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Visual Culture and Personality Psychological Security

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Abstract

The process of advertising effects via its visual practices on psychological security of personality is complex and contradicting. The study involving two hundred respondents was carried out in three Russian cities (Moscow, Yekaterinburg and Krasnoyarsk). It identified destructive factors of advertising influencing everyday life's psychological aspects. Types of advertising presenting the greater danger to psychological security of personality are indicated.

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1. Introduction

There exists a long list of the Western theorists who greatly contributed to the study into visual culture including such distinguished authors as R. Barthes [1], M. Foucault [2], J. Derrida [3], J. Lacan [4], G. Debord [5], T.G. Mitchell [6], K. Silverman [7], J. Baudrillard [8], G. Pollock [9]. However, the way to "iconic turn" was open in the New Time epoch when man-subject transformed into Observer and Contemplator (Flaneur) of the esthetic picture of the world via optic devices (telescope, microscope, magnifying glass) watching closely in order to the world-as-object, the world-as-stage would be in the best set design and composition. As M. Yampol'sky indicates [10], modes of Observer and Flaneur's vision not only facilitate panoramic view extension but also enable to see the "details", in particular, to discover uniqueness of the thing overlooked by others. The shift from semiotic and structural content of the advertising message discourse interpretation allows one to consider advertising image poly-semantic system entirety offering a range of possible meanings to the perception

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subject. Depending on advertising effects practice, social attitudes and professional formats image categorization and interpretation are treated in terms of dialogue mode characteristic of science development. “The category “postnonclassical” actively enters academic discourse in the attempt to describe the modern paradigmatic shift reflecting the necessity to surpass epistemic limits of non-classical scientific picture.” [11].

The concept “gaze” that set aside such visual concepts as sight, vision, eye, has acquired great popularity. In J.-P. Sartre’s wording [12], an eye is just “foundation for a gaze” directing and orienting it to this or that visual object. Unlike an eye a gaze no longer belongs to the human body-it transgresses it, comes out of its limits, merges with things and faces, with visual objects themselves. As M. Merleau-Ponty [13] remarked, «gaze is the embodiment of ‘the seeing’ in ‘the seen’, quest for “self” in the ‘seen’ to which it belongs”, it does not belong to the eye but to the world which it is looking at.”

Modern studies into advertising effects specifics widely use various analytical predictive methods, based on linear programming, theory of mass servicing, theory of coupling, probability theory, network planning, economic and statistic modeling expertise, role-play, etc. The stability of schemes underlying advertising responsiveness is largely determined by the fact that their source is that culture where a person was raised. The schemes concerning different objects and phenomena perception are designed depending on the extent to which these objects are meaningful for this or that culture, thus attracting attention to essential information and influencing what comes to minds of different cultures’ representatives first. A social system in the core of an individual’s advertising responsiveness is realized in structuring certain events and relations and is determined by cultural, normative and role factors. The cultural component of social system responsible for symbolic perception of the brand content is tied up with language, values, attitudes, beliefs, traditions existing in the society. Brand perception in the context of social system is also defined by behavior patterns and norms – shared by the group members’ expectations regarding proper conduct, and by social roles as well.

Functional models of group interaction also assume realization of perception functions which are connected with the processes of symbolization and thinking. They largely depend on the group self-perception which, in turn, is built upon the basis of depicted in myths and fairy-tales ideologies and utopias of its spiritual sets that are widely used in the course of advertising communications and that signify characteristic of the given group boundaries for reality interpretations.

Alongside with discourse as a combination of verbal and printed texts with their own semantic field while being a fragment of symbolic communication, visual practices bear their own semantic field in a system of off-text premises. This phenomenon correlates with polyphony of discursive and visual logic. Discourse – analytical message on logging and including previous statements in the analytical procedure together with the transformation of the texts created in view of new discourse theses give grounds to study integrity opportunities (in terms of discourse psychology – polyphony) of the obtained semantic formations. The development of visual culture from the angle considered shows that its peculiarities in the same way as in case with textual practices shapes a certain specific image of understanding and treatment of social and communicative space.

In this interpretation a subjective approach to communicative procedures taking into account a subject’s gaze transformation potential in its permanent, liquid and correlating interaction with a perception subject, manifests its significance. Thus, psychologists emphasize the necessity to interpret “image as representation emerging in the course of social cognition, upon reflecting certain image-bound characteristics by perception subjects with regard to super inducement of kind of creative element connected with the former person’s experience, values, motives, empathy and superstitions, etc. into the image being perceived.” [14].

In modern systems of communication effects, symbolic connotative formations advertising messaging techniques gain a central position.

In the process of individuals’ behavior focus regulation in group perspective advertising plugs in a group and takes into account group emotionalism which is shaped when a person joins this group, influencing ad’s appeal treatment.

Postmodernist advertising uses a marginally simplified appeal woven of clichéd, well known words and expressions. To add enticement to the copy deconstruction of language norms takes place and decoding the meaning catches consumers' attention and involves them in "riddle my riddle" game. Hence, inquiring character of advertising which creates the situation of the dialogue involving recipients into meaning interpretation given the abundance of connotations of one and the same message after a single reading of which one can omit irony, explicit or implicit quotation, intertextuality. Therefore, the details in postmodernist advertising copies acquire particular significance at their meaning interpreting since in line with postmodern esthetics there are no principal or primary or secondary points, even insignificant, on the surface, fragments can generate new meaning, new interpretations.

Advertising being a poly-coded text is characterized by redundancy of visual images both in terms of their diversity and explication frequency, which leads to desensibilisation, and, ultimately, requires the most powerful, hyper expressive effective techniques. A gaze's transgressiveness gives rise to new vision techniques such as videophilia (crush on images), videomania (to be obsessed and captivated by images), social voyeurism (a mass desire to observe not only easily visible but also the hidden over the veil the visible) and, finally, social exhibitionism (mass aspiration to "to show themselves off" and "collect" strangers' looks)[15].

Visual images create peculiar "visual noise" of everyday life. That is why it is not uncommon for companies in their promo-actions and campaigns to employ aggressive visual components such as spectacular shocking scenes that are far from being connected with the company products.

All this raises the question about security of visual advertising practices which modify "familiar picture" of everyday life thereby reconstructing a consumer inner "self". As researchers specify, the problem of personality security "depends on mass media impact via the use of numerous devices and techniques which ruin traditional stereotypes, values and distort his world picture by intruding into an individual' inner world" [16].

Any advertising visual image represents a rhetoric figure that begins to suggestively influence and dominate over consumers' consciousness triggering "déjà vu" effect and persuading them in the reality of what they have not seen, replacing thus their personal experience by fictitious one. This very paradox is the driving force of social and psychological impact on a visual image due to which he finds himself in the situation of 'no-self-control' security [17]. In this case, advertising effects somewhat cut the "ground" of his everyday well proven practices from under a subject's feet turning him into the object of manipulation.

2. Method

Monitoring agency NewsEffector [18] in collaboration with Regional Research Fund "Regions of Russia" carried out the study "Russian cities Happiness Index". The purpose of the study was to make a conditional happiness index in order to understand in what place in Russia the happiest people live. The survey involved 26900 residents of 100 largest Russian cities. One of the questions asked was whether people felt secure in their city. The results obtained show that living standard is important but it is not a decisive factor effecting the Russian' happiness. The essential criteria are such indicators as ecology and security level. It was found that it is not Moscow, or other cities with more than a million population where the happiest people live. Moscow was 52nd, Yekaterinburg – 49th, Krasnoyarsk took the 37th place. Unexpectedly low rating of these cities is probably due to the fact that in spite of high income and satisfactory city planning and organization they had low scores in regard to ecology and sense of security.

To draw light to advertising role in notions of personal security of Moscow, Yekaterinburg and Krasnoyarsk residents the survey was carried out. The sample consisted of 200 respondents including 70 participants from Moscow, 68 from Yekaterinburg and 62 from Krasnoyarsk.

The survey questions include those ones that deal with threats to a person's psychological security associated with advertising.

3. Results

The majority of the respondents (Moscow – 92%, Yekaterinburg – 64%, Krasnoyarsk – 89%) believe that advertising may be threatening to their psychological security.

Answering the question “what type of advertising carries the greatest danger” the subjects chose television advertising: (Moscow – 55%, Yekaterinburg – 50%, Krasnoyarsk – 43%). It followed by the Internet advertising: (Moscow – 34%, Yekaterinburg – 25%, Krasnoyarsk – 33%). The third place was taken by outdoor advertising: (Moscow – 11%, Yekaterinburg – 19%, Krasnoyarsk – 21%). It should be noted that respondents do not see any threats on the part of radio and print advertising. The possibility is that these types are not popular with the interviewees.

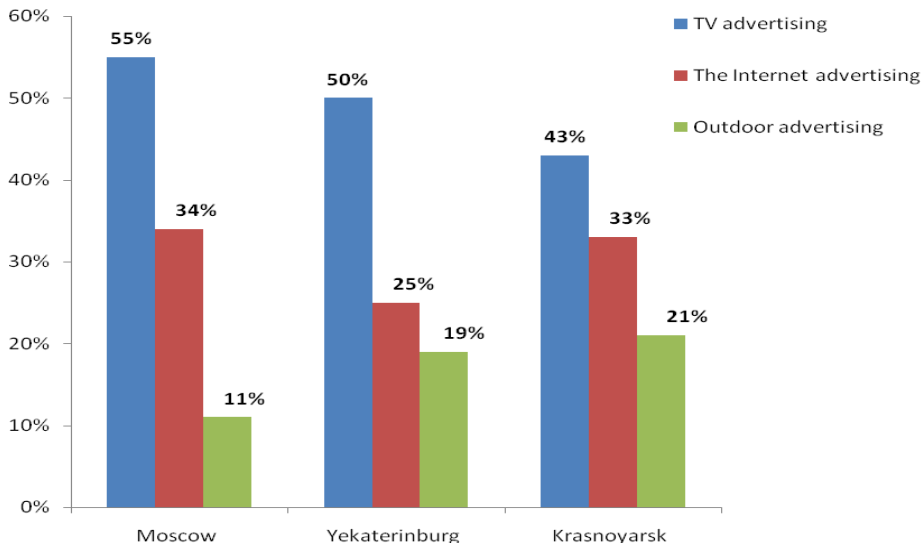


Fig. 1. Types of advertising producing the greatest danger.

Then the respondents were asked to indicate particular situations of threat-bound advertising effects. The results obtained state that the subjects from all three cities consider advertisements for cigarettes and alcohol to be threatening: (Moscow – 19%, Yekaterinburg – 17%, Krasnoyarsk – 18%). 25% of Yekaterinburg respondents indicated the danger involved in “losing weight” ads. Moscow and Krasnoyarsk subjects underlined the following threat bearing situations of advertising impacts: “aggressive ads zombiing and effecting sub-consciousness (10% and 11% correspondingly); interruption of popular TV programs (15% and 8% accordingly); hoardings and billboards worsen unfavorable situations on the roads, distract from road signs (10% and 6% respectively); bank credit advertising “easy” on the surface, enslaving in fact (7% и 5%), drugs and biologically active additives (6% и 5% correspondingly). The choice of Yekaterinburg respondents mark these negative and dangerous advertising effects: ads for stimulating males sexual vigor (15%), ads with elements of erotic (10%), billboards and panels worsen unfavorable situations on the roads, distract from road signs (8%), advertising depicting violence (8%).

Respondents under survey from these three cities (Moscow, Yekaterinburg and Krasnoyarsk) suppose that the following advertising images or messages act more often than others in destructive manner for everyday life: a sugary image of “model family” (16%, 14% and 11% correspondingly), “glossy” high-flyer character (15%, 19%, and 16% accordingly), a housewife feeding her family with broth cubicles and fast food needles (18%, 16% and 13% respectively), “heroes” endorsing wonder remedy for male impotency (11%, 10% and 15% accordingly), social advertising against abortion – the image of “ripped up” child (10%, 9% and 15% respectively), “every ad hosts an image of a person who lies” (14%, 10%, 11% correspondingly), “Arshavin with chips and pepsi” (5%, 4% and 6% correspondingly), advertising of ladies’ hygienic items (7%, 4% and 6% accordingly).

In general, advertising is perceived by respondents negatively, as a permanent threat to human personality. In respondents’ eyes, advertising “zombiing”, “make you waste money on unnecessary things”. It is “built on lies” and misleads consumers. Young people are annoyed by advertising spam in the Internet. Doctors react with pain to unfair medicine advertising, journalists are overwhelmed by elastic conscience of endorsers (especially celebrities). One more destructive factor is advertising messages’ primitivism (“we are taken for idiots!”) and “glamorous images of beautiful, trouble-free life”.

4. Discussion

The population of Russia, especially young generation, has been under massive psychological bombarding by advertising. Billboards, TV and PCs’ screens pour flows of violence, aggression and erotica. It is opinion of many that nowadays in Russia a certain “pepsi” generation is sustainably being formed. Its motto is “take everything from life” (you deserve it!), the generation for whom a brand value of sparkling water, cellular phone or toilet water equals the value of a scientific breakthrough, a master-piece or healthy life style. A quite understandable advertiser’s desire to make more money makes him “forget” that every consumer of advertising product is, first of all, a one-of-a-kind personality. Thus, O.Y. Zotova’s [19] in her study into security notions held by different groups, underlines that “the majority of respondents have lost traditional social defensibility, which results in lowering of psychological resistance resource to environment impacts”.

“Liquid modernity” with its temporal gaps anew actualizes the implication of the past in terms of modern advertising practices being, in essence, the search for pioneer communicative strategies, effecting a consumer. However, representation of the “glorious past” in advertising is a process which, on the one hand, marks social need for popular history of the Russian society. On the other hand, it gives advertising the right to construct reality forms, decide what historic names, events could be built in everyday life and become mundane consciousness’ and language facts demanded by the society. In other words, the process of “negotiations”, talks

with its past, real history interpretations realized via advertising practices deserves a liberal share of interest and attention as a material for new self-identification models of the Russian society.

Therefore, social and psychological aspects of personality security is antinomy-problem (personality-information environment), which gives little hope for easy and evident solution. Thus, recognizing the primary role of advertising in information flow it would not be wise to assess it one-sidedly (positive/negative). Institutional context of visual culture implies freedom for interpreting image connotations with the account of social involvement. In this sense subject of perception becomes the subject of his psychological security.

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