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Dior's Sauvage & Barthes' Rhetoric of the Image

Advertisements in their simplest form are made up of images and text. As a viewer, what we perceive or get out of it derives from the messages being delivered from the combination of these images and text. Most times, an advertisement would reach viewers greatly if it fits with what is happening in their current surroundings. Advertisements are meant to sell a product, a service, or an idea. But behind all that, both images and text provide context, a story, lore, and a message. In this case, I will be speaking about an ad I have come across a lot in different magazines: Dior's fragrance, SAUVAGE.

In this ad, the first thing we see is the model (Johnny Depp), a man standing, a little off-centered, looking into the distance. His face is darkly cast by the shadow and his eyes look dark. His hair is styled but feels laidback. He does have his mustache and beard, but well maintained and neat looking. Directly below and centered is the text "SAUVAGE" in big bold letters. This term is a French term that refers to wild and if you are someone like me who may not know French, it could seem to mean 'savage.' Below this word is the text "The New Fragrance" referencing the newly released product. We also see the rest of the model behind the text. He is dressed up in dark navy blue colors; he is wearing a button-up, dress pants, and a vest. We can also see the model in the middle of rolling up his sleeve, which shows us the many tattoos he has on both his arms, along with rustic rings and bracelets he is wearing. At the bottom, the text "DIOR" is located centered in bold letters though not as large as Sauvage. This

is referencing the brand label that is releasing the product. Off the right of the page, between SAUVAGE and Dior, there is an image of the fragrance bottle. It seems to have a slight reflection as if it does not pertain to the real setting of where the image was taken. Behind the model, the text, and the fragrance bottle, is an image of what appears to be a bright sunny day with blue skies in the middle of a wide-open area, with mountains nearby or a desert. There appears to be a barren plant or branches behind him at waist level, too.

Using Barthes' rhetoric of the image, he considers images like these to have a linguistic message, a coded-iconic message, and a non-coded iconic message. A linguistic message is derived from all the text within the ad. In this case, there is "SAUVAGE", "The New Fragrance," and "Dior." So our message is that Dior is releasing a new fragrance called SAUVAGE (which could also translate to the wild or savage). A coded-iconic message that can be derived from this ad is that the male model is symbolizing masculinity and he seems to be a representation of the French term Sauvage. This fragrance would be targeted to those with masculinity that is raw, savage, wild, and yet they have this other side of nobility, classic and put together. The model's arms also have tattoos and this also feeds into the idea of the "wild man" having tattoos. As for non-coded iconic messages, the fragrance bottles represent the actual bottle and how it would look when purchased. The clothes the model is wearing can be considered non-coded because businessmen or even in formal wear, men would wear this. The jewelry the model wears, such as the rings, can also be considered non-coded because the skulls and texture, and rustic look give off the style that a man will wear. As a connoted image, the model is seen rolling up his sleeves and his collar is opened up which can signify calmness, relaxation, or someone who is ready to do some hard work. This action also rebels against the idea of a business ready for work or being ready for a special occasion. The little halo or bright spot on the model's head reveals it is a

bright desert sun, which is supported by the landscape of the location he is standing in. The brightness and heat of the sun can also be felt by the furrowing of the model's brows and the shadow being cast on his face. An anchorage I would analyze from this ad is the fragrance bottle with text on itself being the same text used within in the ad in big bold letters. The name, product, and brand are given and repeated on the 2nd layer image (fragrance bottle).

Overall, according to Barthes, the purpose of the image within an advertisement is intentional by all means. Viewers or readers are able to interpret many messages depending on each individual's context background. In some cases, some messages can be missed, but the intentional ones are made evident by the use of text. In this case, The name of the fragrance, the brand name, and even the image of the product itself are very in your face about what is being sold. The image and the connotations behind it fall into place to deliver the idea of masculinity and the type of men.



Works Cited.

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