THE USE OF ABSTRACT IMAGES IN ADVERTISING DESIGN "A STUDY OF REQUIREMENTS & IMPACT"

DOAA FAROUK BADAWY ELDESOUKY [1]

Abstract. *The use and depiction of images in advertising is now increasingly being used by advertisers worldwide to catch the attention of the target customers and promote the brand visibility and popularity of their products or services. In this increasingly fast paced and competent market place capturing the attention of the customers, the use of abstract images has encountered a great change and the need for professionalism based on rules of design has become a must for improving the credibility of advertisements through abstraction to attract customer attention and influence their purchase decisions by changing their attitudes and perception of the products through effective advertising. In that aspect the current research discusses the importance of abstraction as a graphic manipulation in advertising design stating the basics for the use of depiction of images for acquiring the most effective results and idea perception through messages presented. The research focuses on the requirements for using abstract images in advertising together with its impact on the audience. The research states the most effective ways & theories to use abstraction to achieve both attraction & influence on people. The research also presents some design samples that achieved success through the use of abstraction and abstract manipulations of images as a research tool for supporting the objective of the research.*

Keywords: Abstraction, Advertising design, Image manipulation, message perception.

1. INTRODUCTION

The use and depiction of images in advertising has undergone a sea change since the dawn of design. Abstract images are now increasingly being used by advertisers worldwide to catch the attention of the target customers and promote the brand visibility and popularity of their products / services. In this increasingly fast paced and competent market place capturing the attention of the customers is a tough task and hence advertisements that are deficient in terms of reliability and sincerity are more often ignored or disregarded by the consumers. Hence, the advertisers are taking keen interest in improving the credibility of their advertisements to attract customer attention and influence their purchase decisions by changing their attitudes and perception of the products through effective advertising.

The use of abstract images is significant owing to its manifold benefits. And nowadays it is used by companies as a part of their cognitive message strategy, affective message strategy, conative message strategy, or brand message strategy.

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[1] Ahram Canadian University (ACU), Faculty of Mass Communication, Giza, Egypt.
Email: doaa-2000@hotmail.com.

- The cognitive message strategy strives to rationalize arguments and promote a unique selling point of the products and dismiss competition by attacking the competitor's product by influencing direct advertising.

- Affective message strategy is more inclined towards emotionally targeting the customers and establish a link to its products by facilitating the target audiences to recall their personal experiences which influence them in making the ultimate purchase decision.

- Conative strategies offer huge discounts and free gifts as a means of attracting their target customers.

- Brand building strategies largely focus on enhancing and elevating the brand image of their products [2].

2. BACKGROUND

Visualization is the key to capturing the early attention of the consumers since it has immense potential of enchanting and mesmerizing the consumer's psyche which lead to the ultimate purchase decision. This tactic is now been increasingly used by advertisers in both digital as well as print media. In terms of advertising – visualization refers to the interpretation of realistic or abstract images which depict a specific set of data.

The abstract advertisers have often embraced the use of highly abstract visual metaphors and symbols in various advertising campaigns to put across their point clearly and diligently. According to Goldman and Montagne, (1986), the advertisers today mostly focus on structuring their advertising campaigns which are built around the use of abstract visual aesthetics and are devised to engender cognitive connections between their products and the abstract visual images. In terms of using abstract advertising in promotion of medical products for example, the obstacles faced by such an advertisement could lead to several social repercussions, and cause impediment to scientific discourse and knowledge [1].

3. PROBLEM AND REQUIREMENTS

The actual interpretation of the abstract images used to depict an idea or promote a product is mostly associated with the general impediments which occur in the use of photography or graphic manipulation that hamper the appropriate interpretation of the underlying message. The depiction of images and photography in a particular manner plays a significant role in promoting and popularizing the product and communicating the desired ideas to the target customers. The general quality of the image depends entirely on the manner in which it is designed and depicted as well as the degree of comprehensibility and sense of aesthetics. The legitimacy of the figurative representation of an image could be judged by the manner in which the advertisers promote a product and put across the idea intended to be conveyed convincingly to the target audience.

The nature of the images being used should not be complicated that renders it incomprehensible and incapable of being interpreted in the right sense, since it would defeat the very purpose of the advertisement. The use of abstract images in advertising, although an attractive option, to capture the attention of its customers should be chosen and implemented wisely because of the various inherent repercussions of a wrong choice of action. The choice of manner of depiction of the product should be able to justify the objective and purpose of

the company and should help them in establishing and strengthening their brand image and at the same time lend credibility to their products / services.

4. METHOD

The various methods used by the advertisers to depict the functionality of their products by use of abstract images and concepts turned out to be very effective since it has successfully managed to capture the attention of audiences through time. Looking back we can find various advertisements and designs using abstraction as a style for presenting ideas and delivering messages. From which are movie posters that hit the audience with innovative and non familiar visual representation of movie pictures. The famous poster for the legendary franchise "Jurassic Park" is a good example Fig. 1.
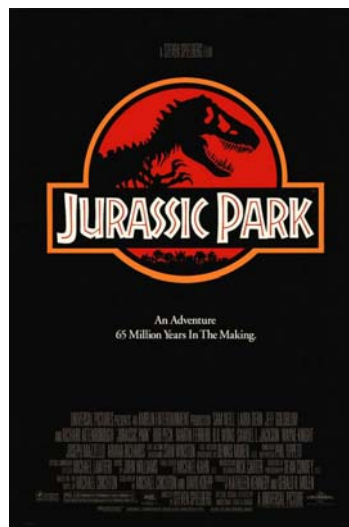
Fig. 1. Jurassic Park movie poster 1993.

Another such similar advertisement was launched by the Microsoft Corporation on the event of the launch of its Windows 95 suite to promote the product's capability of performing multiple tasks at the same time, Fig. 2. The advertisement was launched in both the media digital as well as print [7].

The TV commercial showed the Windows logo as its central image and actively utilized all the four squares to depict the multifunctional characteristic of its product. This commercial is a glaring example of how human mind interprets and associates visual imagery with the product functionality through abstract images in the absence of any concrete content.

Fig. 2. Windows TV commercial 1995.

The key to such promotion of one's product's functionality is to utilize the analogical thinking ability of the humans that allows them to perceive a structural similarity. The depicted objects or products, even though the actual content shows on the television or in the print, are a totally abstract entity [3].

The rules these prevailing days sometimes state that anything and almost everything can be "abstract", as the use of abstract art for advertising design became one of the norms these days. Usually abstract art is characterized by the lack of realism and perspective in recreating actual reality. It focuses more on the emotion of an image, a kind of visual language; therefore the forms of abstract art usually look unconventional and unique. To have more understanding, some of the main abstraction methods used in advertising design is stated in the coming section.

A. Minimalism

Less is more... That is the basic premise of a minimalist advertising design. The main characteristic of a minimalist design is the breakdown of design elements to bear components. An example of this would be the use of simple lines and shapes without adding shadow or shading effects. Usually there is "bareness" to minimalist designs that are clean and elegant. This type of design can be used almost in any field though it is most useful for events, shows and films.

B. Typographic

The typographic style or the "International Typographic Style" was a popular design concept that started in the 1950's and came to dominance around the 1970's. To put it simply, it uses characters or themed fonts as its centerpiece in design. Usually these characters have a prominent place in the design space and would usually spell out the main theme or title of the advertisement.

C. Vectored or Filtered

With the advent of computer aided graphic design a lot of new effects and styles have been appearing in poster designs. Image editing software like Adobe Photoshop and Corel has influenced this kind of movement. Professionals and amateurs alike take advantage of the use of filters and special effects those kinds of software offer. For example, a lot of "vectored" designs have been appearing in poster designs where actual photographic images are filtered and converted to bare lines and block colors often arriving at a beautiful effect. Other designs have soft or blurry styles, ripple effects and other special filters. Those are considered to be the major styles used in abstract advertising design. Most custom posters however do use a combination of these styles to further improve their design [6].

5. SAMPLES AND APPLICATION

The advertisements discussed below justify the arguments put forward in the course of this essay that seeks to challenge the use and significance of abstract advertising in digital and print media in the recent years.

Coca Cola advertisement "Fig.3" is one of a series of commercial posters done to Coca Cola Company by Wieden & Kennedy Agency Amsterdam, Netherlands 2006. A

campaign that was a great success featuring Coca Cola in a totally innovative image that hit the market effectively through digital and printed media. In this ad the designer uses a bunch of straws with different colours and shapes in a festival like image, put inside the Coca bottle to convey the idea of celebrating life with Coca Cola, accompanied by a simple slogan; "the Coke side of life".
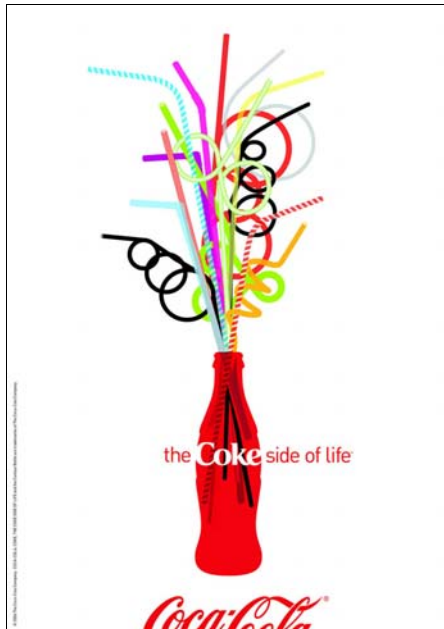

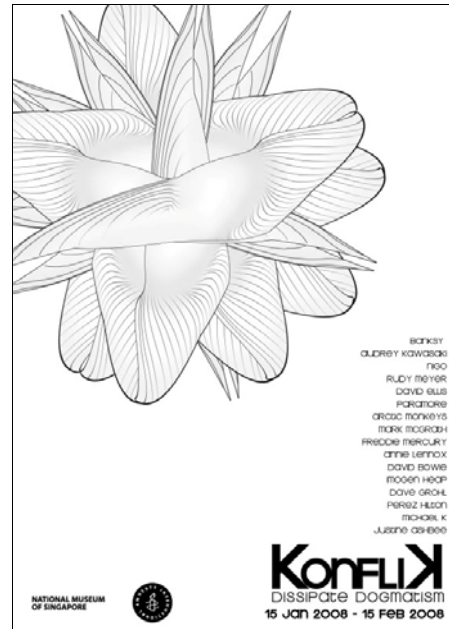**Fig. 3. Coca Cola advertisement 2006.**

Fig. 4. Racism Amnesty International 3, 2008.

Conflict - Racism advertisement Fig. 4 is one of a series posters made in an abstract approach defining conflict in racism made for Amnesty International, The National Museum of Singapore, 2008. This campaign expresses an abstract human concept, standing in the face of racism that is full of conflicts represented visually in a bunch of lines forming an abstract form representing the embracement of the idea of unification and equality that the campaign aims for. The campaign is in black and white that increases impact through the lack of colour and focuses on the abstract idea.
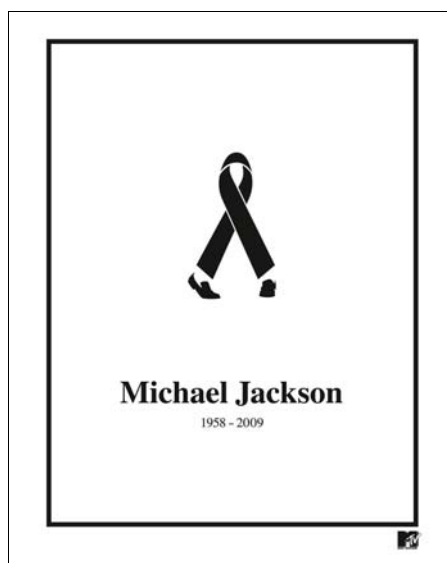

Fig. 5. Black Ribbon Michael Jackson.

Fig. 6. London Film Museum 2010.

MTV Networks ad Fig. 5 is a design made for MTV Networks in the memorial of pop star Michael Jackson, by BBDO Advertising agency, Düsseldorf, Germany 2009. The design uses only black and white representing an abstract manipulation of legs forming a ribbon in the course of dancing. As seen it is a very clever and sophisticated abstraction that used an unconventional image representing Michael Jakson's dancing legs through the black ribbon in a conjunct form that served the idea in a perfectly manipulated image.

London Film Museum - brand identity 2010 Fig. 6 is another design that was created by designer Radim Malinic representing the cinema tape as the main object together with a background of squared shapes expressing the slides of the tape to finally introduce the idea of the museum. This simple design based on abstraction was presented as an idea based on freedom of visualization as Malinic states "*Since November 2009 I have been working with London Film Museum on their new identity, brand image and everything else design required. At present we are in Phase Two, with a lot of amazing work already printed, launched and featured. The project is to be completed by February 2010 and I'm super excited with the outcome. I was given full creative freedom and I used it fully. Nonetheless, if you can't wait or happen to be on the London's South bank, pop down and see the results for yourself. Today, the museum opens doors to Charlie Chaplin - The Great Londoner exhibition, heavily featured on BBC London TV news yesterday and online*".

Fig. 7. FIFA World Cup design, South Africa 2010.

FIFA World Cup design, South Africa 2010 Fig. 7, the FIFA introduced this logo as the visual presentation for the World Cup Championship in South Africa 2010. Despite using many elements in the structure of the logo the image continues to maintain its abstract visualization for the event. In that aspect the FIFA has recently decided to bring all its event logos under a new visual hierarchy, taking the role of parent brand.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Throughout the research the researcher could get a group of results that met the research objective. These results can be summed up as follows:

1 – The ability to associate abstract features or elements with that of the concerned product's features and characteristics can provide a wide platform for the advertisers to explore this genre of advertising and exploit its potential fully.

2 – According to Seabeok (1979), the concept of iconicity, that abstraction presents, suggests a striking similarity between the content of an image and the interpretation as perceived by the target audience. However, contradictory to such observation, the various examples mentioned in this paper were to suggest and establish a link between the use of abstract images for product promotion and as a favorite tool of advertisers in a way that similarity appears to be rare.

3 – According to Smythe (1998) "Advertisers have known for some time now that images facilitate unquestioning acceptance of communication – after all seeing is believing". Thus the abstract modernist images that the advertisers portray and which are published in the print media including magazines, newspapers and periodicals are intended to enthrall the target audiences and generate a genuine curiosity as to the intentions of the advertisements leaving the readers wanting to know more about the featured product / service [4].

4 – The viewing of images and the resultant perceptions varies largely from person to person although it is up to the advertisers to use their abstract forms of imagery diligently to unanimously convey the same meaning and achieve their desired goals – that of promoting their product's manifold functionalities and features and establishing a firm and competitive standing for the said product / service in the highly competitive marketplace. In that sense advertisers should take in consideration some general rules to be followed when using abstraction of images in advertising, where the nature of the images being used should not be complicated that renders it incomprehensible or incapable of being interpreted in the right sense, which will hamper the purpose of the advertisement.

7. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, advertising today has gained unprecedented significance and is considered to be an inevitable part of marketing where the use of abstract images in advertising is increasingly becoming popular [5]. This increasing ability of consumers to rationalize the abstract images and the growing importance of the use of advertising imagery has helped shape the conceptions of identity and smoothened ways for the advertisers to capture their target markets more successfully. This puts using abstraction as a visual solution on top choices for advertisers as an innovative style for approaching audience and presenting different themes and ideas. There are several approaches where depiction of images and the use of abstraction can be used fully in advertising. Nevertheless using abstraction in a complicated manner or away from the rules of abstraction for advertising design may cause the incomprehensibility of messages and the dissatisfaction of the advertisement goals.

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