

INTRODUCTION

As Ugo Volli asserts, "advertising is a mass, aesthetic and ideological instrument, a reservoir to which we draw our way of looking at things, to discover the beauty to have fun and to dream."¹ The author gives the ability to overcome the art and fashion not only for the spread and the wealth of resources, but also for the speed in changes. If in addition there is the technique of humor, the result is extraordinary: the advertising can become art.

This work aims to explore how humor can operate in the field of advertising as a multi-faceted strategy which involves the consumer in a funny way to undertake him/her to co-produce of the meaning of the message. Specifically, this study will compare throughout the British and the Italian textual and visual patterns adopted in advertising and will illustrate how they can differently use such features as originality, irony, humor. Initially it will be traced out a general profile about advertising and the various styles that characterize it, about the definition of humor, its functions, efficiency, something stirs in the consumer, the elements used and how it is used in advertising and through various types of media.

1. Ugo Volli, "Semiotica della pubblicità", Bari-Roma, Laterza, 2005.

Subsequently, this study will present the state of advertising in England with a particular focus on how it is spread across different places like transports in London, the Underground, has become over the years more and more a place of strength and an important means of propagation for marketing strategies in England. This is possible because in the Underground there is a large percentage of advertising, and because there is a large influx of passengers that travel every day on this means of transport, so it is possible to reach a target of customers or potential customers numerically high and different.

In the case of Italy, some cases in which the use of humor led to a subsequent action by the Advertising Self-Regulation System to amend or prevent the disclosure of certain spot will be discussed: you will notice that many censored spots have in common precisely the element of humor. An emblematic case is represented by Italian Oliviero Toscani, the famous photographer who has produced some of the most beautiful and significant advertising campaigns distinguish himself clearly in the standardized and not very creative advertising Italian scene. Over and over again he was censored, and many times this has produced an echo that made even more talk of his "scandals". Still on the way "alternative" to advertise, it will be explored the unique world of guerrilla marketing, an intelligent and low cost way to

do advertising, which affects the individual with the weapon of unexpected and overwhelming humor. Finally, will be considered two advertising campaigns that have proved very successful: advertising campaign of Absolut vodka and the Nike one, realized for the victory of Italy in football World Cup 2006.

To demonstrate how the humor can be effective in advertising, my consulting reference sources were books and essays in English and Italian about the humor in advertising, from different schools of thought, although there is not an extensive bibliography on this subject. Internet, however, has proved a mine of information and pictures about it. After an analysis of documents, it was done a reworking and a comparison between the two realities taken into consideration, the Italian one and the British one. The English prefer irony and humor, all of which constitutes an own style that distinguishes it from others. These features unfortunately are not yet present in Italy.

The choice of completing the thesis in English is simply dictated by a desire to challenge myself, and I must thank my supervisor for the trust placed in me.

1.1 The art of creating advertising

*The power of modern advertising
is within this growing “ubiquity” or
“everywhereness” of advertising (Fraim 2000)*

In contemporary society, advertising is everywhere. We cannot walk down the street, shop, watch television, go through our mail, log on to the Internet, read a newspaper or take a train without encountering it. Whether we are alone, with our friends or family, or in a crowd, advertising is always with us, if only on the label of something we are using. Given this ubiquity, it is strange that many people are reluctant to pay attention to ads. An ad is never the programme they are watching, never the letter they are waiting for, never the website they are seeking, nor the part of the newspaper they are reading.¹

Advertising has a great influence on our lives. Today’s advertisements also inform and guide many of the important decisions we make.

The way in which advertisements are affecting and shaping our attitudes, lifestyles and culture are too many to tally.

1. Guy Cook, “The discourse of advertising”, Routledge, 1992, pag.1

Traditional definitions of advertising include a series of elements that distinguish the field from others. Each innovation in communication has been used for advertising and, in some way, each has changed advertising, which in turn has changed the set of elements used in its definition. Over the years, advertising has been defined in many ways. Defined very generally, advertising is the “*promotion of goods or services for sale through impersonal media*”². Industry icon Leo Burnett defined it as “*selling corn flakes to people who are eating Cheerios*”, and U.S. President Calvin Coolidge called it “*the life of trade*”. Textbooks give a stricter definition of advertising, such as in Jobber³, where he defines advertising as “*any paid form of nonpersonal communication of ideas or products in the prime media, i.e. television, the press, posters, cinema and radio*”. Research in marketing and reception theories should be able to suggest how best to develop and target appeal, which may be created in many ways, with emotive connotations and lifestyle associations, or through factual information, depending in part on culture-specific values, in part on product type.⁴

2. From the “Collins Concise Dictionary”.

3. David Jobber, “Principles and Practice of Marketing”, McGraw-Hill, 2001

4. Beverly Adab & Cristina Valdès, 2004, Introduction from “The Translator”, pag.161

Advertising could be used to make the target audience aware of the existence of a product or service, and the benefits it confers to customers. Advertising influences consumers partly by giving information but mostly by appealing to needs, motives and emotions. Consumption can be driven by functional or social needs. Clothes satisfy a functional need; fashion satisfies a social need. A house serves a functional need; a home serves a social need. A car may satisfy a functional need but the type of car one chooses can satisfy a social need. Understanding variations in people's needs and motives is important for developing effective advertising. People's behaviour is not determined only by their needs and motivations, but also by their surroundings, and the context in which they make decisions.

Advertising has a great influence on our lives because it also informs and guides many of the important decisions we make. Advertising could be used to make the target audience aware of the existence of a product or service, and the benefits it confers to customers.⁵

As Carmen Millàn Varela⁶ says, advertising “sells” but it also does much more than that: it creates identities for products, companies, and also for audiences.

5. Marieke De Mooij, 2004, “Translating Advertising: Painting the tip of an iceberg”. From “The Translator”, pag.179

6. Carmen Millàn-Varela, “Exploring Advertising in a Global Conyext: Food for Thought, 2004, From”The Translator, pag.245

As Williamson points out, “advertisements’ role is to attach meanings to products, to create identities for the goods (and service providers) they promote: a process today described as “branding”.

“Branding” is a crucial element of successful advertising that involves, or should involve, careful cross-linguistic and cross-cultural research. While the goal of brand names, and logos, is to facilitate recognition of a company and its products in any location and context⁷.

Posters, book jackets, political advertising, food and clothing labels, information leaflets, product recall notices, home-made printed or hand-written pages stuck on lampposts, shop and street signs all advertise either a product, a service or some kind of information. They may not always be directly selling a product, but they are reinforcing or constructing an image, seeking to affect people’s behaviour in some way, or at least to make them stop and think⁷. To gain and maintain attention, the advertisements should be planned with greater care and must be more creative, pleasing and rewarding for consumers. Many advertisers now believe that the role of advertising is not only persuasive but also entertainment.

7. Jeremy Munday, 2004, “Advertising: some challenges to translation theory”, from “The Translator” pag.199

The first step in the creation of advertising creative and effective is the planning of a strategy of the message, namely the definition of the overall message to communicate to the public. The development of an effective strategy of the message begins with the identification of benefits for the customer that can be used as decoy advertising. At this point we need to develop a creative concept (a "great idea") to implement the strategy so distinctive and memorable. Sometimes, simple ideas can become exceptional advertising campaigns. The next step in planning advertising is to transform the idea into an effective advertising that can arouse the attention and interest of the target market. Subsequently, the company must choose the tone of advertising. Some companies adopt a positive tone, highlighting the benefits of their products and generally avoid a humour that can distract consumers from the message. Many other companies take a rather sharp humour to distinguish themselves from the mass of competitors.⁸

8. P. Kotler – G. Armstrong, 2006, “Principi di marketing”, Pearson Ed. Italia.

1.2 The language of advertising

Advertising is one of the most controversial of all contemporary genres: it is considered annoying, intrusive, shallow, predictable, even dangerous and manipulative, but also creative, artistic, ingenious, entertaining and uplifting. Advertisers continue to use deceptive strategies for disguising or avoiding mentioning unattractive facts or for describing a product or service in such a way that the inattentive reader may see it only in a positive light. As Cook¹ suggests, the major function of advertising is conative as it aims to persuade people to do something, yet its use of language and other modes is often closer to poetic function.

According to Wilmshurst and MacKay, advertising uses “manipulative, distortive and loaded language” to “catch our imagination and predispose us to the product or service on offer”. Indeed, we may say that rules are intentionally and systematically broken and language is used in a clever, tight, stylized and persuasive way presumably to achieve an even greater, more salient, more pervasive, more penetrating, and ultimately more persuasive effect on the reader. Advertising language displays creative writing features both at the lexical and the morpho-syntactic level.

Colloquial vocabulary recurs, technical terms are also used to describe the specific qualities of a product. Moreover, loan words and neologism are frequently used and play a fundamental role in advertising. Indeed, superlative and evaluative adjectives with clear positive connotations are also frequently used in ads.⁹

Advertisers have a predilection for strategies which distract from or add to the literal meaning of language. This may be effected at the graphic level through deviant spellings or by fusing two words. A popular use of both of these techniques is found in ads referring obliquely to the World Wide Web. At word level, literal meaning can be undermined in many ways, most obviously by puns: the effect is to catch the reader's attention and to amuse, which presumably smoothes the way for the more serious function of selling, improving brand awareness and so on.¹⁰ Apart from cultural values and life style, there is also the question of writing styles and rhetorical effect.

Advertisements are also viewed as persuasive communication, of which rhetoric is an integral part. The persuasive communication function of advertising is biased toward rational claims and a direct address of the public.

9. Annarita Taronna, "Interrogating the language of advertising. Dis/similarities between English and Italian Ads", Papageno Ed., 2006, pag. 21,23.

10. Guy Cook, "The discourse of advertising", Routledge, 1992, pag. 9-10