

SEMANTICS OF ADVERTISEMENTS AND CONSTRUCTIONIST THEORY: A PSYCHO-PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH FOR READING ADVERTISEMENTS

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Introduction

It is well defined and widely excepted fact that semantics strictly deals with what aspects of meaning they are talking about and what not. Meaning is notoriously vague and can be dealt in number of ways (Leech, 1981). The semantics is that of “carefully” building, putting up or arranging idea to make a meaning or has a desired image. This takes us to the conclusion that semantics involves construction of a particular image about the said or viewed thing, done by an individual to suit his views, thoughts, desires, fantasies and needs at a particular point of time.

These days’ language and communication is not only the means of communication but they are also helping as a tool to earn money (Emodi, 2011). A smart use of words in a limited manner is one of the essential qualities for television adverts. Television is one of the major source of entertainment for the populace and as well as for the nobleman and in that course they are bound to see adverts also. The persuasive part of these adverts are carried by both visual and verbal communication (Mao, 2013).

Imagine yourself in a communication situation only in a visual format, how will you able to understand the advertiser’s message? How will you able to analyse and mention its acceptability in your society? How will the viewers able to understand the reliability of the shown visual? And what will be the difference if oral communication is added to it? This is what this paper aims out to construct meaning from something that looks as simple as a photograph and sounds as sweet as poem. For this unravelling process of meaning certain signifying practices come into existence.

1. Data and Methodology-

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This study implement qualitative research methodology for the purpose of analysis, which is descriptive in nature.

The analysed data is collected from different TV channels from 8pm to 10 pm for around a month. The appealing and unique adverts have been selected for the sample. Further the data is categorise into number of categories as per their use.

The data is analysed on the basis of Leech's (1981) type of meaning, Charmaz (2000, 2006) grounded theory and constructivism and Hall's (1997) constructionist theory of representation specifically, associative meaning.

2. Constructionist Vs Social Constructionist Theory for semantics-

Basically Constructivism is used for education purpose especially for classroom teaching. There are two major types of constructivism-

- (A) Cognitive or Individual constructivism which at the large scale deals with Piaget's theory. This is also known only as constructionist approach
- (B) Social constructivism which largely depends on Vygotsky's theory

Similarities between the two includes inquiry understanding methods and individuals creating concepts to construct understanding or meaning that is relevant to the observed.

Differences discuss about language development theories. The former deals with thought process for a language for cognitive constructivism and the later deals with those theories where language precedes thinking for the theory of social constructivism.

Understanding the construction of meaning helps to analyse once view about the observed that whether our thought process is working in the right direction without any influence or our views are actually modified by certain external forces.

3. Adverts as a communication tool-

What is the role of TV advertising as a communications tool? Both advertiser and viewers have much to obtain from television adverts. These adverts are composed of number of written and visual images and undoubtedly different components like vocabulary, cultural features shown in these adverts help viewer to improve their listening and speaking skills in an effortless manner. And in turn these changes in the society force advertisers to review and work-on their advertising components once again. Few common aspects of communication and adverts are as follows-

- Allows communication objectives to be set by considering response models.
- Works on feedback model
- Essential elements of communication like sender, receiver, medium, message are in common

- Essential steps in the process of communication like encoding, decoding, transmission etc. are also same.
- Both adverts and communication helps to improve critical thinking

4. Methods of assigning meaning to Adverts

As per the philosophy of language the speech is act of performing several acts at once (Bach, Kent 2014) which in turn depends on speaker's intention. This theory relates us to J. L. Austin's (1962) development of performative utterances. According to which the speech act can be analysed at three different levels:

1. **A locutionary act**- the produced utterance and its ostensive meaning, constituted of phonetic, phatic and oratory acts corresponding to the verbal, syntactic and semantic aspects of any communication;
2. **An illocutionary act**-the pragmatic 'illocutionary force' of the utterance. It deals with socially acceptable verbal action
3. **A perlocutionary act**- This section deals with the effects of communication such as persuading, convincing, scaring, enlightening, inspiring, or otherwise getting someone to do or realize something, whether intended or not (Austin 1962)

Katherine Frith (1998) in Lukas (2002) discusses three approaches to reading ads which is very much Similar to the above theory

- First- surface meaning
- Second- Intended meaning
- Third- cultural or ideological meaning

5. **Elements that affect meaning Construction for adverts**- There are certain important elements of any advert which are responsible for its popularity and frequency among the viewers. Here I am discussing few of them which plays important role in the analysis of selected data

- I) **Gender**- The word gender is related to perlocutionary act of communication. It reflects the cultural and ideological understanding as its connotation is behaviour that an individual has acquired in the process of his/her socialization in accordance with its sex – feminine or masculine. As per Alvesson and Billing (1997) gender is the social and cultural meanings related with the masculinity and femininity maleness and femaleness forced and anticipated by the society.

The way adverts are looked at and understood are different from the persons having different gender traits. The same advert will be treated differently by different genders.

Situations where a woman is open to opposite sex will be criticized by the feminine individuals and not by the masculine. Rather they might enjoy the aesthetic value of the overall picture.

The problem with the above said example is that a masculinity and femininity might be understood differently by the individual depending on their social status and their exposure to the world. This will take us to the next element which is stylistic social factor.

Example-Nirma ad where few women taking out an ambulance from mud.

Denotative meaning in this advert says that even if your clothes are as dirty as it is shown in the advertisement then also this detergent can clean it easily but connotative meaning says that now a days women are taking those initiatives for which even males have to think a lot.

II) Stylistic social factors (culture)-

It is related to Illocutionary act of assigning meaning to adverts. It says that adverts can-not get free from the cultural influence but they use it gaining more self-assurance that the message will be accepted and understood the way they are trying to. But at the same time adverts are very true example of one of the essential characteristics of human culture is that the change occurs. Sometimes adverts encourage more than our popular culture.

Now-a-days, on several occasion as a fleeting glance at number of adverts in television, there seems to be an arbitrary use of the images whereby there is no defined relationship or in-fact just opposite relation between the advert and the popular culture.

Example- Airlmatic advert- share the load.

Female in India society are psychologically trained from the very much beginning that they are the only person who needs to take care of all house hold deeds. Denotative meaning here says that man is helping his wife in these house hold jobs but connotative meaning implies that now it is time to break such cultural norms.

III) Ambiguity in Captions-

It deals with both locutionary and illocutionary acts of communication. Today, of particular concern to advertising scholars and practitioners is the use of strategic ambiguity for effectiveness of persuasion. Strategic ambiguity, an equivalence of purposeful polysemy, has been considered a strategic resource of communication. Despite these recent theoretical and managerial developments, studies have been scant to focus on the ambiguity in advertising creativity interpretation.

Example- Imperial blue- Pyaarkiraahmeinchalnasikh

This is one of the surrogate advertisements which cocoon two fold ambiguity. Firstly -In actuality this is a liquor advert but because of advertising rules they are presented as a soda advert. Secondly- Tag line “Pyaarkiraahmeinchalnasikh” connotes if you are going through a heart break you should try this liquor.

IV) Acquaintance with the world-

It relates us to Illocutionary act of communication. This type of meaning deals with socially acquired and communicated meaning by the social community. It differs from person to person and place to place. It, sometimes, varies among age groups.

Example-Myntra lesbian advert

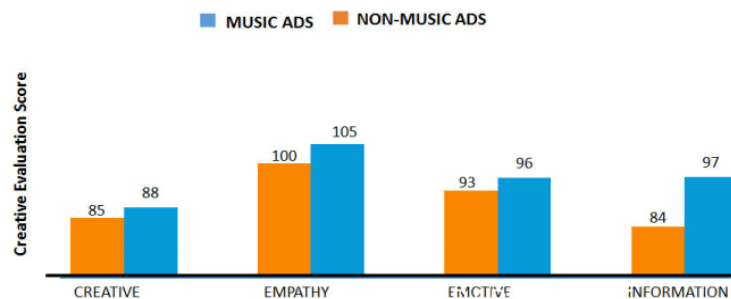
This advert tries to bridge lesbian acceptability in Indian society.

V) Music-

Deals with Locutionary and perlocutionary acts of communication. Music in adverts are also involved in the role of meaning construction. It is employed in number of ways which in turn help to construct meaning as a whole. Nelson also studied about the same and reach to the conclusion that music in adverts helps to analyse meaning at creative, emotive, empathetic and Informative levels.

THE POWER OF MUSIC

Ads with some form of music perform better than others across four key metrics



Creative Evaluation scores range from 0-200. These scores are derived from a proprietary algorithm.
Source: Nielsen Creative Evaluation 9/12/14 – 4/20/15.

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Example- McDowell's No1 Soda adverts- Yaaron Se Bane Hum

In this advert Music in background says “Ye No.1 Yaarihai”. The youngsters mean this word “Yaari” a lot, which means friendship and includes informality of language use which, in turn, reflects closeness and familiarity among the users. The target audience of liquor is the youth. This addresses the target audience and entails social associative meaning.

6. Implementation of Social Constructionist Theory for semantics of Adverts

Airtel ad, titled Boss.

In this ad a lady boss discusses to two subordinate employees of her team that they have to work very hard to reach the deadline. One of the men protests saying that it is not possible in such a short duration. She showed her sympathetic face and mentioned in a sympathetic manner that they’ll just have to manage and ask them to take a leave. Later lady reached home and cook food for her husband like any Indian traditional wife.

The major attraction of this advert is that the shown as the boss of two subordinates is also wife of one of them.

To analyse this advert for meaning construction a set of dior questions have been utilised. As dior questions were framed to analyse print media advertisements therefore for the sake of analysis of Tv commercials we have also framed few more questions on the same pattern.

There are three major dior questions which help viewer to construct meaning:-

WHO is being represented?

This question largely deals with the Gender element of the advert. It includes the argument that which gender is targeted to appeal to? Is it men, women or both? This helps us to construct or reconstruct the image of represented gender.



Picture of Airtel mobile company advertisement

In the above advert at the front face both the genders are included but in the deep analysis we can say that women are largely targeted because it is not representing typical Indian society which is loved to be seen by most of the males. Instead of it is a Subversive but identified representation about how women wish to be perceived and what they are interested in?

HOW are they being represented?

This helps us to understand the Cultural element of the adverts. The questions discusses about the doubt that what is been highlighted in the presentation? This section of analysis helps to understand or reconstruct already existing cultural norms and their acceptability. Whether still they are acceptable in one and the same manner or some changes are required?

In the above advert we have three options

- A) Is it a women in society?
- Or
- B) Man-woman relationship?
- Or
- C) The network at the top of the?

Overtly the third option is seemed to be right one. But to achieve their goal advertisers have utilised second option as a second spotlight and first one as a major spotlight because it deals with psychology of both the categories of women. Professionals as they are shown beautiful,

carrying appealing personality, dominating over males and women would wish to see themselves at that very position in society. Housemakers because of deep love and great understanding between husband and wife.

HOW is the representation constructed?

This question covers a big portion for meaning construction of an advert. Answer of this question share out three elements of any commercial-Music, Acquaintance with the world and Ambiguity. This helps us to construct idea about relation between our surrounding, product and other visuals of the advert. Sometimes these elements of an advert also helps us to dream about our imaginary world.

In the above discussed airtel network advertisement ambiguity of wife and boss is used to attract and appeal viewers. This also force audience to let their brain work more to understand the advert which in turn result in long term memory for the product.

This rebellious advert works in negative direction for the element acquaintance with the world. It is so to make the change in the society which is desired by a large group of the society.

Background music in this commercial is utilised to memorise the brand as it is used in all airtel commercials.

Conclusion:

Summing up the analysis it can be said that visual representations of TV commercials bring us close to the real society. These commercials are very much rich in their semantic representations. Language plays a vital role in constructing and understanding these realities of the society. Both the aspects of language i.e. verbal and non-verbal speaks a lot about society. They relate us to the existing and desired changes in societal norms. With the help of this study my effort was to discuss the involvement of constructionist theory of representation in understanding the delivered messages with their other under carpet messages. It has been fairly discussed and well established fact that number of associated messages are coupled with the main content with the help of involved elements, which finally results in number of varied readings for a single representation.

However, on the other hand we can generalise that all the involved forms of communication converge in a brooding of cultural norms followed or denied in any society at a particular period of time. Finally we can say that implication of this paper is qualitative analysis of the said topic which windup with the result human being derive meaning from all the utilised elements (signs, symbols, colours, background, language, music etc.) ,without any exception of age, gender and society. Though these differences in age, gender and society may affect

their way of perseverance. Objects and human beings varies in their meaning depending on the context and culture and if the seen object or language is not seen before then this works as a barrier for effective communication. The communication process will be blocked and no effective communication can take place.

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Imperial blue: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MenI-xTrv9M>