

Chapter 14: Visual Persuasion

Key Terms and Concepts

images as a vital element in persuasion	fostering stereotypes
picture superiority	images in advertising
iconicity	prevalence of advertising in society
indexicality	media clutter
syntactic indeterminacy	anti-advertising
art as a form of persuasion	image-oriented advertising (a.k.a. image-based advertising)
doctrine of Social Realism	syntactic indeterminacy in advertising images
art as political propaganda	common associations in advertising
art as social activism	luxury brands
awareness through interpretation	aspirational brands
awareness through participation	authentic (a.k.a. genuine) brands
collaborative art	social status and elitism
social movement (Names Project) as art	sex or romance
cinematic persuasion	power, speed, and strength
narrative form of movies	youth culture
product placement	safety and security
intentional vs. unintentional persuasion	sense of place or belonging
embodiment of cultural values	shock ads
promotion of popular culture	creating social controversy
social proof	provoking public dialogue
modeling behavior	photojournalism as persuasion
Social Cognitive Theory	photos as iconic representations
Cultivation Theory	visual literacy (Box 14.1)
viewer identification	

Chapter Summary

- I. Images play an essential role in persuasion.
 - A. Traditional persuasion research has placed more emphasis on verbal or text-based messages than visual persuasion.
 - B. Images, nonverbal cues, and other visual phenomena are an integral part of persuasion as well.
 - C. The picture superiority effect suggests that pictures are more easily recognized and recalled than words.

- II. Images persuade in a variety of ways and on a variety of levels, including:
 - A. Iconicity: images can represent, or sum up, ideas and concepts. They serve as symbolic representations of things.
 - 1) Iconic images evoke emotional responses in receivers.
 - 2) Iconic images are selective; they can emphasize or de-emphasize certain features over others.
 - 3) Iconic images can distort or violate reality.

B. Indexicality: images possess a documentary quality.

- 1) Indexical images function as a form of sign reasoning or circumstantial evidence.
- 2) The documentary aspects of images can be misleading (i.e., images can lie).

C. Syntactic indeterminacy: images cannot convey logical relationships because they lack logical operators.

- 1) Images are incapable of specifying logical relationships such as “either-or,” “cause-effect,” or “if-then.”
- 2) Nevertheless, images can imply such relationships tacitly by establishing associations.
- 3) Images can also establish spatial and chronological relationships.

III. Art is an important, but often overlooked, form of persuasion.

A. Historically, art has been used to further political, religious, and social ends.

B. The arts have been used as tools for political propaganda, most notably by communist societies.

C. Artists use their art to make political and social statements.

- 1) Activist art seeks to increase social awareness about controversial issues.
- 2) Activist art persuades via awareness through interpretation and participation.
- 3) Activist art persuades through a collaborative process involving artists and observers.
- 4) The AIDS Memorial Quilt functions not only as activist art, but as a social movement as well.
- 5) Controversial artworks can provoke public discussion and dialogue.

IV. The cinema serves as an important source of influence on society.

A. Movies enjoy unique advantages over other mediums of persuasion.

- 1) Movies have the capacity to reach large numbers of people.
- 2) Movies follow a narrative form, lending greater believability to events depicted on film.
- 3) Viewers do not expect to be persuaded by movies, so they let down their guard. Thus, viewers are often exposed to product planting in films.
- 4) Movies can influence people intentionally or unintentionally.

B. Movies are capable of influencing viewers in a variety of ways.

- 1) American movies export Western values around the globe.
- 2) Movies promote prosocial values.
- 3) Movies promote popular culture (fashions, trends, lifestyles).
- 4) Movies model behavior, including risky, unsafe, and violent behavior.
 - a. Social Cognitive Theory suggests that adolescents view behaviors in the media and then imitate those behaviors as they provide cues for how to behave.
 - b. Cultivation Theory argues that the more exposure viewers have to violence on TV, the more they will come to adopt a vision of “a mean, scary world.”
- 5) Movies promote viewer identification with the characters.
- 6) Movies foster and perpetuate stereotypes.
 - a. The silver lining in all of this is that younger moviegoers tend to be more tolerant, if not completely colorblind to the stereotypes perpetuated in films.

V. Advertising is one of the most pervasive forms of influence in society.

A. Visual components of ads and commercials are key to their effectiveness.

B. Ads and TV spots persuade in a variety of ways.

- 1) Eye-catching visuals can help an ad stand out against the background of media clutter.
- 2) Anti-ads cater to cynical viewers by capitalizing on consumer skepticism toward advertising.
- 3) Image-oriented ads rely on syntactic indeterminacy by equating products or goods with idealized images and lifestyles.
 - a. Some common associations are social status and elitism, sex or romance, and youth culture.
 - b. Included are branding luxury, aspiration, and authentic (a.k.a. genuine) brands.
- 4) Shock ads are designed to be controversial in nature. They generate product awareness by creating a media controversy over the ad campaign.
- 5) Shock ads can backfire if, in consumers' minds, they go too far.

VI. Photojournalism is highly persuasive.

- A. Photographs serve as iconic representations of events.
- B. Photographs can sum up social problems or controversies.
- C. Photographs are not neutral, objective records of events. Photos reflect conscious and unconscious biases of the photographer.
- D. (Box. 14.1) Images should not be trusted. Developing a visual literacy, or the ability to critically analyze and evaluate visual communication, is just one of many strategies to avoid being duped by manipulated images.