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Semiotics of advertisement

СЕМІОТИКА РЕКЛАМИ

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Abstract

The purpose of the article is to clarify the main trends in modern research on the semiotics of advertising. The peculiarities of semiotic models of modern media advertising as a kind of visualized marketing communication are highlighted and the prospects of formation of semiotics of advertising as an autonomous direction in the stream of semiotics as a general discipline are determined. Modern advertising is interpreted as an artifact of mass culture. It is a cultural product of the postmodern aesthetics, which is special in terms of semantics and semiotics. The article proposes to consider it as a separate direction in the context of semiotics as a science. The presented research is mostly theoretical and generalizing.

The authors used the logical method of integrative cognition to analyze the approaches to interpreting the semiotics in the advertisement field and the descriptive analysis to show how signs transformation influences on the final perception of advertising text. The main thesis of the article is the need to consider the semiotics of advertising as an excellent signing system.

Анотація

Мета статті – з'ясувати основні тенденції сучасних досліджень семіотики реклами. Висвітлено особливості семіотичних моделей сучасної медійної реклами як різновиду візуалізованої маркетингової комунікації та визначено перспективи формування семіотики реклами як автономного напрямку в руслі семіотики як загальної дисципліни. Сучасна реклама трактується як артефакт масової культури. Це особливий семантико-семіотичний культурний продукт естетики постмодерну. У статті пропонується розглядати його як окремий напрям у контексті семіотики як науки. Представлені дослідження мають переважно теоретичний та узагальнюючий характер.

Автори за допомогою логічного методу інтегративного пізнання проаналізували підходи до інтерпретації семіотики в рекламному полі та дескриптивного аналізу, щоб показати, як трансформація знаків впливає на кінцеве сприйняття рекламного тексту. Основною тезою статті є необхідність розгляду семіотики реклами як чудової знакової системи.

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Keywords: advertising, semiotics, semantics, culture of postmodernism, modeling of consciousness.

Ключові слова: реклама, семіотика, семантика, культура постмодернізму, моделювання свідомості.

Introduction

The semiotics of advertising expands and deepens the understanding of the subtleties of the functioning of the advertising message, at least as a sign, economic, political (consumer) and communicative phenomena (Compagno, 2021; Lelićanin & Šošić, 2021). The symbolic nature of the advertising text is beyond doubt. The disclosure of such fundamental concepts of semiotics as "text", "sign", "interpretation", "symbol" is a necessary theoretical and practical prerequisite for composing a seemingly literate (equivalently successful, effective, efficient) advertising message, as well as for adequate reading of the finished advertisement.

The signs, in their most general sense, are the simplest explanation of the semiotics object of study, or semiology as a science. The Encyclopaedia Britannica specifies statements about the manner of using signs (i.e. sign-using behavior) (Britannica, 2020). The "father" of semiotics, F. de Saussure, as a linguist, considered semiotics from the viewpoint of linguistics and presupposed its task in the study of "the life of signs in society" (Britannica, 2020). Ch. Peirce gave semiotics a multidisciplinary meaning, which made it possible to study sign systems through a set of interdisciplinary connections. The semiotics of advertising analyze the advertising message from different points, clarifying its structure and semantics, understanding the basis for the suggestive effect of advertising. In a more pragmatic secondary derivative vector, semiotics is perceived as the science of principles and algorithms for constructing other advertising texts, considering the structural sections of advertising, advantages and disadvantages of composition, the connotation of tokens used in the text, image aesthetics etc.

Thus the purpose of the article is to clarify the main trends in modern research on the semiotics of advertising. Our study consists of analysis of differ approaches of using semiotics in advertising texts and successful examples of transformation sings into famous ads.

This article analyzes the main trends of modern research on the semiotics of advertisement, highlights the features of semiotic models of modern media advertisement as visualized marketing communication and identifies

prospects for the semiotics of advertising as an autonomous direction in the stream of semiotics as a general discipline.

Theoretical Framework

According to Peirce's approach to semiotics, the thesis that a sign can never have a definite meaning is fundamentally important because the meaning of a sign must constantly be specified in accordance with numerous contexts influencing its perception by the recipient (Britannica, 2020). F. de Saussure described it as two inseparable components of the structure of the sign: the signifier, which is actualized in the language as a set of speech sounds or printed or written signs, and signified, associated with the concept or idea that stands behind the sign.

The practice of research on the semiotics of advertising and the main achievements in this area currently belongs to the Western world. However, Ukrainian scientists have also actively developed this perspective of semiotics. Currently, the scientific discourse has formed a general idea of semiotics in advertising and the basics of understanding the semiotic essence of an advertising product.

Akayomova (Akayomova, 2011) does not consider semiotics in general, but its branch - psychophysiological semiotics - as a field of knowledge that focuses on working with advertising texts and since the late 20th century has a deep knowledge of the laws of pair clearing communication between buyer and market.

Slovak researcher Solík (Solík, 2014) notes that the world of advertising works quite thoroughly with signs and sign systems monetizing them. The author identifies three main semiotic evaluation methods: interpretation, formalization, linguistic analysis. Every creative product, including advertising, can transform into semantic unit. Due to the diversity nature of this phenomenon, the understanding of such units requires interpretation – both at the semiotic and semantic levels. The reader's personality (individual or collective) plays an important role in the process of interpreting any text.

Lelićanin & Šošić. (Lelićanin & Šošić, 2021) determined that advertising communication has

the following features: the communicator (initiator of communicative interaction) is the creator or promoter of advertising, the recipient is a potential consumer, and the text is a commercial appeal focused on achieving advertising goals.

Babushka (Babushka, 2018) offered an original view of this problem, the research is devoted to identifying the specifics of the phenomenon of festivity. According to the categories of semiotics, the essence of festivity is the inversion of the official model of life, which is realized by replacing the signs of everyday world order with "world upside down." The researcher analyzed the hyperfestivism of the modern world, which transformed the vacation into a spectacle and so on show-business, developing a type of Homo Festivus (Clark, 2019). Carnival freedom and the phenomenon of festivity form a semiotic dominant of advertising, which subordinates the established way of life to the immanent impulses of the laughter (Babushka, 2018).

Alternatively, such festivity fully correspond to the spirit and principles of composing discourses of postmodernism with its intertextuality, eclecticism, alternative reality and palimpsest (Lelićanin & Šošić, 2021). The considered research determines the tendencies of separate semiotics of advertising from a circle of other semiotic systems. The semiotics of advertising, especially the media, is syncretic. You can trace the two-way influence between the person (recipient, audience, potential consumers) and the advertiser (creator of the advertising product). If we consider advertising only in sync, it is a completely postmodern product because in advertising (especially dynamic) you can trace the whole extract of the culture of postmodernism.

Kourdis (Kourdis, 2018) emphasize the semiotic dimension of Greek subtitles and commentary of French TV commercials dealing with personal care products. The study concerns both the interlingual and intersemiotic level. The author concluded, that the main findings are that the subtitling does not move away from the source language, preserving the same semantic isotopies, and that the intersemiotic translation occurs between the French utterances or the Greek subtitling and the content of the image.

Dwita (Dwita, 2018) reviews the use of English language in advertising to improve the image of the product that associated with sophisticated and cosmopolitan products. The paper's analysis has implications for advertising for middle class

consumers in Indonesia. The impact of English as prestigious language associated with high status, modernity and sophistication can bring an effect to consumers' attitudes to have good impressions about the products being advertised.

Safavi (Safavi, 2021) investigates the member units of sign systems used in contemporary Iranian advertising slogans according to the Organon Model introduced by Karl Miller. The result of this research shows the tendencies of Iranian advertising messages to lean towards the descriptive type of conative function.

The analysis of visualized advertising goes beyond the analysis of purely verbal text contained in a commercial or on a banner. The authors insist that advertising product levels should only be considered together. The task of the study will then be not only to analyze each level of advertising (media, text) but also to reveal the synergies between them. The direction of the research requires an analysis of three traditional sections of semiotics: syntactic, semantics, and pragmatics. All the principles were analyzed in our study.

Methodology

To achieve the goal of the study, the authors used the logical method of integrative cognition to analyze the approaches to interpreting the semiotics in the advertisement field. The use of this method allowed us to comprehensively analyze the viewpoint on the semiotics of advertisements on the concrete examples to better understand the material under study. Descriptive analysis is used to show how signs transformation influences on the final perception of advertising text.

The involved methods demonstrated that the main task of advertising is to influence the final consumer, to focus his choice on a specific product or service. The study bases on the advertising products of the Coca-Cola company. The conducted analysis showed that visual advertising has a better impact on the recipient than sound or print, because it is involved more centers of perception. And when several types of semiotic signs are combined (visual and print, visual and sound, visual, sound and print), such advertising has the greatest impact on the consumer. Also an important aspect is the combination of semiotics with traditional cultural values: the Coca-Cola advertisement in the Christmas cartoon was more popular compared to the usual commercials of this company.

Results and Discussion

To be successful, the advertising text must involve, in particular, an idea of the model of perception of the recipient. As mentioned above, this is also a problematic field of semiotics, which does not study sign systems abstractly, but in the framework of linguistic pragmatics (studies the actualization of subjective (i.e. human) factor at all levels of the language system and specifically within human communication). If we consider the advertising text in the plane of pragmatism as a philosophical doctrine, it will be maximally targeted, all its components (especially due to the conciseness of the advertising product, limited, condensed) will concentrate on content and will be aimed at implementing the intended pragma by decoding signs (verbal and nonverbal).

Advertising aimed at achieving a communicative goal should be built as a means of information with a pre-planned specific message, which should be conveyed as simply and clearly as possible. This explains the thesis expressed in the literature review about the limited range of interpretations that media advertising has adopted from film production (quite clearly can be traced on the example of interpretations of literary texts and films based on its plot). Typical successful advertising in general by its nature, cannot be in such an interpretive environment, where there are endless opportunities for the interpretation of connotative meanings. The principles of advertising determine certain "semantic conservatism", which means that the main thing - consciously or subconsciously to influence the commercial behavior of consumers or subconscious perceptions of the brand. Additionally, this should ideally be realized in a way that is pre-selected by the manufacturers (marketers). The very notion of "semantic conservatism" is a prerequisite for our statement about the archetypal nature of advertising semiosis, which we will propose to consider below the example of the analysis of specific advertising products of Coca-Cola.

We can assume that the recipient (in advertising, this image is as generalized and collective) and the ads creator have a lot in common, although their final goals are differ. From the semiotics point of view, it is realized in the need to better and as quickly understand the signs: the advertiser – to encode an advertising product as

easily as possible, and potential consumers - in the process of decoding content, to capture in advertising the meanings. Semiotics examines the mechanisms and functions of text and visual communicators, encouraging marketers not only to produce successful advertising but also to better understand social processes. Advertising is a litmus test of the social worldview. If we consider the evolution of advertising and the evolution of society – in diachrony – we can trace the instantaneous connection between the slightest change in worldview dominants in society and the way and manner of advertising. Semiotics studies how signs catalyze meaning, suggesting such interpretations depend on the structural set of signs that appears during the definition processes.

Advertising tries to influence on consumers and to make them to purchase or to use services. Ideally, advertising not only leads to the conversion, but also ensures the formation of the brand and constantly maintains a high level of its visibility. To this end, advertising should contain appropriate permanently recognizable markers (slogan, trademark, semantic accent, etc). The purpose of advertising – to persuade them to buy, evaluate, influence (elements of suggestion, incentive) – to transform the consciousness of recipients, increase their need to buy a particular product or service. Advertising as a tool for persuasion is influenced by verbal (word-forming, syntactic and lexical) and non-verbal factors. Accordingly, the advertising product itself contains verbal (text) and non-verbal levels. As for non-verbal, they are video, images, music, sound effects.

Visual images (videos, banners) can convey much more information than words and sounds. That's why they are the main points of semiotic analysis of any media advertising. The consumers process, perceive and memorize images faster than words. The one more important ability of images is to create a mood. That is, it is a means of holistic emotional impact on the recipient. Analyzing video advertising, we paid attention on color, shape, attributes, the heroes of advertising, and the emotional background. Often, video advertising can be deprived of any text or at least its sound. This is what characterizes the brand advertising of Coca-Cola TM, in which the video series is mostly enhanced by lines of text that are simply displayed on the screen (Fig. 1, Fig. 2):



Fig. 1. Coca-Cola German-language advertisement [Official Coca-Cola YouTube Channel]



Fig. 2. Advertising for the Coca-Cola brand [Coca-Cola YouTube channel]

Summarizing the numerous Coca-Cola commercials, it is easy to see that almost all of them are aimed at young audiences. The focus is on the company of active young and successful people who have fun. The traditional semiotics of this promotional product changes significantly during Christmas period. Then, in contrast, the archetype of family, unity, and festivity, regardless of age, race, sex, etc., appear in the center. For example, in one of the international New Year commercials 2021–2022, we see how the residents of an entire apartment building are united by the idea of giving a vacation to a single woman, building a whole structure to deliver a gift to her and not leaving her alone. Interestingly, the video features representatives of all races. It is a tribute to globalization processes, the idea of world peace, and the idea of eradicating all discrimination. Coca-Cola advertising is known to have become an informal symbol of Christmas in most countries. The

appearance of New Year's advertising of the brand is expected in the same way as the appearance of a Christmas tree or the start of Christmas fairs.

The understanding of each semiotic sign may differ in different cultures and social strata, as advertising is formed by culture and, conversely, contributes to the formation of culture. It is not always possible to rely on publicly available symbols, as semiotic signs are often culturally determined. Therefore, for some countries, there is a need to create different commercials - with different accents, for different holidays, with the actualization of specific ethnic or national dominants. For example, below is a screenshot from a video released specifically for the Chinese New Year celebrations. As you can see, it is presented in the form of a cartoon with the traditional character of the Chinese vacation - the symbol of 2022, the tiger (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Fragment of the commercial for Coca-Cola Chinese New Year Real Magic

An important element of advertising is music, without a doubt - this is the most commonly used acoustic element in advertising. It also has semiotic characteristics. They were associated with symbolic sound stimuli. Music can understand without language. It consists of such semiotic elements as tones created by musical instruments. The symbolic interpretation is in chords, their sequence, pitch, tempo, repeats, performance etc. A certain pattern of tones create joy, sad, nostalgic, and many other emotions. The main purpose of advertising is to identify the music that the recipient likes with the concrete product in such a way, that the conditioned stimulus (product) could provoke a conditioned reaction of pleasure, even without music. Analysis of the semiotics of musical series used by Coca-Cola suggests that the mood is mostly nostalgic-dramatic at the beginning and joyful-carefree at the end of the plot (for New Year's videos) or dynamic-carefree, cheerful in most videos aimed at branding or presentation of a new product.

The example of Coca-Cola brand advertising clearly shows an appeal to all the basic archetypes identified by KG Jung, as well as additions based on their other, secondary. The tendency to postmodernist principles of modeling reality, festivals, and reflections on world trends in the field of, for example, humanitarian policy can be clearly seen here. Of course, the format of the article does not allow to thoroughly investigate the semiotics of advertising of even one brand, but it provides a key to understanding the semiosis of media advertising.

The article gives a general understanding of the modern concept of "semiotics of advertising" and proposes to consider it as a separate area in the

context of semiotics as a science. The paradigm of advertising includes the creation of meanings that develop an autonomous ideology and integrating external codes common to the concrete society or ethnically (nationally) labeled. Without interaction with the social element, it is impossible to decode the meaning of the semiotic nature of the advertising product. The production and receipt of advertising is associated with the characteristic processes of semiosis, which differ from other types of audiovisual products. However, just like culture, advertising cannot be reduced to only semiotics – because it is impossible to reduce material life only to semiotics tends. Therefore, it is proposed to separate the semiotics of advertising in a separate area of semiotic research (such as linguosemiotics, biosemiotics or ethnosemiotics, etc.).

Interpretation of advertising, in our opinion, should consider scientific advances in the understanding of the collective subconscious and archetypes that permeate the world of advertising, creating an ideological illusion for the recipient, which offers to purchase goods or services, that is the goal of advertising when it comes to brand advertising). The actualization of archetypes in advertising corresponds to the vision of the role of advertising not entirely in creating new meaning, but, in contrast, in the mutually beneficial (win-win) use of those signs and symbols that have already proven productive, effective for potential consumers of advertising.

Conclusions

Thus, advertising offers a model of the world that is recognizable to the potential consumer (at the level of emotional desire) and is desirable. When

confronted with modern media advertising, the average recipient is subconsciously exposed to powerful suggestive influences. The main thesis of the article is the need to consider the semiotics of advertising as an excellent signing system. The task of semiotics within the advertising sphere is to single out universal signs, model the recipient's reaction, and implement it in the text-multimedia field. As an inevitable artifact of the mascot, it is a special semantics and semiotics cultural product that actualized the collective subconscious, to attract the widest possible range of consumers, who use symbols in the advertising text trying to convey the need to purchase the advertised product.

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