

Shockvertising: Beyond Blunt Slogans and Drastic Images. A Conceptual Blending Analysis

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Conceptual blending (CB) as developed by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner (Fauconnier and Turner 2002, Fauconnier 2010) is a dynamic process that frequently occurs at the moment of perception to create new meanings from already existing ways of thinking (cf. Joy et al. 2009). Since the creativity and potential that reside in thought and language 'depend on our capacity to manipulate webs of mappings between mental spaces' (Fauconnier 1997: 149), conceptual blends frequently occur both in verbal and visual domains, such as those thoroughly exploited in advertising. According to McQuarrie and Mick, 'visual images and verbal messages constitute culturally embedded forms or signs that combine in a specific manner to communicate meanings about brands' (see Joy et al. 2009: 39). Therefore, the task of Conceptual Blending Theory is to account for the processes which facilitate reading the message hidden in various types of advertisements (cf. Nühren 2012).

The aim of this presentation is to discuss the meaning of various instances of blends that occur in selected shock advertisements using the tools the CBT as proposed by Fauconnier and Turner. Since the main goal of shock advertising (or shockvertising) is, first and foremost, to bring awareness to certain public issues, shock advertisements usually 'startle and offend the audience by violating norms for social values and personal ideals' (Dahl et al. 2003).

Still, the role of a successful shock advertisement is not only to attract the viewers' attention by exposing them to violent images or blunt slogans. Shockvertising should also comply with the parameters typical of a successful ad, i.e. it should have attention value, be "readable", "memorable" and have "selling power" (cf. Leech 1972). The analysis of social ads released by such organizations as Organ Donor Foundation, Reporters Without Borders or RI Coalition Against Domestic Violence shows that in each case study the emergent meaning being the result of on-line dynamic blending processes not only meets the above requirements but it also makes it possible to adopt viewpoint of the beholder whose role is to decipher intricate nuances of 'mind's hidden complexities' (Fauconnier and Turner 2002).

References

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