
Decoding An Advertisement: Its Semiotics

This essay sets out to discuss and analyse the advertisement shown in Image A. Semiotics, which is the study of the meaning of signs and symbols and how they can be used, will be explored when discussing the advert as well as representation that is evident in the advertisement. The denotation, connotation, myth and ideology of the advertisement will be explored. The key theorists that will inform this essay are Roland Barthes and Stuart Hall.

Denotation is the basic level of signification or in other words, the literal or obvious meaning behind something. In Image A, the denotation can be described as: a woman with her mouth open, facing a large burger/sandwich with the words "IT'ILL BLOW YOUR MIND AWAY" written below. Denotation is a good base level for understating and analyzing the signs and meaning behind the visuals.

The advertisement is an attempt to promote the world famous fast food franchise Burger King. The advertisement is targeted predominantly at young adult males. By the text and the visual image, it can clearly be seen that the intended message is reinforcing a sexual connotation. The subtext is "Super Seven Incher" which is a direct reference to a male's genitalia and for anyone with general knowledge, the connotation of the image becomes obvious. The tagline of the advertisement is "It just tastes better," essentially saying, the bigger the better. With the small amount of information that is provided in the advertisement, the public is able to separate the code from the message. The signifier is the image and text which evokes the mental concept of the signified meaning behind the signifier, which is ultimately the sexual connotation. Theorist Stuart Hall states that "an image is a re-representation of a pre-existing meaning made visible through a tactile medium," which is exactly what has been done in this advertisement as well as Roland Barthes' theory which states that, "Semiotics is the study of social production of meaning from sign systems; the analysis of anything that can stand for something else".

The emphasis on sex reflects its significance in our own culture. The myth of sex appeal suggests that essentially Burger King is not being used to sell sex, but they are using sex to sell Burger King. The creators of this advertisement have catered to the social significance of sex. The Myth here is that sex and food are interchangeable and Burger King is an important aspect of people as sexual beings. The myth goes hand in hand with the ideology of sex appeal.

The ideology of sex appeal controls the public in a way that seems to be normal and expected and it becomes a framework with which people translate and interpret society. This specific advertisement uses sex appeal to catch people's attention and targets a specific audience that are attracted to the idea that comes with the intended sex appeal.

Therefore, by deconstructing and analyzing this advertisement as well as exploring the denotation, connotation of a sexual reference, myth of sex appeal attracting a certain audience and the ideology of sex appeal behind the advertisement, it is evident that our meaning of symbols such as in this advertisement, is heavily influenced by our concept of society and what is seen as attractive or enticing.