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Graphic Design Theory

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April 26, 2021

Heaven on Earth by Dolce & Gabbana:
Rhetoric Analysis of Spring 2012 Advertisement

In this paper, I will examine the linguistic, perceptual and cultural elements present in an advertisement from Dolce & Gabbana's Spring 2012 ad campaign. I will also attempt to analyze the effectiveness of the advertisers' rhetoric by looking at the coded, non-coded, and compositional messages. This analysis will aim to answer the following questions: What are we seeing in this ad? What are we seeing in this ad that's beyond the literal image?

Dolce & Gabbana, an Italian luxury fashion brand was founded in 1985 by Italian designers Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana. The luxury brand sells the products ranging



from clothing, footwear, handbags, sunglasses, watches, jewelry, perfumes and cosmetics to the worldwide market. The following ad from its Spring 2012 ad campaign depicts six individuals on a beautiful, sunny day near the coast.

There is only one linguistic message found on this ad and that is a Dolce & Gabbana wordmark logo, placed on the bottom left area of the ad composition. A logo, the visual identity signifying a brand is usually repeated over and over again in purpose of recognition and therefore, stronger brand. For those who have never seen this logo, the denotational linguistic message can be a little vague, but it will undoubtedly imply the exclusivity and unity of two things or entities. Depending on the cultural background of the ad viewer, its connotational message can either imply European-like riddle or the undeviating connection between the last names and possibility of their Italian origin, given the sociocultural understanding of the word “dolce”.

In the case of this ad, linguistic message “Dolce & Gabbana” provides an anchorage to the image in a way that it signifies and represents the relationship between the brand concept and the scene depicted on the image. The effect of its relay fist begins with the design of the wordmark logo. “Dolce & Gabbana” designed in a soft, white, Futura typeface provides that additional visual experience that gives away the ideas of sophistication and purposefulness. It also invites the abstraction of ideas between the signified (“Dolce & Gabbana”) and the depicted scene which almost acts like an abstract sign.

The ad is replete with coded messages. Given the long casted shadows, this joyful scene captured just before the sunset, suggests a care-free, celebratory attitude towards life. The overall composition, cloudless sky, energy and movement are all signifiers of a relaxed, lighthearted life. The fact that the scene is right before the sunset, instead of being at home cooking for dinner, people depicted on this ad are engaged in the moment,

dancing, singing and being care-free. Dolce & Gabbana is selling the luxury of the present moment and the bohemian, untroubled life filled with adventure and surprises.

Another interesting, coded message is the presence of all ages in the photographic composition of this ad. We are seeing the shared joy of the present moment between all genders and ages. This can suggest the ideas of universality, harmony and most importantly the circle of life. A cloudless sky, dynamic energy, and the orchestrated symphony of tree of life – with these coded messages, Dolce & Gabbana is proposing their idea of heaven on Earth.

Bright red, tomato print clothing can also connote to the ideas of European cuisine and culture. Although the tomato most likely originating from Peru, it became popular in Europe long before it came to be used in North America. For those with this cultural associative knowledge, the prints would amplify the significance of the brand's Italian background. Additionally, the perceived aphrodisiac properties of tomato, *pomme d'amour* (French), “apple of love,” would reinforce the heaven-like ecstasy by Dolce & Gabbana.

There is also a very effective compositional technique employed in this ad and that is a golden ratio or the Fibonacci spiral. This powerful technique helps to lead the viewer through the entire photograph. Using the Golden Spiral, the placement of focal points is Mathematical to produce maximum impact and give the design of the composition more energy.



The perfectly balanced, dynamic composition in the ad above is aesthetically satisfying on a deep cerebral level. As a result, the viewer is left with the feelings of easiness, harmony and an aspiration to experience Dolce & Gabbana's heaven on Earth.

Works Cited

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