

The Concept of Excellence in Nike Advertisement “Unlimited You”

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ABSTRACT

This thesis mainly deals with Barthes's process of signification, denotation, connotation, and Lakoff's and Johnson's theory of metaphor in order to reveal the excellence concept in the branding of Nike video commercial “Unlimited You”. The focus of the writer's analysis is the verbal and visual expressions in the video commercials. Those theories being used will help the writer in analysing the excellence concept and the use of verbal and visual expressions in the advertisement, then, figuring out the excellence concept used in the video commercials. The writer analyses one video commercial of Nike under the concept of “Unlimited Series” which is “Unlimited You”. This research uses qualitative content analysis by Krippendorff (2004) and Schreier (2012) to describe the concept of excellence in a systematic way. From the analysis, the writer found out that Nike aims to motivate and inspire its audience through the excellence concept. Furthermore, Nike defines the excellence concept as a form of success which comes in the form of ability to pass through the challenge. Nike associates success with high endurance, confidence, and optimism as pictured in the video commercials. The verbal and visual expressions are aimed to inspire and motivate the audiences to be optimistic, have confidence, and have high endurance to achieve success

Key Words: Advertisement of Sports Apparel, Process of Signification, Denotation, Connotation, Metaphor.

INTRODUCTION

Nike, an athletic apparel manufacturer, uses emotion, credibility, and reasoning to capture prospective customers attention. Nike, becomes the top industry by making many advertisements, it continues to reinforce their brand with their unique and innovative ways. We all know that the most catchy tagline of Nike is “Just Do It” that has been around the world more than twenty five years since 1988 (Sharkey, 2015). With that idea, Nike has proven itself to be the best company in advertising their product. Through the use of language, product naming, and tagline, which is essential in building the image as the world's leading supplier of athletic shoes and sports apparel, Nike become a major manufacturer of sports equipment. However, Nike changes their concept in their marketing strategy this on July 2016 through a 120-second advertisements with the title of the video commercial “Unlimited You”.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This study seeks to describe the use of verbal and visual expression in the excellence concept within Nike's advertisement “Unlimited You”. In doing so, this study focuses on the theory of signification process developed by Barthes to interrogate the association within signs to define meanings since Barthes's process of signification is based on Barthes's guiding principle which is to interrogate the “falsely obvious”; or to unveil meanings hidden in cultural practices or perspective through association of meanings and “modes of relationship” as meaning is a product of cultural perspective (Chandler, 2007, p.139). As the name implies, Barthes's process of signification is a process involving several steps/milestones which puts meaning into circulation in three parts; denotative meaning, connotative meaning, and myth. Denotative meaning talks about literal meaning or things visible to the eye. Language is a set example of denotative meaning. Connotative meaning talks about in-depth meaning related with cultural

belief/ practices and personal association. Myth, although will not be further discussed here, is a connotative meaning that is circulated and treated as a cultural belief which has been put into practices for generations. Understanding Barthes's guiding principle and his theory is a priority in this study as it will create a better understanding in defining the meaning through association between signs or between signifier and signified. More importantly, it is because the concept of excellence is based on the process of signification as the excellence concept associates the characteristics of excellence with another characteristics.

Besides process of signification, the writer also used theory of metaphor which is always regarded as a part of process of signification as metaphor operates at the connotative level in the process of signification and plays through the identity of signifier in the form of a world-play. Metaphor talks about the resemblance of a certain quality in a signifier with another signifier, thus, about a certain signifier through another signifier which resembles its quality. For instance, if one is compared to a fox or a snake, it would be to suggest that the human is as cunning as a fox or a snake as the three of them share the resemblance in the level of cunningness. So, the essence of metaphor talks about a certain thing (signifier) in the form of another thing (signifier). As Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p.3) explains, "Metaphor is the use of language to refer to something other than what it was originally applied to, or what it "literally" means, in order to suggest some resemblance or make a connection between the two things Therefore, according to them metaphors would be "an instances of non-literal language involving some kind of comparison or identification: if interpreted literally, they would be nonsensical, impossible, or untrue; the comparison in a metaphor is implicit"(2006, p.7). In that sense, metaphor always plays an important role in interrogating and interpreting the "falsely obvious" which involves world-play such as the tagline of the product in the advertisements. The theory is taken from Lakoff's and Johnson's "Metaphor We Live By" (1980, p.3-13).

METHODS

This research was conducted using Krippendorff's (2004) qualitative content analysis method combined with Schreier's (2012). Krippendorff defined content analysis as a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the context of their use (Krippendorff, 2004, p.18). Since this research sought to describe the concept of expressions in the excellence branding of Nike "*unlimited you*" in a systematic way, content analysis is the most suitable research technique to approach the matter as content analysis technique provides new insights, increases a researcher's understanding of particular phenomena, and informs practical actions. In addition, qualitative content analysis is the most suitable approach to analyze the meaning of an advertisement through the systematic practice of describing the meaning of qualitative material (Schreier, 2012, p.1). Furthermore, the most basic reason to use qualitative content approach is because the data were in the form of images in the videos on it and not in the form of numeric data, which makes qualitative analysis form more effective in reaching the research goals

Data analysis was the process after the writer had done the data collection completely. Some steps that the writer used in order to unveil the concept of the expression in the advertisements includes finding their denotative meaning in the dictionary (for verbal expression), find the association with the other expression, and find the aim of the use of the object of expression. In this analysis, both expressions correlate, and support each other in order to fully develop the meaning of the advertisement. Therefore, each one of them cannot be independent from one another and must be analysed while paying attention to the other expression by relating them together. The use of Barthes's process of signification and theory of metaphor in the analysis contribute much in reaching the goal of the research as the concept of the two theories give the writer new insights in explaining the concept of excellence in the analysis. The conclusion of this research unveils the use of visual and verbal expression in the excellence concept within Nike's video commercial "Unlimited You" from semiotics perspective.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In creating the concept of excellence within the advertisement, Nike uses a motivational plot in order to motivate its audience; making them feel capable of doing anything. In order to do so, Nike uses the concept within its tagline

“Unlimited You” to motivate people in bringing out the unlimited possibilities in each of them. The verbal expression in the commercials helps to associate the concept of excellence with motivational words signifying transcendence and confidence to signify “Unlimited You” and the concept of excellence within the commercial.

Table 1. Highlighted verbal expression in the first half of the Nike video commercial - Unlimited You

Excellence Concept	Semiotics Analysis	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Meaning
“Get out! I am winning!”	In pursuit of every sports where contenders hope while racing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hot-blooded • Youth (in the sense of competitiveness) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidence • Endurance • Competitive
“Now, I score every time I got the ball	Every time: used to measure how often sth happened, in this case, it is become a habitual thing that she would score a goal whenever she got the ball.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To win points, goals, etc in a game or competition. • Ace 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidence • Endurance • Achievement

In the first clip (Nike-Unlimited You), Nike uses verbal expression for conversational purposes in order to create a descriptive plot based on the reality. In the first half of the commercial, the narrator pretty much describes the activity of the athletes while uttering his hope for them which is responded with disbelief as their reality is far from the hope. From the highlighted verbal expression above, an aura of confidence, and determination could be felt from the used verbal expression which is expressed with a high-pitched tone of when the speaker is angry because the narrator disturbed him, or when he is about to lose and he refused to give up. On the other hand, the second highlighted verbal expression let out a feel of confidence, and achievement which is expressed because the speaker is certain that she scores every time she got the ball on her. In that sense, she is on a winning streak, and is certain and confident that she and her team will win the game. From the first half of the commercial, Nike aims to tell the

story progress to success of athletes which connotatively signifies confidence and endurance through the use of verbal expression in the form of conversation. In the first half of the commercial, Nike seems want to imply that success is a progress and a result of optimism and confidence.

Table 2. Highlighted verbal expression in the 2nd half of Nike commercial - Unlimited You

Excellence Concept	Semiotics Analysis	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Meaning
“Hey, I’m not done. Hey!”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Metaphorically means that the speaker can still do more than that. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hot-blooded • Youth (in the sense of competitiveness) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidence • Endurance • Competitive • Never give up
“It’s a warm up!”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Metaphorically means that everything he/she does is just a beginning of something greater 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sth you do before doing a particular sports or activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optimism • Confidence • Transcend • Endurance
“You said I could do amazing things”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Metaphorically means that the speaker is confident that he/she has a big potential inside him/her. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Big things, extraordinary things. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optimism • Confidence • Transcend • Endurance

Excellence Concept	Semiotics Analysis	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Meaning
“I have never lost”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Metaphorically means that everybody should have confidence in themselves in order to achieve something bigger 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always win on every competition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optimism • Confidence • Competitive • Endurance • Achievement
“Yes, he can”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone can achieve everything he/she wants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He could manage doing it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optimism • Confidence
“Psst, I got this”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Metaphorically means that the speaker has the skill required to do the activity/ stunt. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everything is under control. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optimism • Confidence • Endurance
Narrator: “I didn’t mean jump off a frickin’ cliff!”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cliff is an element of nature which is dangerous and has killed many people. • Doing activity which involves the cliff is understood as insane and extremely dangerous especially without safety gear. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A vertical rock exposure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disbelief

However, in the second half of the video commercial, Nike wants to say differently through its tagline “Unlimited Series” which metaphorically suggests more than what is discussed in the first half of the advertisement. Thus, the plot of the commercial does not stop at that. Instead, the story moves on with the plot picturing unusually extreme sport activity done by some stubborn people while leaving the

narrator in disbelief. Although most parts are handled by the visual expression in picturing the idea of unusually extreme sports activity, the verbal expression plays its role by associating the idea of extreme sports activity with words that metaphorically signify the idea of high endurance, never give up, optimism, confidence, and transcendence as reflected in table 4.2. By doing so, Nike aims to motivate people that success (which is metaphorically represented by the capability of doing unusually extreme sports activity) comes from high endurance, never give up, optimism, and confidence.

The support from the visual expression in the video commercial makes more sense of the motivational plot employed in the advertisement as the audiences could measure the degree of extremity of the activity by seeing the activity directly. Essentially, the visual expression is there for the audiences to see for themselves of what is meant by unusually extreme activities which are pictured in the advertisements. By doing so, the visual expression strengthens the motivational plot employed in the video commercial of Nike.



Figure 1. The highlighted visual expression in Nike's video commercial - Unlimited You

In the first clip, the video commercial starts by picturing several sport activities done by mediocre athletes and infants who cannot possibly do it right yet. The activities pictured there are used in accordance with the motivational plot to connotatively associate Nike Unlimited Series with optimism, hope, confidence, and transcendence in the form of motions which visually attract and might motivate the audiences better. The highlighted non-verbal expression in the first clip metaphorically express the idea of hope and optimism by picturing an infants who is helped doing the slam dunk. The highlighted activity reflects optimism and hope for slam dunk itself is an activity often done by professional athletes for it needs a lot of practices that it becomes associated with professional level of basketball athletes. However, the activities pictured in the first clip do not mean anything without the plot and the verbal expression which make the motivational plot interesting as it shows progress where the mediocre athletes grow into a professional athlete. It could be said that the excellence concept talks about the success story where people could become success with progress as long as they have confidence, and high endurance. The non-verbal expression supports the video commercial by strengthening the meaning of the motivational plot. Without the supports from the non-verbal expression, the motivational plot will not be as stronger as it is now as the verbal expression could not be able to vividly describe the extremity level of the sports activity pictured through visual expression.



Figure 2. The highlighted visual expression in the 2nd half in Nike’s video commercial - Unlimited You

The main idea of the video commercial of Nike - Unlimited You is to motivate its audiences that success needs endurance, optimism, confidence, and hard work. Different from the first half which express the idea of hope, and optimism, in the second half of the commercial, the non-verbal expression (visual expression) pictures some unusually extreme sports activities as highlighted in figure 2, which are rarely practiced as it possesses danger to the person doing it, to metaphorically describe success as the ability to pass through the challenges. The visual expression in the clip also tries to picture the idea of excellence related to the tagline “Unlimited You”, which actively tells that each person has unlimited possibilities reside within, by picturing the confidence in each athlete; believing that each of them will be able to pass through the challenge. That idea is fully described in the figure 2 which describes one of the extreme sports activity in details motion by motion. While picturing the degree of extremity within the activity, it also connotatively tells the main idea within as the activity requires a lot of practices, trials, and errors which could endanger a person’s life in its process which needs confidence, and endurance in doing so.



Figure 3. The use of Neymar as an actual professional athlete in Nike's video commercial - Unlimited You

However, the visual expression of Nike video commercial does not stop at that point as it further defines success to the next level by using actual professional athletes who are widely known throughout the world for their career in sports. Nike tries to use metaphor which pictures professional athletes as a signification of success which might be an inspiration to further motivate its audiences. The use of professional athletes as a metaphor in the video commercial is to picture successful people with connotatively signify the idea of success. Furthermore, the athletes are pictured as people who have a high endurance and is very confident in themselves to further hone their skills by doing unconventional training program. Then, their success is pictured with them dominating the game. By doing so, Nike wants to use professional athletes as a signification of success which is achieved through extreme training which requires confidence and high endurance. Essentially, the visual expression in the first video commercial define success by picturing unusually sports activity, and professional athletes with the aim to associate success with endurance and confidence while motivating its audiences. Its idea of excellence concept is pictured through the video commercial which connects the idea of success with high endurance, and confidence.

CONCLUSION

The writer comprehends that the branding concept of Nike "Unlimited Series" suggests excellence concept in it with the aim to motivate and inspire the audience. The tagline associates success with confidence, and high endurance within the commercial. To create a bigger impact in motivating the audience, Nike uses verbal expression to create the content. The non-verbal expression is used to picture the signification in the tagline although the non-verbal expression seems dominating in some of the video commercial. The success in inspiring and motivating the audiences through the content is created from the non-verbal expression which enhances the quality of the content relayed to the audiences. The further research pursuing this topic is best done by relating the advertisement with the product sales to describe how language is widely used in the business area by imprinting a certain images to audiences mind with the aim to increase sales.

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