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Communication Design Theory

Throughout many years, the world has had many amazing ad campaigns come and go. Each one of them has come in multiple different types of shapes, styles, and forms. Most advertisements are quite effective and are able to make the audience buy their products. However, not each ad campaign can be a homerun. Most can be controversial and even offensive, without even noting it. Some famous controversial ad campaigns can be, Gillette's "We Believe", where they tackle toxic masculinity or even Pepsi's "Live For Now", where Kendall Jenner gave a police officer a Pepsi and suddenly ended police brutality. Both of these advertisements got a lot of attention, by people and media and got faced by a lot of criticism, which caused both companies to come out and apologize to the public. But Gillette and Pepsi aren't the only companies to create such controversial campaigns. Another major company that produces controversial advertising is Axe. Axe is a body spray company that also makes products for skin care. Their products are mostly aimed towards men, and this can be best seen in their ads. Axe in partially is a company that produces some controversial advertisements. Most people have been offended by the ads, mostly because they portray certain aspects in their ads. Axe advertisements tend to exaggerate on some issues that people don't approve of. These types of ads have become part of our society and numerous numbers of people have grown up with it and even new generations are learning from these controversial advertisements.

In multiple Axe ads, women aren't portrayed as women, but instead as followers. In many of their advertisements, women are only there to support the men. They are the secondary

characters, supporting the “main character”, which in this case are the male figures. They are only there to help out and provide support for the “higher-up” people and help make their lives better. As authors Hazel Tafadzwa and Anias Mutekwa say, women, “are still figured as the handmaidens of the male nationalist revolution. Their case illustrates the hidden power of discourse to hail subjects into particular subject-positions” (Ngoshi 246). In this case, Axe portrays women almost as handmaidens. Handmaidens obey their masters, by doing things such as cleaning, cooking, doing laundry, and helping out the “higher-up” people in their lives. And this is presented within Axe’s ads. The men are getting admired, adored and worshipped, almost as if they are gods, while also displaying women as lower value. In addition to using women, Axe also likes to sexualize female models by embracing and admiring the man, using the product. They want to grab their audience’s attention and they can do that by make the women posed really sexually as if she’s ready to have sex with you. Men can easily be tricked by this because they can be putting more attention on the women instead of the product. In fact, according to Laura Mulvey, author of *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, she says that, “Women displayed as sexual object is the leitmotif of erotic spectacle: from pin-ups to strip-tease, from Ziegfeld to Busby Berkeley, she holds the looks, plays to and signifies male desire” (Mulvey 837). Axe and other mainstream companies portray women, only to please men. They make them look like, all they really care about is having sex. Sex can make the men think that they can get women like that, if they buy the product. Men will think that they can get any type of woman, even the really beautiful ones, if they buy the product. As long as it gets them a date, or even give them a reason to get laid, they will get convinced. As the author of, *Why Sex Sells...More Than Ever*, they say, “Sex sells because it attracts attention. People are hardwired to notice sexually relevant information, so ads with sexual content get noticed” (*Why Sex*

Sells...More Than Ever). Ad campaigns that have designs like this have been around for awhile, and probably could have been in front of our faces, even if we don't realize it sometimes.

However, women aren't the only thing that Axe ads portray negatively. In most of their ads, Axe also uses the male gender as a way to make the men question themselves. In their ads, they displayed the men as gods. They make them displayed as they are in a problem and can be fixed through an Axe product. Whenever a man is included in an ad, the company wants the man to be portrayed as a "man" should be portrayed. According to Tom Nakayama he states that, "the advertising archetypes presented, men are in charge, self-contained and often alone. When shown with other men, they seem ready to unleash their aggression at any moment. When shown with women, they must be dominant. The male body can be used to sell any product, but whatever the fashion, the air of aloofness and barely controlled power is palpable" (Tom Nakayama *Images of Men in Advertising*). Men in advertising have also been given standards, even if we don't notice it ourselves. From society's eyes, a real "man" is someone who is very confident, attractive, young, muscular, and strong. It makes the males watching, doubt themselves and ask if they got what it takes to be a "man". And this can be seen within their ads. The men in their ads, all are good looking, well groomed, and very dominant out of any other character within the ad. Heck, even one of their ads, shows a male in a locker room, "spraying off" the fat of his body. And the bottle he uses to "spray away" the fat, reveals his inner body which is all fit and muscular. And the bottle that he is using is an Axe body spray, clearly giving off a message that Axe can "fix" you, in a way. They do this to purposely make you question yourself and actually consider whether or not you are a real "man". Axe and other ad campaigns want to clearly indicate and jokingly insult the man watching the ad. Axe takes the male gender

and makes their audience ask the question, what makes a “man”, and what they have to do in order to show that they got what it takes to be considered a “man” by society terms.

Although the photography and images within their ads are quite interesting, another factor that is displayed in Axe ads is the text, or headline, published in their ads. In the world of design, typography and photography have always played a key factor. When type and photography work together they effectively send a message, visually. As László Moholy-Nagy says, “Typography is communication composed in type. Photography is the visual presentation of what can be optically apprehended” (Moholy-Nagy 33). And this holds true for Axe. In their ads, they usually only have one headline, and that one headline itself actually holds a strong linguistic message. The cause of this strong linguistic message is due because of how strong the relay is. Relay is when text makes your mind go way out of left-field. It makes one wonder about what happens next. It sends your mind elsewhere. In this case, when people read the phrase, “THE AXE EFFECT”, it makes people curious. It makes them wonder, just what exactly is “THE AXE EFFECT”. The image then comes into play, because they can see what “THE AXE EFFECT” is doing to people. It makes these male characters into “men”. It adds all the qualities that a real “man” should have. These qualities aren’t just affecting men, but also women. Women are attracted to these qualities and look for these qualities, when they define what a “man” is to them. The type itself can communicate a message with its audience and automatically show them the effects of the “THE AXE EFFECT”. It is telling the audience what the axe effect is and its properties. However, the typeface, or font, they use placed a part into their effectiveness as well. The headline itself is text that says, “THE AXE - EFFECT”. They have in all capitals letters, in a sans serif typeface, and are usually placed next to one of their products. In fact, according to Sean Paul Lavine, he states that, “sans-serif fonts give off a feeling of being casual, informal,

friendly, and very approachable. Companies who want their brands to appear more youthful and relatable tend to use sans-serif fonts.” (Lavine *The Psychology Behind Serif and Sans Serif Fonts*). Axe wants to establish a trust relationship between customers and company. One way they can do this is because they use a sans serif typeface. Sans serif fonts are used quite often among ad campaigns and advertising, and Axe is one of these companies. When people see a sans serif typeface in an ad, it makes the company feel “casual, informal, friendly, and very approachable” (Lavine *The Psychology Behind Serif and Sans Serif Fonts*). This is an excellent reaction that every company wants their audience to feel. And Axe is one of these companies. They want, and can, make them feel young, cool, and feel like they are part of something big. As Sean Paul Lavine also states, sans serif typefaces used by companies make the companies feel “youthful and relatable” (Lavine *The Psychology Behind Serif and Sans Serif Fonts*). They even use it in their own logo. Their logo is AXE in all capital letters in a sans serif typeface. And this fits perfectly with Axe because this is in the same range, or similar area, of their target audience. Axe has a more younger target audience than other male focused companies. As Miguel Raminhos Gonçalves Santos states, “Axe’s main target group is constituted by young men, between 14 and 25 years old” (Santos 24). And within their ads, they want their target audience to have a good and positive mindset about Axe. In fact, as Miguel Raminhos Gonçalves Santos says, “The aggregation of these factors, or personality, intend to create the idea in consumers’ minds that Axe is essential in gaining the attention of women and a precious help in developing a relationship with them” (Santos 22). Axe wants their audience to have this mindset, where if they buy their products, it will greatly increase their chances of getting a girl’s attention. They want the type of feeling and satisfaction they want their consumers to feel, when they buy their

products. In design, type is a very powerful factor and the addition of adding sans serif type can greatly improve the impactfulness of an ad campaign, and the overall effectiveness of it.

In addition to type playing a part in Axe's ads, color also plays a big part. Ever since we were young, we were taught that red can equal danger, such as blood, fire, or urgency. While other colors such as blue can equal, calmness, relaxation, and even trust. Axe does the same thing. In design, color can really make a design from good to great. In this case, Axe uses a very gray scale color scheme, within their ads and brand personality. They do this for a specific reason and that is to make viewers view Axe in a positive way. In fact, the author of *The Psychology of Colour in Advertising*, says that, "Organisations which want to portray themselves as completely trustworthy and serious, such as legal firms, may opt for black and white designs in their marketing materials." (*The Psychology of Colour in Advertising*).

Companies such as Axe want to establish a brand personality among they say that companies that use black, white, and gray, tend to, When type and color work together they effectively send a message that a client wants their audience to know. It can determine their mood and convince them into a conversation, about a purchase.

As you can see, Axe is just one of many companies that make conserval ads that end up working out for them. They are able to successfully communicate with their audience though their images, type, color, and other factors. Many of them use relay and other types of methods in their ads, and are able to communicate with the audience in different ways. Over the years, many organizations have tried to stop this type of advertising. But it usually doesn't go anywhere. In fact, as Sydney Ember said, "Several women said male executives became visibly uncomfortable and ended the conversation when the issue of gender and racial diversity was raised" (Ember, *For Women in Advertising, It's Still a 'Mad Men' World*). It always comes back

around and creates toxicity among men and frustration among women. As time passes, society will evolve, and so will design. Axe makes these ads that gain a lot of attention. The more attention could help Axe since it's almost like free marketing for them. But Axe doesn't need to make ads this controversial. Axe is a male branding company, so they advertise to men, without making them feel bad about themselves. They can advertise to men, without it being so controversial. Design has purpose because it communicates with people and Axe can do this successfully without needing to objectify women and acknowledge toxic masculinity.

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