Section A: Selling Images - Advertising

Introduction:

For Section A of Unit 1 you will need to **develop skills of analysis** through a study of the **commercial advertising** of consumer products, charity or public advertising and music video as a form of marketing (to be explored in a separate knowledge organiser). The topic of *Selling Images* develops **your knowledge and understanding** of the key media concepts: **Media language, Representations and Audience** which will then be applied to an analysis of an unseen print or moving image text.

In **commercial advertising** the producers of adverts want to create an awareness of their product and to sell this to their **target market**. However, advertisers need to firstly **attract an** **audience** and **create appeal**; they do this using different elements of **media language** and **representations** to communicate their desired message. Commercial advertising campaigns however rarely simply sell us a product instead they sell us ideas, lifestyles and values that audiences can relate or aspire to and ultimately buy into.

Charity and public information adverts also have to **communicate messages** that an audience can respond to, albeit for different purposes, and have their own range of strategies that serve to raise an awareness of an issue or persuade audiences to support their organisation.

Key questions to ask:

When **analysing** an unseen advert for the first time it is important to generate a framework of understanding.

- What is being advertised/marketed? What is the purpose of this advert?
- What is the name of the product/organisation/campaign?
- Is the product depicted? If so, how? If not, how is the product established?
- The brand – is the product/organisation an established brand?
- What are the key features of/association with the brand – brand values and identity?
- How are these values communicated- look at the visual codes within the frame?
- What is the 'concept' of the advert? Is there a 'unique selling point'?
- Who might the target audience be? Give initial reasons for your suggestions.

Media Language:

This is the way in which a media text communicates meaning to an audience. The different elements of media language consist of:

Technical, visual and written codes for print adverts : these include layout, design, use of language, mode of address, positioning of images and/or photographs, the camera shot/position, focus, lighting, framing, use of typography, graphics and colour.

Audio-Visual Codes for moving image adverts: such as camerawork (distance, angle, movement), editing and transitions, mise-en-scène (settings, locations, costume, props), editing, use of sound both diegetic and non-diegetic-such as music or voice over.

Advertising terms:

anchorage text, aspirational images, audience appeal, brand image, connotations, conventions, copy, cross-platform campaign, demographic, diegetic sound, editing, format, focus, femininity, genre, hard sell, iconic representation, imperatives, layout, logo, masculine representations, messages and values, mise-en-scène, mode of address, music, non-diegetic sound, product endorsement, positive lexis, pose, stereotypes, slogan, soft sell, target audience, voice over.

Critical Perspective:

Semiotics: *Signs can function at the level of denotation, which involves the 'literal' meaning of the sign so this involves looking at elements of the mise-en-scène such as props and iconography of the setting or the use of colour. At the level of connotation, the meanings suggested by the sign can be explored as this will give insight to the intended meanings and the messages and values that are associated with the brand that the audience will read and understand.*

Activities:

Look at a range of print or moving image adverts for a well-known, branded product e.g. perfume, clothing, an electronic device.

- Use the questions above to generate an understanding of how media language is communicating messages about the products to their intended audience.
- How are the adverts and the media language used similar or different? (Codes and conventions of adverts)
- What values are communicated about the brand and product?

It is always important to look at the effect of the language used:

- What persuasive effect does the media language have? Does it play on emotional, psychological or social needs?
- Does the media language create opportunities for identification or aspiration though the portrayal of a lifestyle; a slice of life?

Representations:

This concept explores the way social and cultural groups are presented in commercial and charity advertising. The key areas for consideration here are related to gender, ethnicity, age and where appropriate issues. All media representations are constructions that employ media language to communicate meaning in relation to that representation.

Key areas to consider:

Gender: Gender is a term used to exemplify the characteristics that a society or culture constitutes as *masculine* or *feminine*. Notions of gender identity expand and develop in accordance with how society evolves. Advertising uses representations of gender to communicate recognised or shared understanding of gender roles and attributes linked to their products and the image of their brand.

Ethnicity: This term links to a group of people who share a cultural heritage, beliefs, language, customs and traditions.

Stereotypical representations: These representations conform to traditional beliefs associated with being male or female or of a particular ethnic group. A stereotype is an oversimplified representation that can act as a form of shorthand as meanings communicated tend to be shared and understood by the target audience.

Hegemonic representations: These communicate the dominant messages that shape mainstream values and ideologies of society.

Counter hegemonic: Some representations are constructed to oppose, or challenge dominantly held views. This might be to raise awareness of issues, or to challenge the ways in which an audience might think or to appeal to different demographics in society outside of the mainstream.

A study of historical adverts can help to exemplify how representations have changed over time in order to reflect changes in society.

An investigative approach is a useful way to prepare for this unit.

Now look at a charity advert or public information advert.

What different strategies are used? Traditionally charity adverts have used 'shock tactics' and stereotypical representations to communicate with audiences. More recent campaigns challenge stereotypes and present the solution rather than the problem. How are audiences positioned to respond to the advert and the images used? Does the purpose of the advert have an impact on the media language employed and the representations created?
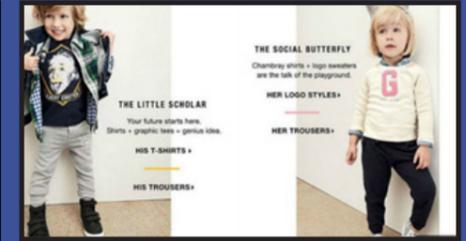
Audience:

Advertisers need a clear idea about who their target audience is so that they can use the strategies that are likely to promote the desired response. There are key areas that need to be considered in order to understand the ways in which advertisers **construct**, **target** and **appeal** to their **target market**.

Key questions to ask:

- How can audiences be categorised? By age, gender and social class, by lifestyle and taste or psychographic profiling?
- How are audiences targeted? Advertisers need to maximise the appeal of their advert so will use a range of methods.
- How are audiences positioned to respond to the advert? Producers encode their adverts with certain meanings using media language and constructed representations.
- What might affect the way in which audiences respond to the advertisement? Are audiences encouraged to be active? Are dominant views challenged or reinforced? How might audiences respond in different ways? Does it depend on cultural experiences?

Critical perspectives: identity

David Gauntlett: *The idea that in the past the media tended to convey straightforward messages about ideal types of male/female identities, the media today offer us a more diverse range of stars and icons from whom we may pick and mix different ideas.*

Stuart Hall: *Hall argues that hegemony manipulates beliefs and values to suit the ideas of the ones in power, so the media and language is where the dominant ideologies can take over. This is why it is important to look at why some social groups might be underrepresented or misrepresented.*

Key questions to ask:

- How does media language construct the representation?
- Are stereotypes used? If so how? Are they positive or negative?
- Are the representations typical or challenging?
- How might an audience respond to the representation?
- What is the purpose and context of the representation? Does this affect the representation? How?

Critical perspectives:

Reception analysis theory Hall: *The idea that communication is a process involving encoding by producers and decoding by audiences. Messages and meanings may be decoded in different ways dominant, negotiated, oppositional readings.*

Gerbner: *Exposure to repeated patterns of representation over time shapes and influences the way in which people perceive the world around them.*

Bandura: *Behaviours are learned through observation and the media therefore provides us with patterns of behaviour that can be adopted.*