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Communication Design Theory

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An image can have so much power, it can capture our attention or sometimes even shock us. Today we see images everywhere such as on social media, the press, and even in advertising. Advertising is the most common place we see images being used. However, we don't recognize the power of what a good image could have over us. Any image used in an ad has been thought out carefully to not only attract a specific target audience, but to also convince you to buy a product. How do advertisers do this though? Roland Barthes explains the hidden messages behind images in advertisements. In his reading "Rhetoric of the Image" he discusses important key ideas such as the linguistic message, the non iconic coded message, the iconic coded message, and etc. Using Barthes methods, a person can break down and understand any advertisement. By understanding an advertisement you become more aware of what message the ad is trying to portray to you, and maybe even have a better understanding in making the decision of whether or not you want to buy the product being sold. To show how Barthes methods work an ad from Nissan will be used as an example.

The first thing that should be done when looking at any advertisement is identifying everything that you see in the image. The image is a horizontal rectangle shape, with a pink background. On the top left corner you see the Nissan logo and next to it the words "A safety driven lifestyle", under it you also see "#coronavirus_prevention". In the middle of the image we see a grey lamp, a black car seat, and a small triangular wooden table with a plant on top. The objects are in a living room style arrangement. On the right side we see some text that says

“Staying home with your family will save your life”. Now that we have an understanding of the image we can proceed to breaking it down for further understanding.

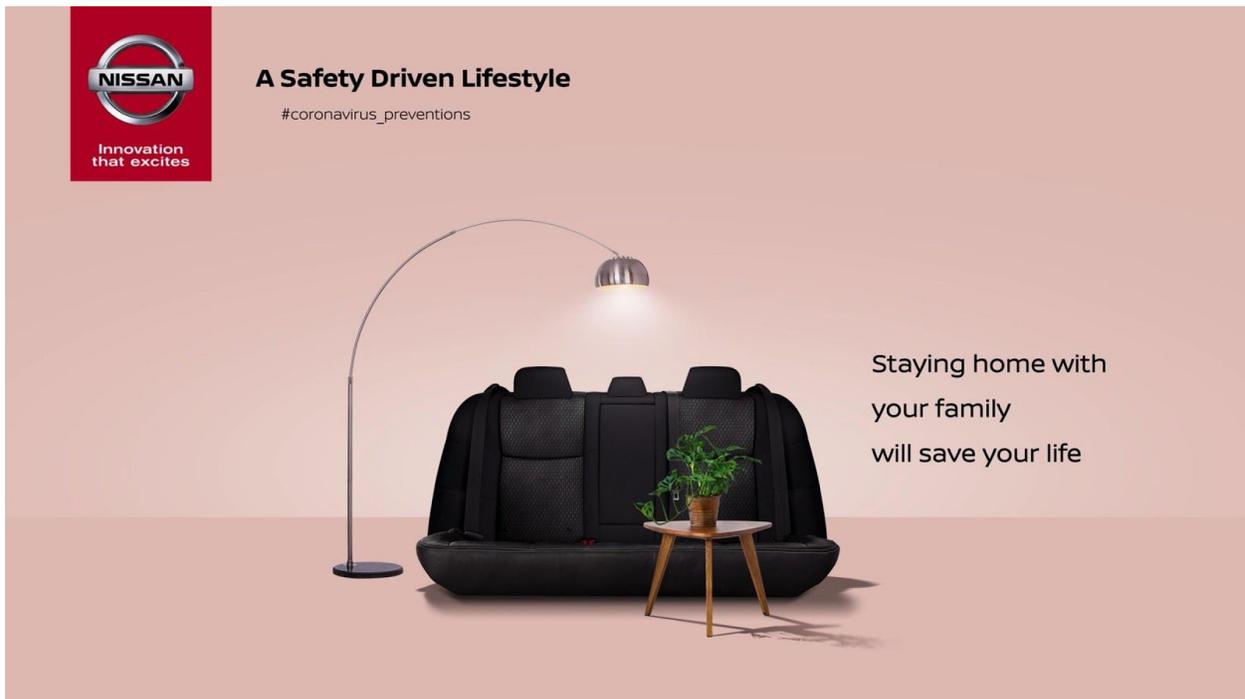
One of Barthes first methods is the linguistic message which is simply just all the text that you can see in an image. In the Nissan ad we see about four areas of main text including the logo, “A safety driven lifestyle”, “#coronavirus_prevention”, and “Staying home with your family will save your life”. These are the linguistic messages that we see in this advertisement, it is the language that is presented to us. From what we see in this Nissan ad we can tell that the information is saying to stay home and stay safe. The second method is the non iconic coded message, which is the message that you process based on the symbols that you see. These symbols exist in the scene as words but are read and represented visually. Overall it is just describing the image, which in this case would be the furniture that we see. The grey lamp, black car seat, and the triangular wooden table with a plant on top are the symbolic representation of a living room. This now shows us that we are dealing with the idea of a person's home since these are all things that we probably own in our living room (except for the car seat). The coded iconic message is what the image implies. Using the linguistic and the non coded iconic message we can put together what the image is trying to say to us. The coded iconic message also has a cultural message and this works into how we read and understand the image. We tend to identify an image based on how it relates to our culture since it is what we are most familiar with. In the Nissan ad the cultural message that we are getting is about social distancing. Right now we are currently in the middle of a pandemic from the Coronavirus. The words in the ad are telling us about safety and how to protect ourselves by staying home. This message is further implied by the car seat replacing what would normally be a couch. Another cultural message would be the

Nissan logo since we can identify them being a car company. By putting a car seat in the place of a couch for a living room setting they are implying the idea of not driving and staying home.

After identifying the main three parts, the next thing is understanding the denotative and connotative aspects of the ad. Denotative is the direct meaning to something in the image. For example, the car seat in the middle is denotative since it is what we literally see in the image. We also know what it is because a majority of people have seen what the inside of a car looks like. Connotative is the hidden message within the implied meaning of the denotative object. So the car seat is representing the idea of travel, but it could also represent the idea of family, comfort, or safety. These other ideas start to form since the context of the seat itself is different than what we would normally expect. We don't see the car seat inside a car, but in a living room environment so our interpretation of it is going to be different. Similarly, the Anchorage brings everything that we are looking at together. It is how we understand the image itself. The text that we see in the ad acts as an anchor for the images. For example, "Staying home with your family will save your life" is supported by the images of the furniture which represents the idea of home. Relay makes you ask questions about the image and opens new ideas for what it could mean. In this case in the Nissan ad what could make a person question the image is the actual car seat and why it is arranged with other living room furniture. One obvious interpretation would be that the ad is saying to not travel and to stay home, especially during this time when everyone is socially distancing.

Finally, we see the effectiveness of the advertisers rhetoric. Rhetoric is how well the advertisement convinces you to buy the product being sold. In this particular case the advertisement is selling us a Nissan car. Even though we don't see the actual whole car in this ad,

the advertiser does a good job at displaying an important message that anyone looks for when buying a car which is how safe it is. By using this pandemic to not only send a message about being home with your family and staying safe, we also get the feeling and idea that Nissan would be a good place to get a car because they show that they care about not just your own safety but your families too.



The advertisement features a minimalist living room scene. In the center is a black car seat, presented as a piece of furniture. To its left is a modern, arched floor lamp with a silver shade, casting a soft glow. In front of the seat is a small, round wooden coffee table with a potted plant. The background is a plain, light-colored wall, and the floor is a matching light color. The overall aesthetic is clean and contemporary.

NISSAN
Innovation
that excites

A Safety Driven Lifestyle
#coronavirus_preventions

Staying home with
your family
will save your life

Works Cited

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Roland Barthes 1977 essay, *Rhetoric of the Image*