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“TAG Heuer: Manly Guys Do Manly Things”

It's funny to think that there was a time in this country where subliminal messaging was a hot button issue. Used as a plot device in popular films and tv shows, as well as the heart of conversation surrounding conspiracy theory, subliminal advertising as we know it dates back to the late 1950s when market researcher James Vicary placed the words “Eat Popcorn” and “Drink Coca-Cola” into a movie. Since the dawn of mass culture parents have almost uniformly been worried about the subliminal messages their children have been receiving from entertainment without ever taking into account the ever present barrage of advertising they see on a regular basis. Advertising is loaded with subliminal messaging, and one could argue its entire role is to slip by your mental defenses and implant a message you are not aware of. Even the most banal advertisements try to draw upon the audience's subconscious worldview, and prior experiences to get them to make judgements about a product or service without ever realizing it. I'd argue that the more entertaining examples of this subversion come in the form of boring ads.

TAG Heuer, a Swiss watch manufacturer has some of the most boring advertisements I've ever seen. Their advertising embodies the energy of a regional manager at a Best Buy. The advertisement I chose, as it is presented in its non-coded iconic state, features Patrick Dempsey (former star of Grey's Anatomy) driving some sort of classic convertible with the top

down along a seemingly secluded road. The image is a profile shot so it's fairly difficult to tell that Dempsey is actually the person driving the car. The Headline of the ad is "#DontCrackUnderPressure". The body copy reads "Patrick Dempsey, perfectly inspired by Gentleman Drivers, is the symbol of TAG Heuer's legacy. He embodies the taste for adventure, panache and elegance. #DontCrackUnderPressure is what drives him." It should be noted that Dempsey's face is fairly stern, he's wearing black shades and he's also sporting a five o'clock shadow. In the lower right hand corner next to the body copy is a watch with a stainless steel case, black face, and silver hands with red accents. The watch face displays three separate smaller faces which contain the hours, minutes, and seconds as well as the date. The image is fairly tame and pretty unremarkable, however, it undergoes a major transformation from non-coded iconic, to coded iconic due to the linguistic message.

TAG Heuer advertisements excel in anchorage and relay. The text frames how you should perceive Dempsey in this advertisement, particularly the line "He embodies the taste for adventure, panache and elegance." Which bestows upon Dempsey the very qualities which it states. This text works with the image by utilizing the luxurious yet masculine classic car, which arguably bestows the aforementioned characteristics upon Dempsey in greater effect than the watch does. It should be noted, aside from the watch shown in the lower right hand corner, we can barely ever see that Dempsey is even wearing a watch.

The connotative messages which make up the coded-iconic image within this ad are largely focused on rugged masculinity. The fact that Dempsey is driving through what seems to be secluded road as opposed to driving in the city, in conjunction with the body copy confers an adventurous nature upon Dempsey. Driving out in a seemingly free and open area, along with his

five o'clock shadow, and shades says that Dempsey has a quiet yet obvious uber-masculinity, however, he prefers the finer things in life. By finer things we are not talking about high priced mass consumer items, such as a big screen tv and the latest technological toys, but items that harken back to a time when "men were men". The Analog watch, and car (which I can only assume is either a Porsche or a Shelby) seem to evoke images of James Dean in Rebel without a cause. Lastly tying this image into a knot of testosterone is the phrase "#DontCrackUnderPressure". What could possibly embody masculinity more than the ability to remain strong in the most tense and pressure inducing situations? I will say that TAG Heuer's lack of subtlety with the copy in these ads does make them effective at getting their message across. While my worldview is colored by past experiences with the type of guys they're aiming for, The messaging of this ad is if nothing else clear and concise.

It should be noted that this advertisement was found within the pages of GQ Magazine. As Roland Barthes believed the image is largely a slave to everything surrounding it. Whether we see an image in a gallery, on social media, or in a magazine, the contexts of these spaces begin to prime our minds for the works we are experiencing at a given moment. I bring this up because there's almost a larger connotative message with the Magazine itself, and this advertisement is just a small piece of the signifieds within the overall work. A TAG Heuer watch is a signifier to those around its wearer that they are a person who is rugged, classy, elegant, and above all a Gentleman. One could even thumb through the pages of the magazine and put together the image of a complete man. A true gentleman who wears Gucci suits, and Givenchy sneakers, drinks silver Patron, smokes American Spirits, and caps the entire identity off with a TAG Heuer watch.



#DontCrackUnderPressure



TAGHeuer

SWISS AVANT-GARDE SINCE 1860

TAG HEUER CARRERA CALIBRE 16

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