

Media's Exploitation of Its Viewers' Perception Processes

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### Abstract

The following paper focuses on the methods that the news media and advertisements use to exploit the perceptions of its viewers. Advertisers and news sources send their messages to society with specific pre-conceived motives in mind; therefore, the methods and phrasing of these messages is crucial in influencing the viewers' perceptions. Throughout the focus on the media-related perception process, several themes are identified that supply pertinent information and are supported by both research articles and the textbook by Adler and Proctor (2011). The first theme deals with the way in which advertisers convey underlying messages to exploit the interpretation stage of its viewers' perception processes. Secondly, news sources must attend to the viewers' selection processes because viewers are not interested by every news story. Lastly, the messages proposed by the media will be interpreted differently across different societies, countries, and cultures. The paper will elaborate on these three themes, arise questions for future research, and explain limitations that are currently being faced in research of the media's influence on viewers' perception processes.

*Keywords:* Advertisements, News, Media, Perception, Influence

### Media's Exploitation of Its Viewers Perception Processes

Every free moment of television is crammed with commercials, as well as every square inch of athletic venues being plastered with advertisements. In a culture surrounded by such a large amount of advertisements, people are forced to interpret and perceive the messages being projected onto them on a daily-basis. Without knowing it, people cycle through the perception process every time they receive a message. Along with advertisements, society is constantly being exposed to the news media. When advertisers and news sources relay messages to their audiences, they always have an underlying message that they wish to impose upon the audience. By exploiting the already mentioned perception process, these advertisement agencies and news stations can better ingrain their messages into its audience. In an advertisement for instance, companies always plan to encourage the viewers to feel a sense of necessity for their product. By simply phrasing a commercial script in a specific way, they can influence viewers into wanting their products. In news stories, newscasters realize that everyone will not be interested by their specific story. To attract their selected audience, news sources realize they must exploit their viewers' perceptions in order to attract their attention. Being in a culture surrounded by advertisements and news stories, it is important to identify the ways that these media outlets exploit their viewers' perception processes.

### Literature Review

In recent years, experts have developed studies that investigate the ways that advertisements and news media exploit its viewers' perception processes. While every study concentrates on proving specific points, several converge on distinct themes that represent practices shared by all advertisements and news media. Adler and Proctor (2011) provide information that enhances these common themes while also conceptualizing the perception process. Given that these articles were written in 2009 or earlier, the information is more adequate to explain society's perceptions in today's culture.

#### **Exploitation of the Interpretation Stage**

According to Adler and Proctor (2011), interpretation is the stage of the perception process that determines how people respond to personal acts and messages. Many advertisements strive to exploit the interpretation stage of its viewers' perceptions. While advertisements are designed to sell specific products, they are doing so by conveying underlying messages to the viewers in order to enable them into purchasing the product. People generally refuse to purchase products without a reason for doing so. To achieve this, advertisements phrase their delivery messages in a way that gives the viewers a reason to purchase the product. Advertisements exploit people's perception by using their self-concepts to their advantage. According to Luther (2009), Japanese male and female teenagers compared themselves with the models after viewing sample advertisements. These comparisons were linked to an increase in the importance placed on artificial means of enhancing appearance. By using social comparison to form their self-concepts, people's perceptions of outside messages are influenced. According to Trampe, Stapel, and Siero (2011), attractiveness-relevant products in messages can affect whether the viewers think about themselves when they see the advertisement and also how they think about

themselves. Advertisement agencies want their viewers to reevaluate themselves, which can cause them to feel obligated to purchase the product.

### **Attracting Viewers Through Their Selection Process**

People are not interested nor influenced by every news story. Many different things will influence the selection process that people use when attending to stories. In order to attract viewers, news distributors must identify methods of attracting viewers to their stories. According to Adler and Proctor (2011), people cannot attend to every message they are faced with; therefore, they are forced to choose which ones to ignore. People are attracted to messages that are intense and capture their attention. According to Chung, Nam, and Stefanone (2012), readers of online news sources are more attracted to articles that show obvious signs of credibility. They suggest that news sources with hypertextuality, or stories with links to outside sources, give readers confidence in its credibility. According to Wirth, Schemer, and Matthes (2010), people in positive moods generated by commercials find the broadcasted news stories to be more entertaining, relaxing, and credible. By choosing to run advertisements that cause positive moods, news broadcasters can attract viewers because they will find the stories to be more entertaining.

### **Different Perceptions Across Cultures**

The messages proposed by the media will be interpreted differently across societies, countries, and cultures. When the media wants to portray an advertisement or news story to a specific audience of people, they must first grasp the traditions and beliefs of those people in order to accurately communicate the message. Adler and Proctor (2011) discuss many different cultural practices that can cause communication issues when presented in the wrong culture. Differences like these can cause a body of people to misinterpret an advertisement or message

being presented to them. According to Jeffres, Atkin, and Neuendorf (2011), if a group of people perceive a set of values to be linked to their ethnic identity, they are more likely to see this set of values in entertainment media. This means that people are more likely to pay attention to the news if they perceive their own beliefs to be incorporated into the messages.

### **Limitations**

Because no study can be perfectly thorough, it is imperative to list limitations that restrict better study. Several of the sources only focused on teenagers or children's perceptions of the news or advertisements. While many advertisements are focused on selling products to children, there are many advertisements designed to sell products to adults. In further research, it will be important to include adults in the experiment so determine whether their self-image is affected by the underlying messages of advertisements. Secondly, many of these sources either include only American samples or only non-American samples. With one of the themes of this paper involving the affects that cultural differences have on perception, it is important to expand the research to a mixture of foreign and domestic study samples. Doing this would allow foreign and domestic research to be gathered and compared.

### **Future Research**

While the articles cited in this research paper along with the text from Adler and Proctor (2011) assisted greatly, it is still important to note that further studies must continue. Culture will continuously evolve, along with people's exposure to advertisements and news media. While this paper has successfully pointed out many themes that pertain to the media's exploitation of its viewers' perception processes, it has led to some suggestions for future research on this topic. It has been noted that phrasing messages differently in both news media and advertisements can cause differences in viewers' perceptions of the messages. It would be interesting to observe the

affects that projecting message in different ways has on the audience. Also, it is shown that many news stories send underlying messages to its readers. It would be interesting to see studies that link specific news casting styles and successful projections of underlying messages upon the viewers.

In conclusion, this research paper explains the ways in which advertisements and news media can influence the perception processes of viewers. It is shown that advertisements and news media have been successful causing viewers to perceive a message in specific ways. It is also important to note that before people interpret a message, they must first be attracted by it. Because of this, news media and advertisements have focused on attracting specific audiences that will be interested in their message subject. When moving across cultures, the media must consider the beliefs of the people when projecting messages unto them. While the research articles used in this paper sufficiently prove their specific points, there will always be more areas of this subject to be investigated. The following questions can provide future researchers with direction in studies related to viewers' perceptions of advertisements and news media.

RQ1: Are people in certain cultures more susceptible to certain marketing strategies than others?

RQ2: While this study focused on viewers' perceptions of advertisements and news media, would these common themes also apply to viewers' perception of lessons taught in movies?

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