
Review of Nescafe's Promotional Material

Semiotic analysis is useful for examining texts, to "unravel structures of meaning beyond mere presence or absence" (Van Zoonen: 74). In this essay semiotics will be used to discuss ways that gender is represented in a Nescafe advertisement published in CLEO. The idea of first, second and third orders of signification, as outlined by Liesbet Van Zoonen, can be used as one way to analyse this advertisement, by describing the literal elements of the image (denotation), interpreting the associations that the image draws upon (connotation), and finally identifying the manifest expression structuring the overall meaning of the advertisement.

Identification of relevant signs and their dominant aspects is the first step in making a semiotic analysis. This advertisement for Nescaf Espresso Coffee features male Greek/Australian celebrity Nick Giannopoulos (aka 'The Wog Boy'), striking a pose on the dance-floor. He wears a white t-shirt, black pants, shoes, belt, and leather jacket. His pose partly conceals a background logo, with only the words 'Strong', 'Spirited', and 'Dark', being fully recognisable. In the denotative sense these words represent the strong, dark and spirited flavour of Nescaf coffee. 'Nescaf' is printed boldly across the top of the page with the words 'Express Yourself' across the bottom of the page, denoting that drinking Nescaf allows you to Express Yourself. There is no real mention of coffee in this advertisement - if the audience didn't know what Nescaf was, they may have trouble understanding the ad. There are no pictures of coffee, and no coffee colours, eg brown, are used.

Second order signification examines potential cultural values and beliefs expressed by a sign (Van Zoonen: 76). The denotative signs provoke numerous connotative meanings. The words 'Strong', and 'Spirited' reflect the personality of the celebrity, while 'Dark' could be in reference to his ethnic background. His clothing, both the style and colour, are stereotypical of many young ethnics. The words 'Express Yourself' reflect the celebrity's personality: his stance and facial expression certainly show his own humorous form of expression. There are no women in this advertisement. This may be because the ad is in a women's magazine, and the male celebrity is being used to attract attention and sell the product.

The third order of signification identifies the manifest expression structuring the overall meaning of the advertisement, the dominant ideology (Van Zoonen: 76). The male has an active role in the image; he has presence, and asserts a certain power and attitude, traits which are common in male representations. However this advertisement may not be as effective if a white-anglo male was used because the terms 'Strong', 'Dark', and 'Spirited' would not be as easily applied. Therefore it could be said that this advertisement classifies ethnic men differently to white-anglo men. Similarly this ad would not have been as effective using an unknown person. It would be

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interesting to see the same advertisement using a female celebrity; the words 'Strong', 'Spirited' and 'Dark' are rarely applied to females.

It is interesting that ethnicity is being associated with 'Dark'. Binary opposition "ranks two polarised terms so that one becomes the privileged term, the other it's suppressed subordinated, negative counterpart" (Grosz: 1994), therefore if 'Light' is given the good connotation, 'Dark' is it's negative counterpart. Such opposition is often used to represent ethnicity, for example 'White' and 'Black', or 'Good' and 'Bad': which is not acceptable. However the most important and obvious meaning of this image is that the man is not being overpowered by anyone else, he is 'expressing himself', being who he wants to be, and is happy doing so.

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Through semiotic analysis it becomes evident that numerous interpretations and ideas can be derived from one text. Van Zoonen believes that:

"The multi-accentuality of signs, consisting in the capacity every sign has to signify more than one meaning, depending on the circumstances of its use, ensures that the meaning of the text is never nor determined only by the features of the text itself." (Van Zoonen: 79)

This ad can be seen as a simple advertisement for Nescaf, featuring a popular celebrity, or can be interpreted further, examining representations of gender, culture and ethnicity.

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