

Ariana Dejesus

Comm. Theory

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Rhetoric of the Image - Home Depot Ad

I've chosen an ad on the front page of a Home Depot catalog magazine. In this ad, the majority of it is taken up by a queen-sized bed, which is decorated in holiday themed sheets. Two of the pillow cases and the sheet they're resting on are designed with cardinals holding red-berried hollies, also known as mistletoes. Between these two pillows are two others; a gray, fuzzy pillow, and a red one with a gold and glittery Christmas tree designed on it. Along with two white pillows resting on the headboard, there are white blankets, both fuzzy and cotton-materialled, and a red blanket. On the left side of the ad, there is a white nightstand with a white vase filled with a red-berried holly plant, and a red mug on a coaster filled with coffee. The headline on this image is "Make the Holidays Yours" in a bold text. In a normal type font, it reads "Discover stylish decor and enjoy free delivery to your door."

According to Roland Barthes, there are three messages within an image. Barthes labels these messages as the linguistic message, and two encoded messages; a denoted one and a connoted one. In this Home Depot ad, there is the linguistic message of the headline and sub-text. Barthes states, "Of course, elsewhere than in advertising, the anchorage may be ideological and indeed this is its principal function; the text directs the reader through the signifieds of the image..." The headline "Make Your Holidays Yours" blatantly tells us that this ad is holiday-oriented. The sub-text further chooses the viewers' perception of the ad to focus on the "stylish decor" and "free delivery" the store is offering. Barthes also explains the influence of

the anchorage and how it pulls the entirety of the message together; “Anchorage is the most frequent function of the linguistic message and is commonly found in press photographs and advertisements... Here text (most often a snatch of dialogue) and image stand in a complementary relationship; the words, in the same way as the images, are fragments of a more general syntagm and the unity of the message is realized at a higher level, that of the story, the anecdote, the diegesis (which is ample confirmation that the diegesis must be treated as an autonomous system).” The headline of this Home Depot ad reinforces the message and theme of the imagery it is coinciding with. It is reinforcing the communication of “Happy Holidays. This is what we are offering you this season”; this headline is in a strong complementary relationship with the photograph of the bedroom set.

There are plenty of denoted and connoted messages within this ad. A denoted message is the literal message of the objects seen in the ad. The Christmas tree pillow is a Christmas tree pillow, the cup of coffee is just that, a cup of coffee. The red and white pillows and blankets, the bedsheets, the vase with red-berried hollies; these are all elements within the ad which mean just what they are individually. There is no hidden meaning when it comes to their denoted messaging. However, a connoted message is the symbolic message; it is the message with a deeper meaning of what you see in the image. These individual elements then work in harmony to create a message not necessarily obviously stated.

The bright red cardinals on the bed sheets and pillow covers are a symbol of Christmas themselves. Winter is a season full of dullness, coldness, and although full of festivities, it is a season of depression to a lot. The bright colored birds offer a symbol of hope of joy around Christmas time in the dull colored season. The red colored pillow with the gold Christmas tree is a symbol of the holiday. The red-berried holly plant the cardinals are holding on the pillowcases

and bed sheets is the same plant in the vase on the left of the ad. These red-berried hollies, also called mistletoes, are often hung on top of door frames to signal the two standing under it to kiss. These plants are used very often during Christmas time to symbolise good luck and love. The red mug filled with coffee is a symbol of cold winter mornings during Christmas time. It communicates the early morning of Christmas and that need for a warm cup of caffeine before you deal with gift opening. Something seemingly so simple can evoke all of this symbolism. All together, with both the text and imagery, they create the intended meaning, the relay. This creates the rhetoric of the image, which is “Christmas is near, and this is what we are selling to you.”

Roland Barthes talks about these different types of messages to be able to analyze advertisements and see how many ways the imagery and/or text can be interpreted through different signs. With this Home Depot ad consisting mostly of the photograph of the bedroom, there are multiple elements within the seemingly simple ad that can symbolize many individual things while still coming together to create a single coherent message.



**MAKE THE
HOLIDAYS
YOURS**

Discover stylish decor and
enjoy free delivery to your door.
See page 10 for details.

Shop at homedepot.com/catalog