

COMPROMISED CRITIQUES: A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF AN ANTI-CIGARETTE
ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN

by

VANDANA SHANKAR

(Under the Direction of James Hamilton)

ABSTRACT

This study is a semiotic analysis of one secondhand smoking campaign by UNITE GEORGIA. The primary question posed in this research is how messages are constructed in one anti-cigarette advertising campaign, and whether their structure dilutes or compromises the critical stance regarding smoking. To this end, the study explores three ads – “Drive,” “Car Seat” and “Baby Monitor.” These ads critique the individual’s behavior, instead of addressing promotional activities of tobacco companies or the addictive nature of nicotine. Popular American ideologies of ‘opportunity,’ ‘freedom’ and ‘individualism’ are critiqued, in that ‘opportunity,’ ‘freedom’ and ‘individualism’ are not equally available to all. A person’s actions have repercussions for those around them, and failing to take that into consideration is a sign of self-centeredness. The codes required to understand the ads are recognized as those that are common to a particular culture, being a part of that culture enables the audience to understand the message. The study suggests that the messages in these ads are clear and easily understandable by the intended audience, in this case, the average American.

INDEX WORDS: Semiotics, UNITE GEORGIA, Anti-smoking, PSA, secondhand smoking

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my husband, Balaji Santhanam, my parents, Mr. T. Girija Shankar and Mrs. Usha Shankar and my in-laws, Mr. M. Santhanam and Mrs. Usha Santhanam.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
LIST OF TABLES	viii
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION	1
Intention of Study	1
Statement of Problem	1
2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE	4
Studies of Cigarette Advertising	4
Studies of Public Service Announcements (PSAs)	6
Historical and institutional studies of advertising	7
Textual studies of advertising	8
Research Questions	9
Theoretical Perspective	10
Method of Analysis	12
3 CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS	20
History and Evolution of PSAs	20
Nature and Purpose of the Organization	23
The Tobacco Settlement	24
Secondhand smoke as a social problem	26

4	TEXTUAL ANALYSIS	28
	Summary of Analysis	28
	Denotation	28
	Connotation	30
	Myths.....	38
5	CONCLUSIONS.....	43
	Directions for further research	44
	REFERENCES	46
	APPENDIX	
	“DRIVE WITH UNITE GEORGIA – 30 SECONDS”	50
	“CAR SEAT WITH UNITE GEORGIA – 30 SECONDS”	51
	“BABY MONITOR WITH UNITE GEORGIA – 30 SECONDS”	51

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1: Important Paradigms.....	32
Table 2: Binary Oppositions	39

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Intention of Study

While mass-communication research has addressed the effectiveness of cigarette advertising, less has been done on advertising that seeks to prevent people from smoking, or that encourages them to stop. Less has been done as well regarding the shaping pressures of specific institutional and cultural contexts of this advertising.

This thesis seeks to contribute to the scholarship in advertising and mass communication by addressing anti-smoking advertising. A case will be made that semiotic analysis is particularly useful in the study of message construction. Also, the hope is that advertising practitioners may gain some valuable insights into their professional activities through greater knowledge of a semiotic approach.

Statement of Problem

Studies of anti-smoking advertisements are increasingly important today. Smoking can cause serious if not life-threatening damage to one's health. Learning more about anti-smoking advertising might help design more effective ads that can save lives. Extensive research has been done from a positivist and a model of direct effects aspect because most researchers are very interested in numbers and data. While this has been done in great detail, there are very few studies that are done from a constructivist angle. Although the effectiveness of the different campaigns, the effect that they have on the audience has been studied, the message itself is usually

neglected. For any message to be effective, it has to be communicated in a language and manner that the audience can understand and it has to be in a context that the audience can relate to. This aspect is the constructivist aspect that is often neglected; researchers fail to take into account the active participation of the audience and their comprehension of the issue from the communication. The purpose of this study is to examine one anti-smoking campaign. The aim is to determine in this case to what degree the ads convey a consistent and uncompromised message. If the ads do not convey a strong message, it suggests a problem in the message construction. Given the severe health implications of secondhand smoke not only for adults but also for teenagers and small children, the government takes an active interest in curbing smoking. Given this nationwide interest in cigarette smoking and the perils of it, governments of different states are taking steps to discourage smoking, for example, the California Department of Health Services, which has been criticized for not generating enough anti-smoking ads despite the funding received, “has unveiled a campaign out of Los Angeles agency Asher & Partners that includes a TV spot offering a new reason to quit, or better yet, not start smoking” (Takaki, 1998). The Connecticut state government uses a different approach by making retailers responsible for selling cigarettes to minors; if they violate the law they pay a heavy fine and are penalized (Rountree, 2002).

To address this issue, I will examine three television advertisements from the ongoing UNITE GEORGIA campaign – “Drive,” “Car Seat,” and “Baby Monitor,” each thirty seconds long. The three ads all advocate greater awareness of the health

consequences of second-hand smoke. Accordingly, this thesis will be organized into the following chapters.

Chapter 2 of this study will include a review of the literature, a theoretical perspective of the study and finally a discussion of the method of analysis that is to be used. The literature review will encompass those literatures that are relevant to this study; it will include studies of cigarette advertising, studies of public service announcements, historical and institutional studies of advertising as well as textual studies of advertising. The theoretical perspective discusses the study from a cultural perspective, examining relevant literature for validation. The section on method will discuss the semiotic method that will be used for the purpose of this study.

Chapter 3 will analyze the context within which the study is situated. Here we will look at the history and evolution of Public Service Announcements (PSAs), the nature and the purpose of the organization involved for the purpose of this study and finally the Tobacco Settlement that forms the premise of the ads.

Chapter 4 will give a detailed textual analysis using the semiotic method. The chapter will be organized into three levels of signification: denotation, connotation and myths. At the level of connotation, the analysis will use the different semiotic elements such as synchronic, diachronic, paradigms, syntagms and codes.

Chapter 5 will draw relevant conclusion based on the study and will raise questions and issues that can be explored in future research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this study is to examine advertising that seeks to prevent people from smoking, or that encourages them to stop as well as the shaping pressures of specific institutional and cultural contexts of this advertising. Given this purpose, number of literatures can be consulted for possible contributions to the present study.

Studies of Cigarette Advertising

Cigarette company ads have been studied in great detail by researchers and scholars, to understand why these ads are persuasive and effective. In the bargain, the researchers have paid less attention to public service ads that try to persuade people not to smoke or give up smoking.

Using erotic images as well as those of adventure and risk, in different magazines, cigarette ads are tailored to suit the desires of consumers, belying the health affects of smoking (Altman, Slater, Albright & Maccoby, 1987). In understanding what works for anti-smoking advertising, Seigel, found that “advertising focusing on the tobacco industry’s manipulative and misleading advertising tactics and those focusing on the health effects of secondhand smoke are the most effective in denormalizing tobacco use” (Seigel, 2002). Similarly, a study of 901 billboards of alcohol and tobacco products in San Francisco emphasized the social aspects of smoking and drinking in order to promote products’ attributes. The

authors suggest that understanding such appeals can provide health professionals with information regarding the strategies of the advertisers, which has important implications for prevention and cessation interventions (Schooler, Basil & Altman, 1996). Further emphasizing the relationship between advertising and society, a content analysis of 197 anti-smoking television ads found that youth oriented ads have youth characters, sociability, and humor as common appeals, with social and short-term consequences such as countering the portrayal of smoking as glamorous or healthy by showing that it has immediate health and cosmetic consequences. On the other hand, adult-oriented ads relied on fear appeals and long-term health related consequences (Beaudoin, 2002). Researchers have also found that tobacco advertising and promotion increases the likelihood that youths will begin smoking they found that “tobacco promotional activities are causally related to the onset of smoking” (Pierce, Choi, Gilpin, Farkas & Berry, 1998).

Another analysis, examining the effects of two different types of anti-tobacco advertising, found that while a realistic fear appeal elucidated a negative response as opposed to those that used vulgar humor as the appeal, neither appeal brought about any behavioral change (Lee & Ferguson, 2002). In these and similar studies, the focus is more on quantitative measure of effect than on nuanced features of the ads.

While the message is important, the medium also plays a very important role. In a rhetorical analysis of the 1987, 1988 and 1989 federal AIDS television campaigns, the authors Bush and Boller found that there was a progression in the role played by the television advertisements, from “ building awareness of facts” to “build worry and fear” to “provide a coping response” by 1989. Television played an

effective role in advertising an AIDS emergency, which seemed to work very well rather than using it to make announcements (Bush & Boller, 1991). This illustrates the role played by the medium in transmitting an important message to the audience. Further, the television seems to be the medium of choice for public service announcements. It plays a role like no other medium because of the widespread reach of the television.

Studies of Public Service Announcements (PSAs)

While studies of PSAs have suggested among other things that PSAs can be effective, and while they have attempted to make links between certain features of ads and their effectiveness, few address the formative role of context in the constitution of meaning. The use of PSAs to keep the public informed has evolved over time, but down the line there have been several setbacks for PSAs. Public service advertising is facing hard times at present. The majority of public service advertisements (PSAs) run as a community service at no charge by the media. These ads seek to educate and awareness of significant social issues in an effort to change the publics' attitudes and behaviors and stimulate positive social change. Because they do not generate any income, most cable and broadcast networks are hesitant to provide airtime for such advertisements. Several organizations compete with each other to put their message across on the limited amount of airtime available to them. A study conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that most broadcast and cable networks provided on an average of only one half of one percent of all television airtime to PSAs (Berger, 2002).

Despite this, several studies conducted on Public Service Advertising (PSA) have shown that they are as effective as commercial advertising (Murry, Stam & Lastovicka, 1996). Research has also shown that if the message uses an emotional appeal it works much better than a rational one and, further, that the novelty of the messages adds to the appeal and aids in the recall of the message among the public (Lee & Davie, 1997). In an experimental textual study conducted on cause-related marketing ads, it was found that such ads produced positive responses before there was any scandal, but in the face of any negative news, they lost their advantage (Deshpande & Hitchon, 2002). A study comparing beer ads with PSAs using a sample of 578 ninth and twelfth graders found that the ads were rated favorable for production quality while the PSAs were rated favorable for content. The researchers found from the “receiver-oriented content analysis” that message content mattered more for the later stages of decision making and that logical appeals in the PSAs came too late in the decision making process (Pinkleton, Austin & Fujioka, 2001). Using surveys to determine the effectiveness of PSAs, researchers have shown that while the placement of the advertisements plays an important role in determining the effectiveness of these ads, they were unable to come up with an optimum channel (Schooler, Steven & Roser, 1998).

While suggesting that PSAs can be effective, the studies presented here neglect the roles of the context in the constitution of meaning.

Historical and institutional studies of advertising

Historical and institutional studies of advertising constitute a third important body of work for this study. The primary value of this work is that it discusses the

connection between textual features and institutional, cultural imperatives and conditions. Institutional studies of advertising and society suggest the importance of context in assessing the meaning of advertising.

In examining the American advertisements of the 1920s- 1930s, Marchand found that ads did not reflect a mirror image, but a distorted image that was an enhancement of what society should be. He attributed this to the people of elitist upper class of society who created the advertisements, which portrayed what they knew (Marchand, 1985).

Schudson examined advertisements and some surveys that were conducted from 1972 – 1981. His goal was to assess the role of advertising in shaping American values. He found that advertisements helped advance a consumer culture in which things were valued for the wrong reasons (Schudson, 1984). Similarly, in trying to understand the role played by advertisements in the lives of the American public, Jhally found out that the mediating institution of the market influenced “the use of goods” (Jhally, 1987).

Textual studies of advertising

A fourth important body of work is the textual studies of advertising. Williamson and other semiotic studies show how codes constitute the structure of meaning. Language and signs and how these constitute people’s perception and thoughts of the world around them is an important aspect in the study of media language (Lacey, 1998). The images in an advertisement are usually current and they are constantly changed to keep up with the times, yet they can also refer to the past and the future to come (Berger, 1995). In analyzing advertisements, Williamson

concludes that the ideological function of advertisements is that it creates structures of meanings, and that structuralist method of analysis is helpful and influential (Williamson, 1978). The primary value of this work is that it provides a clear and concrete procedure for discussing how texts become meaningful.

Conclusions

Both institutional studies of advertising and society as well as semiotic (textual) studies of advertising emphasize the crucial role of social and historical context in explaining how advertisements are meaningful. In mimicking society and presenting idealistic portrayals, the advertisers make it easier for the audience to relate to and understand the messages better, thus leading to a positive response to the message, which is so crucial especially in public service advertising. Linking the message to people's sense of their lives is a priority in PSAs. For this to happen, the context is of utmost importance.

Studies of PSAs suggest increasingly that studying the actual ads is also a crucial component for understanding effectiveness. In doing so, the creators might understand the relationship between the different appeals of the ads and the responses generated by them. This will help them create ads that will produce the right structure of meaning for a given audience and context.

Research Questions

The primary question posed in this research is how messages are constructed in one anti-cigarette advertising campaign, and whether their structure dilutes or compromises the critical stance regarding smoking.

To address such a question, the campaign from UNITE GEORGIA an organization that is against smoking will be used. This organization was chosen because this is a state level venture that is supported by government funding. This study will examine the three television advertisements from the UNITE GEORGIA campaign:

“Drive w/Unite GA” (30 seconds)

“Car Seat w/Unite GA” (30 seconds) and

“Baby Monitor w/Unite GA” (30 seconds)

(Source: The Austin Kelly Advertising Agency, 2002)

The campaign that they released uses the format of a Public Service Announcement (PSA). Some key issues that will be addressed are

1. What are some enabling conditions for the campaign?
2. What are some key internal and external relationships that make the PSAs meaningful?
3. To what degree does the structure of the ads contradict their intention?

Theoretical Perspective

The literature review and research questions suggest the need to blend an institutional and social approach with a textual approach to understand how and why certain advertising becomes meaningful in specific contexts. Doing this requires a theoretical basis for combining the two. Such a basis can be found in a broadly defined cultural perspective. Granting the breadth of approaches encompassed by this term and the debates between and within them, for the purposes of this thesis, a number of key characteristics of a cultural approach can be identified.

Communication can be seen as not the transmission of self-contained information, but the contextual making of the world as meaningful. Carey identifies two kinds of communication, one being the transmission view of communication and the other being the ritual view of communication. The transmission view of communication is most common to industrialized nations because, as the name suggests, it is about transmitting information to others, coming “from a metaphor of geography or transportation” (Carey, 1989). On the other hand, the ritual view of communication, which arises out of religion and is not much in use today, “is directed not towards the extension of messages in space but towards the maintenance of society in time; not the act of imparting information, but the representations of shared beliefs” (Carey, 1989).

As we can see, both the definitions of communication are intertwined with the functioning of society. Carey mentions that, “To study communication is to examine the actual social process wherein significant symbolic forms are created, apprehended and used” (Carey, 1989). This emphasizes that the process of message creation cannot be taken in isolation. The context provides meaning to any form of communication, and it lays the framework for understanding the message. This is emphasized by Duncan, who notes that symbols are “the directly observable data of sociation, and, since it is impossible to use symbols without using them in some kind of structure or form, we cannot discourse about society with any degree of precision unless we discourse about the forms social relationships assume in communication” (Duncan, 1970). The world is thus not intrinsically meaningful, but made meaningful, with that meaning maintained and constantly renewed through time.

This meaning-making is enabled by certain kinds of historical conditions. Without attention to conditions, acts of meaning-making cannot be fully understood. Since all communication is affected by the context that it takes place in or is a result of, to understand communication it becomes imperative to know its historical conditions. Hardt and Brennen describe this as a “different understanding of media history, for instance, not as a biography of elites or elitist institutions but as an expression of a collective process involving various class interests under specific political, economic and cultural circumstances” (Hardt & Brennen, 1993). So the codes to understand the communication are situated in history. By examining conditions, a clearer understanding of communication can be gained.

Method of Analysis

Given the extensive role played by society in shaping the messages used in advertising, it becomes imperative to make ads that appeal to a particular audience in a particular context. This has led to the creation of advertisements that mimic life situations and sometimes portrays idealistic situations. Some didactic advertisements can be called parables, because they attempt to draw practical moral lessons from incidents of daily life (Marchand, 1985). This is the method employed by many PSAs as they are most effective and they draw an immediate reaction from the audience. The meaning in the message depends on the manner in which the signs are organized internally and on the relationship of the advertisement to external belief systems (Jhally, 1987). Textual analyses of advertising suggest that meaning is not inherent in the ad, but is contextually determined.

One way of investigating the social, cultural, and historical nature of communication is through an agnostic use of semiotics as a method of analysis. Such an approach understands meaning as a product of specific relationships between signs, themselves produced and interpreted in specific contexts. This capability is why a cultural and historical application of semiotics fits this study, in that it links texts with contexts, and regards textual interpretation as dependent on historical contexts.

Semiotic Method

Semiotics involves the identification of “constituent units in a semiotic system (such as a text or socio-cultural practice) and the structural relationships between them (oppositions, correlations and logical relations)” (Chandler, 1991).

The nineteenth century Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857 – 1913) first proposed “semiology” as a discipline to study sign-based behavior (Danesi, 2002). Saussure’s main concern was three kinds of systemic relationships: that between a signifier and a signified; those between a sign and all of the other elements of its system; and those between a sign and the elements which surround it within a concrete signifying instance. Saussure described the creation of signs, not just formal signs, but any form of communication itself. He gave a structure to signs, by arguing that, “the sign is the sum of the signifier and the signified” (Lacey, 1998). The signifier is a physical manifestation of the sign; it could be speech, sound, taste, smell, or touch, for example, the smell of a rose. The signified is the mental association that we make with that physical manifestation for example – the mental picture of the rose associated with the smell. The relationship is known as

signification, which operates at the level of denotation. Identification of the sign is known as denotation. The signifier and the signified may be separated, but when we perceive the sign, we see them as inseparable.

Saussure emphasized that meaning comes out of the differences between signifiers. These differences are of two kinds: syntagmatic (concerning positioning) and paradigmatic (concerning substitution). The two dimensions are often presented as “axes,” where the horizontal axis is syntagmatic and the vertical axis is paradigmatic. The horizontal axis of the syntagm is a “combination of this-and-this-and-this” on the other hand the vertical axis of the paradigm is a “selection of this-or-this-or-this”(Chandler, 1991). Syntagmatic relations are possibilities of combination and within the text they refer to the signifiers that are combined. On the other hand, paradigmatic relations are functional contrasts - they involve differentiation and they refer to the signifiers that are missing in a text (Chandler, 1991).

Both paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations determine the “value” of a sign. “Syntagms and paradigms provide a structural context within which signs make sense; they are the structural forms through which signs are organized into codes” (Chandler, 1991).

Further, the relationship between them is not natural, but historical. (Lacey, 1998). When we see signs, not only do we understand them, we make some particular associations with that sign, which direct our understanding of the sign. This is known as connotation. In his introduction to *Image Analysis*, Lacey notes that at the level of denotation, the description provided by all the recipients of the message is the same, but at the level of connotation, many differences can arise. Connotation

involves looking at the text for sequence, structure and codes that are used to understand the message. This is achieved by using semiotic elements that will look at each of these such as synchronic/diachronic analysis for the importance of sequence and binary oppositions, paradigmatic/syntagmatic analysis for structure and codes.

In a synchronic analysis, a phenomenon is studied as if it were frozen at one moment in time; diachronic analysis focuses on change over time. In Saussurean semiotics, the focus is mainly on synchronic rather than diachronic analysis, but such a focus underplays the dynamic nature of media conventions. For instance, in television, conventions change much faster when compared to conventions for written English. It can also underplay dynamic changes in the cultural myths which signification both alludes to and helps to shape (Chandler, 1991).

Paradigmatic relationships can operate either on the level of the signifier or the signified or at both. A paradigm is a set of associated signifiers or signifieds which are all members of some defining category, but in which each is significantly different. In natural language there are grammatical paradigms such as verbs or nouns. Paradigmatic relations are those which belong to the same set because of a function they share. A sign enters into paradigmatic relations with all the signs that can also occur in the same context but not at the same time. Within a given context, one paradigm in a set can structurally replace any other within the same set. This is what defines a paradigmatic relationship, where the choice of one sign excludes the choice of another sign. The use of one signifier rather than another from the same paradigm set shapes the intended meaning of a text. Paradigmatic relations can thus be seen as “contrastive.”

In film and television, paradigms include ways of changing shots (such as cut, fade, dissolve and wipe). These are paradigms because these take on the role of signifiers: having a cut rather than a fade at a particular moment in a sequence can alter the meaning of the text. The medium or genre is also a paradigm, and particular media texts derive meaning from the ways in which the medium and genre used differs from the alternatives. The use of a particular medium adds a different dimension to the text, the choice of one over the other is determined by the need to reach a particular kind of audience and the reach that the medium has.

An orderly combination of signifiers that interact with each other and form a meaningful text is called a syntagm. These combinations are formed within a framework of syntactic rules and conventions, both implicit and explicit. A sentence is a syntagm of words, as are paragraphs and chapters. This points to the way in which syntagms usually contain other syntagms. Printed advertisements are syntagms of visual signifiers.

Syntagmatic relations are the various ways in which elements within the same text may be related to each other. Syntagms are created by the linking of signifiers from paradigm sets that are chosen on the basis of whether they are conventionally regarded as appropriate or may be required by some rule system (e.g. grammar).

Syntagms are often defined as “sequential” (and thus temporal - as in speech and music), but they can represent spatial relationships. Spatial syntagmatic relations are found in drawing, painting and photography. Many semiotic systems - such as drama, cinema, television and the World Wide Web - include both spatial and temporal syntagms.

This is where codes come into play. Some connotations are widely accepted, for example the connotation of a dog wagging its tail is that it is friendly. According to Roland Barthes, signs take on the value of the dominant value system – or ideology – of a particular society and make these values seem natural (Lacey, 1998). For example, any cosmetic ad has a female model generally (unless the product is specifically targeted to men). This is because the product is seen as one that enhances beauty, and the feminine gender is seen as beautiful or more beauty conscious. This is a value created by a dominant ideology that females are beautiful creatures that use cosmetics. Rarely is a man seen in the same role.

Saussure dealt only with the overall code of language, he stressed the fact that signs are not meaningful in isolation, but only when they are interpreted in relation to each other. Extending the importance of context even further, “Jakobson, emphasized that the production and interpretation of texts depends upon the existence of codes or conventions for communication” (Chandler, 1991). Reading an image, like the reception of any other message, is dependent on prior knowledge of possibilities; we can only recognize what we know. Since the meaning of a sign depends on the code within which it is situated, codes provide a framework within which signs make sense; we cannot give something the status of a sign if it does not function within a code. Furthermore, if the signifier and its signified have a random relationship, then interpreting the conventional meaning of signs requires familiarity with appropriate sets of conventions. Reading a text involves relating it to relevant “codes.” It is argued that even our perception of the everyday world around us involves codes. The conventions of codes represent a social dimension in semiotics: a code is a set of

practices familiar to users of the medium operating within a broad cultural framework. Society itself is dependent on the existence of such signifying systems.

Codes organize signs into meaningful systems that correlate signifiers and signifieds. Both producers and interpreters of texts link them together in an interpretative framework that are used. In creating texts, signs are selected and combined in relation to the codes with which the audience is familiar, this limits the possible meanings that can be generated when read by them, making it simple and easier to communicate to others. When reading texts, the appropriate codes are used to interpret them. The medium used influences the choice of codes. In an everyday situation, people are hardly conscious of the interpretation that they do. But in an unfamiliar situation, they have to identify the relevant codes before they make sense of the text as a whole. Even to understand the simplest of texts, the audience has to draw from a repertoire of textual and social codes.

Signs and codes are generated by myths and in turn serve to maintain them. In general the term “myth” usually refers to beliefs that may be false, but the semiotic use of the term does not necessarily suggest this. Myths can be seen as extended metaphors. Likewise, myths help people to make sense of their experiences within a culture. This explanation is reiterated by Marchand for the use of “parables” in advertising. They express and serve to organize shared ways of conceptualizing something within a culture. Semioticians who used the Saussurean tradition treat the relationship between nature and culture as relatively random. For Barthes, on the other hand, myths serve the ideological function of naturalization. They make dominant cultural and historical values; attitudes and beliefs seem entirely “natural,”

“normal,” self-evident, timeless, obvious “common-sense” - and thus objective and “true” reflections of “the way things are.” It is argued that society tends to regard as “natural” whatever confers privilege and power upon themselves. Myths can function to hide the ideological function of signs and codes. The power of such myths is that they “go without saying” and so appear not to need to be deciphered, interpreted or demystified (Chandler, 1991).

Differences between the three orders of signification are not clear-cut, but for descriptive and analytic purposes some theorists organize them along the following lines. The first level of signification, the denotative level, is seen as primarily representational and relatively self-contained. The second level of signification, the connotative, reflects “expressive” values, which are attached to a sign. In the third level of signification, the mythological or ideological, the sign reflects major culturally-variable concepts underpinning a particular worldview - such as masculinity, femininity, freedom, individualism, objectivism, and so on.

Conclusions

The literature examined did not take the cultural context into consideration it dealt with questions of effectiveness. The research questions on the other hand were aimed at examining message construction and strength through the structure of the message; this will be achieved through textual analysis using the semiotic method.

CHAPTER 3

CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

The primary question posed in this research is how messages are constructed in one anti-cigarette advertising campaign, and whether their structure dilutes or compromises the critical stance regarding smoking. Since meaning is constituted by contextual relations, it is vital to understand the context within which the message is situated, for example, the form of the message – Public Service Announcements, the background of the organization that is putting the message out - UNITE GEORGIA and finally the Tobacco Settlement from which all such advertising came out. In this chapter, each of these will be looked at establishing the framework for the study.

History and Evolution of PSAs

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has defined a public service announcement (PSA) as “any announcement (including network) for which no charge is made and which promotes programs, activities, or services of federal, state, or local governments (e.g., recruiting, sale of bonds, etc.) or the programs, activities or services of non-profit organizations (e.g., United Way, Red Cross blood donations, etc.) and other announcements regarded as serving community interests, excluding time signals, routine weather announcements and promotional announcements” (Dessart, 1997).

They came into being during World War II, mainly on radio as propaganda for the Office of War Information. “Print, outdoor advertising and especially radio

became the carriers of such messages as “Loose lips sink ships,” “Keep 'em Rolling” and a variety of exhortations to buy War Bonds” (Dessart, 1997). In the year 1969, PSAs received a huge boost when a federal court “upheld the FCC’s application of the Fairness Doctrine to cigarette advertising on radio and television, and ordered stations to broadcast “a significant amount of time” for anti-smoking messages” (Dessart, 1997). This led to a decline in smoking rates for the first time in history.

The Advertising Council was founded and incorporated as a non-profit organization that brought together the government, the media, corporate sponsors, and the advertising industry to support the war effort through public service advertising in the year 1942. It currently is the leading producer of PSAs.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the Advertising Council and PSAs were criticized for being “too narrow in focus.” The networks thus sought to distance themselves from the Ad Council, and to set their own agenda by dealing directly with the organizations themselves. However local stations were under additional pressure from innumerable new community-based organizations seeking airtime; many stations created and produced announcements in an effort to meet local needs especially since the FCC had come to require that stations report how many PSAs they presented and at what hour.

A number of stations went public or the ownership changed in the 1980s. Higher debt and increasing costs and competition created a demand for profitability. In these ways, government deregulation made the situation worse for PSAs.

This trend increased when, to battle illicit drug problems, the Advertising Media Partnership for a Drug-free America was set up by a group of media and

advertising agency executives, spearheaded by Capital Cities Broadcasting Company, which was completing the take-over of ABC. With huge support, the organization mounted the largest public service campaign ever, with “more than \$365 million a year worth of print lineage and airtime, it rivaled the largest advertising campaign” (Dessart, 1997). During the first years of the campaign, considerable attitudinal and behavioral changes among the youth were recorded. But over time, the results were less hopeful as a number of “societal factors changed and media time and space became less readily available” (Dessart, 1997).

Other developments included two strategies. The Entertainment Industries Council combined high-profile film, television and recording stars doing network PSAs with depiction efforts: producers, writers and directors incorporated seat belt use, designated drivers, and AIDS warnings and anti-drug references in story lines. The other major development, by consultants, was the appearance of the Total Station Project. Stations would adopt a public service theme and, often after months of planning and preparation, coordinate PSAs with station editorials, heavily promoted public affairs programs and features in the local news broadcasts (Dessart, 1997).

PSAs have proven to be an effective method of communicating socially relevant and other important messages. Despite the setbacks that PSAs have encountered over the years, due to deregularization of the media industry, they are still important today and have an even greater role to play in the transmission of important messages.

Nature and Purpose of the Organization

The organization involved for the purpose of this study, UNITE GEORGIA, is partially funded by the tobacco industry's Master Settlement Agreement (MSA). It is an initiative of the Georgia Department of Human Resources, Division of Public Health, Department of Human Resources, in partnership with the Georgia Cancer Coalition. "The campaign, coordinated by the Division of Public Health's Tobacco Use Prevention Section (TUPS) and jointly sponsored by the state's 19 health districts, aims to reach out to all Georgians to build understanding and awareness about the effect tobacco has on all our lives" (UNITE GEORGIA, 2001).

In a landmark settlement against five major tobacco companies, as one of 46 states, Georgia was awarded \$4.8 billion and received the first payment of \$150 million in the 2000 legislative session. Of that, \$15.8 million was earmarked to fund tobacco use prevention in 2001. "Governor Roy Barnes' 2002 budget proposal includes an increase of \$5 million in spending for tobacco use prevention" (UNITE GEORGIA, 2003). This is a public service campaign and it is part of a consolidated effort by the state to reduce tobacco use and to prevent it. This campaign focuses on secondhand cigarette smoking, where peer pressure and the influence of the other people sharing a smoker's environment can change a smokers' behavior, discouraging him/her from smoking.

UNITE GEORGIA has conducted an entire campaign on anti-smoking and secondhand smoking. This campaign has other television spots similar to those being studied here and the campaign also includes billboards and pamphlets. This advertising campaign is targeted at both smokers and non-smokers, by presenting the

statistics the ads hope to inform the public/smokers of the severity of the issue, they also hope to instigate peer pressure among the public and thereby discourage the smokers from putting the non-smokers at risk. The campaign does not take the stance of “do not smoke” instead it promotes the message – “be a considerate smoker.”

Through its messages and its network, hopes to educate the public on the issue of smoking and provide a support system to help people to quit smoking. Specifically through the advertising, UNITE GEORGIA hopes to educate the public about the harmful effects of secondhand smoke.

The Tobacco Settlement

The Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement was the premise for most of the advertising against cigarette smoking. It provided the resources for the anti-smoking campaigns by the Georgia government, and the UNITE GEORGIA program was funded by the \$4.8 billion given to the state of Georgia as a payment as decreed by the Master Settlement Agreement (MSA). This anti-smoking program was put into place by the state government based on the directives of the MSA, and the funding for this came out of the MSA.

“In 1995, the Attorney General brought a lawsuit against major cigarette manufacturers to stop deceptive cigarette marketing practices; to require cigarette companies to disclose research concerning smoking, health, and nicotine addiction; to fund public education and smoking cessation programs; and to recover the significant costs incurred by the Commonwealth due to smoking-related diseases” (National Association of Attorneys General, 2001).

In November 1998, the Attorney General and the attorneys general of 45 other states entered into a landmark settlement of this litigation, the Master Settlement Agreement. As of April 2002, 38 manufacturers have become “participating manufacturers” by signing the Master Settlement Agreement.

The tobacco settlement agreements set standards for and impose significant restrictions on the advertising, marketing and promotional activities of participating cigarette manufacturers. Accordingly, for each year over the next ten years, the tobacco industry was to pay \$25 million to fund a charitable foundation that would support the study of programs to reduce teen smoking and substance abuse and the prevention of diseases associated with tobacco use. The foundation would also:

- “Carry out a nationwide, sustained advertising and education program to counter youth tobacco use and educate consumers about the cause and prevention of diseases associated with tobacco use.
- Develop, disseminate and test the effectiveness of counter advertising campaigns.
- Commission studies, fund research and publish reports on factors that influence youth smoking and substance abuse.
- Track and monitor youth smoking and substance abuse with a focus on reasons for increases or failures to decrease tobacco and substance use rates.
- Create an industry-funded \$1.45 billion national public education fund for tobacco control. The fund is established to carry out a nationwide sustained advertising and education program to counter youth tobacco use and educate consumers about tobacco-related diseases” (National Association of Attorneys General, 2001).

The Tobacco Settlement was the premise for anti-smoking advertising; funding for the programs came out of the settlement. The Tobacco Settlement determined the target audience of the advertising. UNITE GEORGIA's program arose from this and had strong implications for the people of the state.

Secondhand Smoke as a Social Problem

Smoking is regarded in the United States as a compelling social problem. The extent of this issue is staggering with the numbers growing, and an increasing percentage of smokers being teenagers.

This problem does not just end there. Even non-smokers are affected. According to the EPA, secondhand smoke is a mixture of the smoke given off by the burning end of a cigarette, pipe, or cigar, and the smoke exhaled from the lungs of smokers. This mixture contains more than 4,000 substances, more than 40 of which are known to cause cancer in humans or animals and many of which are strong irritants. Secondhand smoke is also called environmental tobacco smoke (ETS); exposure to secondhand smoke is called involuntary smoking, or passive smoking. It has been classified by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as a known cause of lung cancer in humans (Group A carcinogen). Passive smoking is estimated to cause approximately 3,000 lung cancer deaths in nonsmokers each year (EPA, 1993).

By inhaling the smoke released by the smokers, the non-smokers (or secondhand smokers) become vulnerable to a host of health problems. This is especially bad in the case of young children whose parents are smokers. "Infants and young children whose parents smoke are among the most seriously affected by

exposure to secondhand smoke, being at increased risk of lower respiratory tract infections such as pneumonia and bronchitis. EPA estimates that passive smoking is responsible for between 150,000 and 300,000 lower respiratory tract infections in infants and children under 18 months of age annually, resulting in between 7,500 and 15,000 hospitalizations each year” (EPA, 1993).

To tackle this issue, PSAs now address parents; they are made accountable for their actions and responsible for those of their children, especially adolescents. The parents are encouraged to actively participate in the lives of their (adolescent) children so that the children can make the right choices when offered cigarettes. Further, with extensive coverage in the newspapers and magazines of the magnitude of this issue, the public is increasingly made aware that a collective step has to be taken to prevent further damage to their quality of life.

Conclusions

The UNITE GEORGIA ads use the format of the PSA and are funded by the government from the Tobacco Settlement. Increasingly secondhand smoking has become a major social problem and recognizing this issue, UNITE GEORGIA, put forth the PSAs to counter the growing problem.

CHAPTER 4

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Summary of Analysis

The primary question posed in this research is how messages are constructed in one anti-cigarette advertising campaign, and whether their structure dilutes or compromises the critical stance regarding smoking. To do this, an analysis of three commercials – “Drive,” “Car Seat,” and “Baby Monitor” will be done using the semiotic method discussed earlier.

This analysis is organized into three sections – denotation, connotation and myths. These three levels are likened to the peeling of an onion. Denotation is where we recognize or identify a sign: it is a basic description. Connotation refers to the associations that we make with it. The core is mythic and suggests how signs take on the values of the dominant value system – or ideology – of a particular society and make these values seem natural.

Denotation

The first level of signification is the recognition or identification of a sign, which is known as denotation. The purpose here is to give a detailed description of the signs and to establish patterns between the three ads that are being analyzed. Like any good story, each of the three advertisements has an opening, a setting of the scene or event, followed by crescendo of the tension and a final dramatic conclusion.

In “Drive, ” the opening shot is of two people, a Caucasian male and an African American female in a moving car. The guy lights up a cigarette, and the woman swerves the steering wheel of the car. Their conversation,

M – “What are you doing?”

F – “you’re endangering my life”

F – “just returning the favor”

captures the drama of the commercial. The statistics presented in the form of a caption on screen is “Each year 53,000 people die from secondhand smoke.” The organization name and the motto “We can all live without secondhand smoke” are seen at the end with the deep resonance music that draws it all together.

In “Car Seat,” a woman straps a baby into the car seat, in a parked car possibly at a mall. The conversation that the woman carries on with the baby establishes their relationship, that of mother and daughter. The mother gets into the driver’s seat, and lights up a cigarette. The caption “Each Year Up To 26,000 Kids Develop Asthma From Secondhand Smoke” displays. The ad concludes with the same display of the logo and the organization’s motto.

In “Baby Monitor,” the baby monitor is shown in the beginning sequence. Bars of sound on the LED display are seen increasing, and the crying of a baby is heard from the monitor. The changing shots and the play of light – the monitor is moved into deepening shadows – culminates in a pair of hands turning off the monitor. The caption provides the relevant statistics “Every year 300,000 babies get sick from secondhand smoke,” and the logo and motto of the organization appears.

The three advertisements have patterns that are common to all; this can be established from the description of the ads. All ads have a dominant persona, the Caucasian male in “Drive,” the mother in “Car Seat,” and the unseen adult in “Baby Monitor.” These people perform acts that affect the other characters in the ads, the African American woman in “Drive” and the two babies, one seen and the other unseen, but heard in “Car Seat” and “Baby Monitor” respectively.

Furthermore, “Drive,” “Car Seat” and “Baby Monitor” involve mundane everyday activities. A woman is driving a man around possibly giving a colleague a ride, mother is seen strapping her baby into a “Car Seat,” and an adult is probably baby-sitting a child in “Baby Monitor.” These are part of the all American lifestyle, no out of the ordinary situations.

Another common pattern in the ads is the intimate setting of the action. In all the three ads, the action takes place in a relatively intimate and confined setting, bringing the characters into close contact. “Drive” is set in the confines of a moving vehicle; “Car Seat” again is set within a car, although stationary during the ads; and “Baby Monitor” can be safely assumed to be taking place in two rooms in a building, possibly within a house.

Finally all the ads have statistics presented at the very end, which establish the purpose of the ads and draw the messages of the ads together.

Connotation

After the recognition of the sign and the establishment of the common patterns, connotative analysis focuses on the associations that we make with these. At this level, the text is analyzed for the underlying meaning of the texts using different

relationships such as – synchronic/diachronic, paradigmatic/syntagmatic and codes. Each is used to understand the significance and relationships of the different elements of the text that lend meaning to the text.

Synchronic Analysis

A synchronic analysis, works on the premise that meaning arises out of the binary oppositions that exist. As observed from the denotation, at a very basic level, these ads contain such binary oppositions such as gender, power (dominant/dependent), and perpetrator/aggrieved.

In “Drive,” the man and the woman signify the oppositions of gender, power and perpetrator and aggrieved, and good and evil. We can make out all these oppositions because of their actions in the ad.

Likewise, in “Car Seat,” the mother and child represent perpetrator/aggrieved and dominant/dependent. From the actions of the mother, where she lights up a cigarette, the dimension of the self-absorbed/unselfish and that of automatic/intentional are also signified. She automatically lights up her cigarette, which is an involuntary action that arises out of the addiction, yet it is a self-absorbed or selfish act because she is not mindful of the health consequences that her action might have on her helpless child.

In “Baby Monitor,” the perceived adult and the child also signify the perpetrator/aggrieved, the dominant/dependent and the self-absorbed/unselfish. The adult person’s hands are shown turning off the baby monitor, shutting out the incessant crying of the child. This represents a selfish act on behalf of the adult who is in a position of dominance over the hapless child, whose pleas go in vain.

Diachronic Analysis

While the binary oppositions play an important role in the message, they do not stand alone as described in a synchronic analysis. Sequence and progress of time and space lend signification to the message.

A diachronic approach focuses on how signs change in form and meaning over time. It is the horizontal dimension of meaning, in which the sequence of the signs is very important to signification.

The ads being examined have a characteristic progression in the sequence of the shots and in action. If the shots were put in a different sequence, the story would be lost on the audience. When looking closely at the three ads (“Drive,” “Car Seat,” and “Baby Monitor”) from the UNITE GEORGIA campaign, a clear progression can be seen. The opening shot establishes the setting of the ads; it is a car in the first two and possibly two rooms in a house for “Baby Monitor.” The action takes place in this setting; the man smokes in “Drive” making the woman drive dangerously in retaliation. Likewise, the mother smokes in “Car Seat” as her baby watches her helplessly, and in “Baby Monitor,” the child is heard coughing, and finally the adult hands turn off the monitor. The common elements are the display of the caption, logo and motto.

Paradigmatic Analysis

Paradigmatic analysis seeks to identify the important paradigms or pre-existing sets of signifiers, which lie beneath the manifest content of texts. This involves a consideration of the positive or negative connotations of each signifier revealed through the use of one signifier rather than another, and the existence of

“underlying” thematic paradigms like binary oppositions. “Paradigmatic relations” are the oppositions and contrasts between the signifiers that belong to the same set from which those used in the text were drawn.

The crucial paradigms in the three advertisements can be summarized in a table:

Table 1: Important Paradigms

Paradigms	Advertisements		
	“Drive”	“Car Seat”	“Baby Monitor”
	Perpetrator	Caucasian Male	Mother
	Aggrieved	African American woman	Baby
	Relationship	Casual Relationship	Parent
	Setting	Car	Room (2 rooms in a house)

As seen from the table given above, some common paradigms form sets defined by the roles that they play.

In the first set, the perpetrator, the Caucasian male in “Drive,” is putting the woman who is driving the car at risk by smoking. Similarly in “Car Seat,” the mother is harming the child by smoking. Finally, in “Baby Monitor,” the perceived adult, whose hands are seen is the perpetrator, because he/she ignores the cries of the child and turns off the baby monitor. All the three people are seen as perpetrators of evil/harm as they put other people around them at risk, by placing them in a position where they are forced to inhale secondhand smoke.

Likewise in the second set, the aggrieved, these are the people who suffer the consequences of the ill actions of the perpetrators. They are the African American woman in “Drive,” the baby in “Car Seat,” and the baby who is only heard in the

“Baby Monitor.” While making a case of the two paradigms, it is important to note that the advertisement- “Drive” is different from the other two because the woman takes control of the situation and rights the wrong that is done to her unlike the babies in the other two ads. Given this difference, race and gender play very important roles as paradigms in “Drive” the woman’s role is defined by these paradigms, which she overcomes and takes positive action against the perpetrator.

The third set formed is based on the relationship between the characters. There is a casual relationship between the man and the woman in “Drive,” who are possibly acquaintances from work just sharing a ride. In “Car Seat,” the woman’s dialogue establishes her relationship with the baby as one of mother and child. The absence of any people shown in “Baby Monitor” opens the possibility of a variety of relationships between the perceived adult and child, but since the adult is seen as looking after the child, we define this relationship as one of a caregiver.

In the last set, the setting of the advertisements is the paradigm. It is a car in both “Drive” and “ Car Seat,” while in “Baby Monitor” it is a house, more specifically two rooms in a house; we gather this from the function of the baby monitor.

The settings connote a paradigm of personal intimate space, in which the perpetrator violates the personal space of the other character. In the first ad, the woman’s car is her personal space and the man violates this by smoking in it. This ad is different from the other two, because the woman reasserts control of the space. She steers the car in a way that frightens the man, and when questioned regarding her actions, she tells the man that she was just “returning the favor” (he endangered her

life by smoking). In the second ad, the mother violates the personal space of the child by smoking; she is putting the child into danger instead of protecting the child. Finally in the third advertisement, the unseen caregiver is violating the terrified baby (again unseen), by ignoring its crying and coughing and turning off the baby monitor.

Syntagmatic Analysis

The syntagmatic analysis of a text involves studying structure and the relationships between the parts. The study of syntagmatic relations reveals the conventions or “rules of combination” underlying the production and interpretation of texts (such as the grammar of a language). The use of one syntagmatic structure rather than another within a text influences meaning.

In the three ads, the combination of the paradigms of “perpetrator,” “aggrieved,” “setting” and “relationship” according to the rules of the language, gives the message of secondhand smoking, which forms a syntagm.

Codes

Both the paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations determine the ‘value’ of a sign. Paradigms and syntagms provide a structural context within which signs make sense; they are the structural forms through which signs are organized into codes.

The concept of the “code” is fundamental in semiotics. It is the system in which signs are organized and which determines how they relate to each other and thus can be used for representation and communication. “Codes are ‘organizational systems or grids’ for the recurring elements that go into the constitution of anything that humans make, including signs, rituals, spectacles, behaviours, and representations of all kinds” (Danesi, 2002). These can be either formal like in

mathematics (structures and rules) or flexible ones like the code to greet people that depend on the participants of the ritual, and these are culture specific.

Some basic codes that are required to understand the advertisements, depend on the audience being part of American culture, in which activities like a woman driving a car, or smoking, asserting ones independence are commonplace. Unless this was the case, a person from a different culture would not understand the actions of the protagonists or even the setting of some of the ads.

In the first advertisement, “Drive,” the African American woman is seen driving the car, which is a reversal of roles in a typical male dominated society. The woman is shown asserting her independence in the presence of a man by driving the car while he rides as a passenger. The African American woman is also seen driving in a crazy way putting her and her passenger’s life in danger. She does this to prove a point in the commercial but, for a foreign viewer, the subtle nuances of facial expressions may be lost and the woman may be seen as the aggressive perpetrator. The code to understand the setting the ensuing drama is inculcated and is part of the culture.

Further, issues of race and gender are perceived differently in different parts of the world, so the interpretation of this commercial would have different significance to people of different cultures. Even in this country, an urban educated audience may interpret the empowerment of the African American woman, while a less educated rural/small town audience may not understand the fuss being made as they might still see the man as being as being the dominant person and the woman as being subservient to him, even moreso being an African American.

The mother in “Car Seat” is shown smoking. This is not acceptable in many cultures and may seem alien to those people. Women are not normally seen smoking openly in most cultures, and it is frowned upon. Furthermore, she is shown doing this in the presence of a child, which is unacceptable in many societies. The car seat is itself not a part of many cultures, and children are rarely left alone, even in the back seat of the car. Because the car seat is a familiar icon of the American way of life, its use can be recognized only by being a part of the culture.

In the “Baby Monitor” commercial, the use of a baby monitor is a mundane part of life in the western cultures as is putting a baby in a room by itself without any adult watching over the child or hiring another person to “baby-sit.” But to people of other cultures, these too may seem unfamiliar.

For these reasons, the ads are all clearly specific to American society. The audience has to borrow from an inbuilt mythology that they grow up with and which evolves as time goes by.

The code changes at the end of each of the advertisements, when the statistics are presented at the end of each of the commercials. The statistics at the conclusion serve the purpose of educating the audience of the enormity of the situation; it also gives a sense of drama to the commercials. To decipher this message, the code required is different from that of the rest of the message. The cognitive process required for this is a much more complex one as the audience has to read and understand the statistics being presented. There is a deviance from a vividly visual text to one that is stark and requires more effort from the audience.

Myths

The third level of signification, is what Roland Barthes refers to as myth. Myths are usually associated with classical fables about the exploits of gods and heroes. But, for Barthes, in his book *Mythologies*, myths were the dominant ideologies of the time. Marchand similarly refers to the use of fables as ‘parables’ he attributes their usage in the advertising context to ‘draw practical moral lessons from the incidents of everyday life’ (Marchand, 1985). The ‘parables’ use contrasts and exaggerations to dramatize a central message.

The semiotic analysis of cultural myths involves an attempt to understand the ways in which codes operate within particular popular texts or genres, with the goal of revealing how certain values, attitudes and beliefs are supported whilst others are suppressed.

Historically, the use of ‘parables’ or myths in advertising has emphasized comfortable truths, but with the emergence of the public service announcements, they are used to highlight stark and ‘distasteful truths,’ the purpose being to educate the audience. The role of the advertising parable was to persuade, not confront, nor did they typically seek to inform or provoke active thought from the audience.

From the first two levels of signification, the commercials are inferred to be social messages that address the issue of secondhand smoking. At the mythical level, the advertisements challenge yet also reproduce dominant cultural values.

Some very strong cultural values of America are those of freedom, opportunity, and individualism. America is seen as the land of opportunity to people all over the world, who come to this country seeking better opportunities in their

career or lives. If they work hard enough for it, here all people have equal opportunities. Similarly, America is also seen as a “free nation” where people have the freedom to practice what they believe in or express their thoughts freely. They have the freedom to make choices. This is also the country that gives importance to the individual.

Looking at the three ads and examining the myths signified by them these key American beliefs are critiqued.

Opportunity

Although the ideology of the country promises equal opportunity for all people, the aggrieved in these ads have no such status. In a land of opportunity, the aggrieved in the three ads do not have the opportunity to defend themselves against the harmful behavior of the perpetrators. The woman in “Drive,” the two babies in “Car Seat” and “Baby Monitor” do not have the opportunity to express their views against the person that is putting their lives in danger. “Drive” is the exception here though, as the African American woman does seize the opportunity to defend herself against the man’s reckless behavior.

Freedom

The unconditional freedom promised to all people has its limitations in the three ads. The ads critique the notion of freedom and demonstrate that it is not limitless and that it is not uniform for all people. The perpetrators express their freedom to choose at the expense of the aggrieved, who are unable to exercise their rights to either verbally prevent the perpetrator or, if they choose, to physically move away to another place. Again, “Drive” is the exception because the woman enacts her

freedom by taking action against the man. The African American woman takes things into her own hands, thus being “free” to take meaningful action, despite being a member of two historically disadvantaged groups in the United States – an African American and a woman. Hence this particular advertisement really signifies the empowerment of the aggrieved much more so than the other two ads which emphasize the victimage only.

Individualism

In a country where the achievements of an individual are celebrated, where the individual is of utmost important, these ads portray this as a manifestation of selfishness. The perpetrators do not stop to inquire about the comfort of the aggrieved, nor do they request the permission of the aggrieved before they light up a cigarette (show in “Drive” and “Car Seat”). Although this might be an unintentional act, it seems self-centered, which is portrayed here as a negative characteristic, this is common to all the advertisements.

At a mythic level, ads show that nothing is available unconditionally; there are conditions, limits and rules for certain people but not for others. There are some basic binary opposition that exists; which make this clear.

Table 2: Binary Oppositions

Mythical; Binary Oppositions	
Freedom	Responsibility
Individualism	Communitarianism
Selfish	Empathy
Bad	Good

While the binary oppositions are listed here, what is important to note is the vertical associations within each column. “Freedom” and “individualism” are seen as bad qualities here; individualism is also seen as being selfish. Similarly, “responsibility,” “communitarianism” and “empathy” are portrayed as good qualities in these ads.

Conclusions

These ads define the problem of secondhand smoking as being the result of the failing of the individual. Due to a person’s failure as an individual and their self-absorption, they fail to take into consideration the fact that they might be putting other people in harm’s way.

By defining the problem of secondhand smoking as an individual failing, the PSAs critique important American values. Freedom and individualism are seen as the problem. In doing so, the PSAs contradict widely held beliefs, thus compromising their meaning. One can solve the problem, yet only by turning one’s back on some basic American values. Their portraying the solution to the problem as not “don’t smoke” also compromises the critique of the ads but “be a considerate smoker.”

Yet, by defining the problem of secondhand smoking at the level of individual action, the PSAs at the same time coincide with other American values, individualism being the primary case in point. In addition, by locating the problem at the level of the individual, the coercive power of tobacco company promotions as well as the equally coercive addictive qualities of nicotine are left out of the picture, and thus not seen as part of the problem. In this way, the actions of companies, the effects of advertising,

and the physical qualities of nicotine--all of which suggest a clear limitation to an individual's ability to solve the problem of secondhand smoking--are defined as not relevant to the problem of and the solution to secondhand smoking.

The analysis at the mythic level suggests, therefore, that the PSAs' message is quite clearly compromised. The criticism of secondhand smoking as presented in them works by criticizing key American values, but it also supports others.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

The primary question posed in this research is how messages are constructed in one anti-cigarette advertising campaign, and whether their structure dilutes or compromises the critical stance regarding smoking. By examining the ads using the semiotic method, the conclusion is that the three advertisements – “Drive,” “Car Seat” and “Baby Monitor” do have a consistent message against smoking, but that it is also compromised and contradictory.

In the first level of signification, that is the denotative level, the ads were looked at in detail and patterns were established. In the connotative level, the second level of signification, meanings and structures were made out of the patterns that were identified, and the code required to understand the messages was also identified. The codes required to understand the ads are recognized as those that are common to a particular culture, being a part of that culture enables the audience to understand the message. Finally at the mythical level – the third level of signification, using Roland Barthes’s ‘myth’ as the basis, popular ideologies within the message were examined and were critiqued in the ads.

Popular American ideologies such as “opportunity,” “freedom,” and “individualism” are seen in a negative light. They are seen as a sign of selfishness and the ads show that they are not available to all people.

The problem of smoking is seen as an individual problem, it is seen as the failing of the individual. It is seen as a selfish act regardless of the consequences to other people.

Yet, this does not present the complete picture, the coercive power of tobacco company promotions as well as the equally coercive addictive qualities of nicotine are left out of the picture. The effects of nicotine are addictive thereby limiting the individual's ability; this is not dealt with in the ads, compromising the ads. Further the ads contradict widely held beliefs when they portray freedom and individualism as the problem, thus compromising the meaning of the ads.

As mentioned at the very beginning of the study, the findings of this study can be very useful for industry practitioners. By understanding the value of semiotics and the role that it plays in message construction, advertising practitioners can build ads that are efficient and serve their purpose in a better way.

Directions for further research

This study does not directly deal with the issue of smoking; instead it deals with the process of message construction using a semiotic analysis. Secondhand smoking as an issue can be explored and other campaigns can be examined. When talking about message construction, another possibility is for future researchers to interview the producers/writers of these ads examined here, this will give a clearer insight of the choices made by the ad filmmakers of these ads.

The three levels of signification have been explored in this analysis, yet there are many more semiotic elements within each. Further, each of these semiotic elements has a lot to offer. For example, in the connotations, only a few paradigms

have been explored, the dimensions of gender, power, relationships, personal space, etc. have not been dealt with. These are possible research ideas that can be explored.

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APPENDIX

TRANSCRIPTS OF THE VIDEO TEXTS

“Drive with Unite Georgia” – 30 seconds

LS – Slightly winding road, car approaching the camera
Sound of the car

MS – African American woman, mid 30s, driving with Caucasian man, late 20s, seated next to her. He reaches into his shirt pocket (left side using right hand) takes out a cigarette and lights it up using a match. The woman glances sideward at him. As he throws the match, the woman turns the steering wheel towards him, bending her body towards him.

BGM / Match striking

LS – Wooded area, curved road, car approaches camera and then flies over the top of the camera

BGM / Sound of car

MS – the car lands in front of the camera, side view of the car, it almost crashes but does not break

MS – man’s terrified face is seen as he is bouncing around inside the car, he has the cigarette in his mouth and his hand is outstretched in protest, in contrast the woman’s face is determined

BGM/ Sound of car / Man shouting – “Look out for the tree”

MS – of the car bumping and scraping against the shrubbery

LS – from the inside of the car through the windshield show the tree

CU – of the trunk of the tree from the inside of the car

BGM / Sound of the car

MS – car swerves and avoids the tree

MS – shot of the car going away from the camera, the back of the car, (BGA 497, dusty red, compact car)

MS – of man staring incredulously at the woman who has a smug look on her face

M – “What are you doing?”

F – “you’re endangering my life”

LS – Back of the car driving away from the camera

F – “just returning the favor” Caption on screen – “Each year 53,000 people die from secondhand smoke”

On screen – “UNITE GEROGIA

We can all live without secondhand smoke”

Ominous music

“Car Seat with UNITE GEORGIA” – 30 seconds

CU – woman (early 30s brunette short hair, wearing mauve sweater with denim overall) strapping a baby (approx. 12-15 months old, wearing a delicate creamy white crocheted sweater) into the car seat.

M – that was fun this morning wasn’t it?

B – baby sounds

M – We’ll go home and get some lunch. Ready? Ready to go? Good girl.

B – Baby sounds

MS – of little girl with arms outstretched towards mother

B – baby sounds

MS – of woman getting into the front seat of the car (over the shoulder shot) she looks at the baby in her rearview mirror

Sound of the car door opening

CU – of baby who smiles at the mother

Sound of a cigarette lighter

CU – of woman (over the shoulder shot) we can see her blowing the smoke out of her mouth and nostrils. She adjusts the rearview mirror to show the baby. Caption on the screen, “Each Year Up To 26,000 Kids Develop Asthma From Secondhand Smoke”

Sound of the woman smoking

B – blabbering

M – Is my little princess safe and sound back there?

On screen – “UNITE GEROGIA

We can all live without secondhand smoke”

Ominous music

“Baby Monitor with UNITE GEORGIA” – 30 seconds

CU – of baby monitor (from a side angle) red light blinking to show that the baby is crying one side of screen is dark

Sound of a baby crying

CU – the monitor is slowly enveloped in darkness (very slow pan) the outline of the baby monitor is visible and the red light on the led screen is seen.
Crying of the baby gets louder

ECU – of the LED panel displaying the ‘sound light’
Sound of the baby coughing and crying

CU – baby monitor (from the opposite angle) with a little bit of light on it. Caption on the dark portion of the screen “Every year 300,000 babies get sick from secondhand smoke”
Sound of baby crying

CU – more light on the baby monitor
Sound of baby crying and coughing

ECU – of the ‘sound light’ bars on the LED
Baby crying and coughing

CU – of baby monitor, with a pair of adult hands coming closer towards it.
Baby crying and coughing

ECU – the monitor is dark and the hands turn off the monitor Caption on the screen
“But some people just don’t hear that”
Silence

On screen – “UNITE GEROGIA
We can all live without secondhand smoke”
Ominous music