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COMD3504

Communication Design Theory

Professor Matthew Lange

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no digital distortion

Unilever

“Watching my daughter grow has made me more proud of my stretch marks.”
Dominique

Renew the love for your skin with ceramide renewing Dove Body Wash.

Dove Body Wash with 5 skin-conditioning ingredients, replenishes up to 100 skin ceramides. For instantly hydrated, visibly moisturized skin.

Let's **Change** Beauty

ceramide renewal

deep moisture

Dove

Dove advertisement

As Barthes in his *“Rhetoric of the Image”* submits the Panzani ad to “a spectral analysis of the messages it may contain”, to better understand how the meaning gets into an image, where it ends and if it goes beyond, I decided to analyze a Dove advertisement I came across while leafing through Allure magazine. I chose this advertisement because beyond the signified that is formed by certain attributes of the product, there are a lot of strong messages. Those messages justify the collocation of this ad in a feminine magazine which subtitle is the beauty expert.

The picture shows a dark-skinned woman without makeup in a white simple bra and light blue (probably) shorts. She wears a shiny smile and short braids with golden clips. Her stomach shows visible stretch marks and a floppy abdomen with saggy skin. She is standing close to a window with white blinds and a small green plant which faded out. This effect was used to make her stand out from the background and let the observer focus on her and on the product which is depicted at the right bottom of the page.

The long text that accompanies the picture on the top and then at the bottom of the page, the label of the product and the added short info contain the linguistic message. The quotation from Dominique *“Watching my daughter grow has made me more proud of my stretch marks”* is relay text that leads to one of the interpretations of the picture. It gives voice to Dominique who is the smiley lady in her comfortable pose and explains the reason of her stretch marks; she is a mom of a newborn. The anchorage text at the bottom of the picture *“Renew the love for your skin with ceramide renewing Dove Body Wash”* (which I think is the title or the caption of the image) leads the viewer to the main purpose of the advertisement with an invitation to use the product to improve your skin. The subtitle *“Dove Body Wash with 5 skin-conditioning ingredients,*

replenishes up to 100 skin ceramides. For instantly hydrated, visibly moisturized skin.” brings further the attention of the observer to the meaning of the picture, that Dove is the product that is helping Dominique’s skin to renew and her stretch marks to go away. Other elements like the “Unilever” which is the company that owns Dove products, the “ceramide renewal” and the number 1 recommended by dermatologists' logos work like the word magnets in the Panzani ad. They are part of a sentence, and they belong to a chain of meanings. The Unilever logo reminds the observer that their sustainable company embraces brands that help people to feel good, look good and get more out of life. The golden logos confirm the good qualities and trustworthiness of the product. They are denotational because they are redundant, they are not adding more information. The “no digital distortion” which wants to ensure the truthfulness of the ad was added to the picture because of the a priori knowledge of the observer who may think that the picture has been modified with Photoshop to achieve perfection or to show unreal results. Last linguistic message that needs to be mentioned is “*Let’s Change Beauty*”, tagline of the ad campaign, which is connected to one of the main messages and to Dominique’s statement. It is the mission of a movement that Dove is promoting to change the people perception of beauty, redefining beauty, and breaking unrealistic beauty standards in our society. An honorable mission for a company that is trying to pull behind horrible past mistakes and which decided to focus on inclusiveness and diversity redefining the role of social media in impacting society’s perception of beauty in an era where a great number of people looks for idealized body and beauty.

Going back to the picture the no coded iconic message is the smiley woman with her stretch marks. She just woke up and she is in her bedroom. Unilever is the company and Dove is the name of the product. If we look at the iconic message, the idea is that everybody exactly like

her (regardless the skin color) should feel beautiful, not ashamed of their body or imperfections and confident in their own skin. The simplicity and the authenticity of the picture recreate a domestic and intimate scene. Being a picture taken at the eye-level, she is looking at us as her own reflection in the mirror and she is proud of what she sees. Furthermore, the imperfect nail polish, the basic outfit, and the simple accessories that she is wearing are purposely chosen to make her look like an ordinary person as the observer is. It is rare in fact to see a mom depicted in an advertisement especially after child delivery. The signified of her standing in the middle of the picture is based on the concept that women, especially moms, feel insecure about body appearance due to the judgment of others and that make them less self-confident. Those stretch marks are part of the natural being and make her unique. Mothers can love their skin and be proud of their unique body, no need to cover it, to be anxious or ashamed. A cultural sign I noticed in the picture is the choice of the hairstyle which recalls African traditions and enforces the concept of inclusiveness while the golden hair jewelry underlines the connotational message of the uniqueness of the subject.

After reading about the insensitive and racist ads of the past years made by Dove, I started looking with skepticism at the strong diffuse front light that invests the subject making her skin looking brighter (colorism accusation)*. However, taking this outside information aside and going back to my previous ideological approach, the light used might just bring the focus on the dark parts of the picture which is her hair, her abdomen and the bold blue text at the bottom (visual rhetorical signs).

* (The light effect is more visible looking at the magazine then on the picture I attached.)

References

Roland Barthes' 1977 essay, Rhetoric of the Image (PDF)

Unilever

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Dove Let's change beauty

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