campaigns end with a presentation of more products by a particular company and provide more information about the product. However, a successful creator of a commercial ends the commercial successfully employing the sound codes. Sound is an important part of the entire commercial. Therefore, a simple text which conveys the main information about coffee pods and coffee-makers adds certain exclusivity. The same mood and intrigue is maintained. The tone of voice and music provides the commercial with some mysteriousness. The texts become intriguing and seducing. The voice timbre becomes a symbol. It can be said that the signifier is transferred to the coffee pod.

The commercial ends with the inscription and the quote about black shades. This finalises the commercial emphasizing the blackness and taste of coffee. A different blackness of coffee: a different taste of coffee.

Conclusions

Advertising is an industry of promises. It promises more than the product advertised can give. The most important goal is to affect the subconsciousness of the consumer in order for him to remember the product, the brand, and purchase the product/service. The creators use a lot of signs and symbols in their works.

The symbol of the Café Noir commercial campaign is the clown who gains a new symbolic meaning and performs the function of the observer who reveals secrets. There is one more sign in the commercial analysed: the coffee pod which is also an icon and a symbol. However, there are more signs: the sound of the clock, windows, binoculars, coffee cup, etc., which are analysed in this work.

There are many codes employed in this commercial: those of dress, space, sound and colour. It can be said the colour code of the entire commercial campaign is the black-and-white one. Sound codes reveal the mysteriousness of the commercial and create an intrigue. Decoding the dress codes, the social situation and lifestyle of the characters can be revealed. These people like luxury and pedantry.

Having analysed this commercial video, the meaning of the visual message has been revealed. This commercial wants to create an illusion that coffee can “transport” everyone into a life full of luxury, elegance and pedantry. It also reveals that the coffee pod alone can seduce the opposite sex. It can be said that if you drink a cup of coffee with a person you like, s/he will be yours. Coffee can be powerful. It can change the current situation. Therefore, certain instances of *kontrafaktas* are prevailing in the situation.

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