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XDMA 9122: Media Literacy -Fall 2018

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FINAL PROJECT

RE: "Advertising and the Perfect Storm" by Sut Jhally

"Advertising is the most powerful and sustained form of propaganda in human history and if unchecked, it's cumulative and cultural affects, will be responsible for destroying the world as we know it."

A harsh claim introduced by Sut Jhally (Ph. D –University of Massachusetts-Amherst) in the beginning statements made in the video *"Advertising and the Perfect Storm."* As a viewer, this proclamation initially raises the eyebrow as to the validity of the claim.

But upon reviewing the Media Literacy course materials, and watching the video until its completion, it has swayed my way of thinking to a degree of agreement with his thesis.

During the presentation of Mr. Jhally's lecture, he provides an analysis of media and the underlying messages, which touches upon the five core concepts provided by the Center of Media Literacy. I have come to concur with particular assertions made in Mr. Jhally's starting arguments in relation to the five concepts.

1. All media messages are constructed.

Someone or an organization can create a message. Media Literacy informs its students that *"media"* refers to all digital or electronic means, print or artistic visuals used to transmit a message.

The media defined is Radio, Television, Newspapers, Magazines, Film, and the Social Media/Internet. Photography and the arts also provide messages created by the artist.

Mr. Jhally encourages the members of society to understand where these messages are coming from and how they are affecting us individually and as a *culture*.

The CNN commercial ad- **"This is an apple"** demonstrates Mr. Jhally's view.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vckz6EAn30Y>

The commercial ad uses the slogan *"Facts First"*. CNN alludes to Ferdinand de Saussure's concept of *the signifier and the signified*. The commentator uses *the signified* (the image of the actual apple) and reiterates *"no matter how many times someone calls it a banana, it is still an apple."* *the signified* (the word)

The CNN commercial ad is in response to the images and messages being forwarded by the current Trump administration. The creation of alternative facts or misleading information being communicated to the United States population is not said outright, however it is being symbolized by the demonstration of the apple.

The apple in Christian tradition is an age-old symbol of knowledge and understanding (good and evil). It is also associated with the fall of man and the rise of sin (Book of Genesis). CNN's

slogan “*Facts First*” communicates to this viewer how our country is heading toward a similar path if we do not exercise our abilities to Analyze, Access, Evaluate and Communicate information competently (Media Literacy Education).

2. Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.

Mr. Jhally states that “*The prime function of media is to deliver us to advertisers. Their goal is to get us to look at something.*”

In order for this to occur, the message is forwarded by the advertising industry using images, language and sound. Leonardo da Vinci referred to “*the eye as the chief means for understanding most fully and abundantly.*” Ludwig van Beethoven was quoted as saying “*Music is the mediator between the life of the senses and the life of the spirit.*”

The Autonomous Individual, Realism, Emotionalism and Love of Technology are concepts used as tools for the advertising industry to communicate a message. They reach their goal by proper execution of these concepts.

In the commercial from Cadbury Inventor-**Go Madbury**, we see some of this being relied upon to attract the audience’s attention.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXAz4nLvFTE>

Cadbury is promoting a competition for the public to invent the next Cadbury Dairy Milk. The viewer is emotionally intrigued due to the movement and speed of the camera shots., the visible images and the playful rendition of song and sound. The end of the commercial characterizes the autonomous image and the sense of accomplishment.

The Microsoft commercial – **Surface Go and the Salmon Sisters** represents to the viewer Marshall McLuhan’s “*bridge biological inheritance and the environments created by technological innovation.*”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XnZ_J3l_0z4

The commercial implies the message of how a small business owner will benefit from technological innovation at an affordable price. The Surface Pro is portable and transferrable to any desired location as required by its new owner.

3. Different people experience the same media message differently.

The individuals of our society experience messages differently. This is due to many factors such as age, gender, education, etc. According to essayist John Berger “*the way we see is affected by what we know and what we believe.*” Media literacy education teaches the student that in order to see we need eyes, the brain and culture.

Mr. Jhally defines “*Culture is a space where society tells stories about itself. Values are articulated and expressed. Notions of good and evil are defined. Every society has a cultural space. In our society it is the advertisers that dominate the cultural space...where a consistent set of stories tells us how we should live.*”

“Everyone is affected by advertisements” as stated by Mr. Jhally. Regardless of who we are *“The lenses that we look at the world, is being dominated by advertising .”*

This leads to advertisers molding our cultural spaces and identifying the target audiences for specific advertisements. According to the marketing firm M3 Agency

“A target audience is the group of people you want to hear, see, and interact with your messaging with the aim of turning them into loyal customers....getting your message to the right people at the right time in the right way represents the best chance for you to increase your bottom line. Companies can waste tens of thousands of dollars if they have a well-crafted message, but send it to the wrong people who aren’t most likely to buy their products or services!”

<https://www.m3agency.com/importance-target-audience/>

4. Media have embedded values and points of view.

Our current culture is accustomed to various forms of media and advertisements that initially seem harmless. Mr. Jhally claims *“Individual ads may appear banal, but they carry a single unifying message...they are carriers of a much broader ideology that is the threat.”*

Mr. Jhally indicates that messages and values embedded in advertisements *“create a culture to which desire and identity are to be fused with commodities. The way to happiness is through consumption of objects. Things will make us happy... It has made us addicts.. culture is an adjunct to the system of production and consumption.”*

The Nordstrom 2018 Anniversary Commercial- **Your wardrobe is calling** is an example.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u2ZtOGxB8bk>

The commercial communicates Mr. Jhally’s term *“We are what we buy.”* The Nordstrom commercial pushes an emotional urgency to purchase (Sale currently on- limited time only). The viewer is presented with images of the latest fashions and how this is a wake up call (telephone ringing) from your inner fashionista to buy (the autonomous individual).

Our culture is being trained to associate brands with ideas. We are attracted to the *“fetishism of commodities- to make objects as important as people are.”* It has been integrated in our lifestyles and daily activity for years. Mr. Jhally indicates we have become a culture that will do anything to feed our habits under the illusion it will produce happiness.

Another selection is the commercial from VISA- **Finding new finish lines.**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U_5DMO-Jziw

VISA’s slogan *“You keep finding new finish lines, we help you cross them”* is the message also appealing to the autonomous individual/shopper. The visual images of sport competitors, with the music and lyrics of the commercial, sends the message of self-accomplishment and how the usage of VISA credit line is the tool for achievement.

5. Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power.

Mr. Jhally proclaims “ *The entire media system has been developed as a delivery system for marketers...The advertising industry was created to ensure commodities are converted to money form /profit.*”

Mr. Jhally’s lecture emphasizes that the media defined derives a majority of its financial support from advertisers. Due to this reliance, the advertisements that consumers are subjected to have dramatically increased. Our society is bombarded with messages through advertisements.

According to a recent article posted on investcro.com titled “*Social Media Ad Spending – Statistics and Trends*” by Ayat Shukairy, just with U.S. social media advertising alone, it is estimated to see a 194% revenue increase by end of 2018 (reaching \$15 billion). This apparently translates to a 24% annual growth rate. The article goes on to write as an example how Facebook ads have risen by 54% from last year. They are considered the most preferred social media platform for advertisers (92% standing).

<https://www.invespcro.com/blog/social-media-ad-spending/>

Comments

I must admit prior to attending the Media Literacy course, as a consumer I would have taken Mr. Jhally’s initial statements lightly.

I previously evaluated my personal situation to be *happy*. I assumed the co-workers and people I associate with to be generally *happy*.

After viewing the video “*Advertising and the Perfect Storm*”, the utter truth is apparent to me of how I have been a targeted consumer by the advertising industry and the businesses they are laboring for.

Mr. Jhally made the claim “ *In our culture, it is the stories and values of the advertisers that dominate the spaces*”. He further stressed the advertisers delivering of certain types messages/values:

***Happiness- The way to happiness is through purchasing of goods.
Economic Growth = Good***

Mr. Jhally declares “*Your inner self will be expressed in the outer world by what we consume*”. He also quotes the statement “*Advertising does not mirror how they are acting, but how they are dreaming*”.

At least, that is what advertisers want you to hold valid.

Advertisements associated clothing, automobiles, real estate, techno gadgets, etc. as an outer expression of my autonomous image.

In my youth, I believed that substantial gratification came from buying the latest and greatest available. I admittedly tried to “*keep up with the Jones*” as the expression is stated and encouraged my purchasing. I associated affection towards objects similar to the affection of a person.

But I did not formerly correlate any of the influences from the various forms of media or advertisements with my happiness. Negative experiences were not the consequences from the messages derived from various forms of media.

I have now come to the realization that was my illusion.

The consequence of continual purchasing tends to result in enormous debt.

In the past, my family experienced its effects and that did not provide any pleasure. Credit cards and lines of credit provide instantaneous acquisitions of goods. However credit card companies will effectively remind the consumer that “cash” is still required and must be paid accordingly (+ additional interest).

This will result in the consumer working longer hours and sacrificing in other areas of life.

But it all leads to the ability of choice.

Do we go along with the advertisers and their claims?

This is where Media Literacy Education is quite valuable to the consumer. The competency of understanding the terms “*ACCESS, ANALYZE, EVALUATE and COMMUNICATE*”.

The ability to interpret the messages being transmitted to us by advertisers is essential to make proper choices. Media Literacy empowers critical thinking.

As an individual of society, I am in contact with various means of media throughout my daily activities. I still listen and view what is presented to me by advertisers. I can still easily be swayed to a frivolous purchase or a certain point of view.

However due to the attendance of the Media Literacy course, I hold it has given me the tools to a better understanding of the advertising industry and the media around me.

During the beginning of the class, our first handout referred to the statement “*Human sight is intelligent*”. I may use this out of context, but intelligence is the key to our final choices.

As I have grown older, my ability to differentiate between my “wants” and “needs” has resulted in the conclusion objects are ***not*** equivalent to bringing happiness.

I have established a set of priorities and a cash reserve is of importance. My spending curtailed and household budgeting upheld, decide if a monetary transaction is made.

Will advertising be responsible for destroying the world, as we know it?

I cannot say it will or won't. Mr. Jhally's assertions are quite compelling, and consumption is out of hand.

Society and culture has progressed in many ways for the positive and capable to in this area.

I may come across naive in my thought process, however a belief in a higher power is ingrained in my nature. The human factor is still prevalent and the doctrine of conscious. I side with the hope of our society awakening from its slumber. Greed is set aside and logic reigns.

I do not have a crystal ball nor do I have the ability to foresee future events, but I blindly aspire for positive advancement.