

A Multimodal Analysis of H&M Video Commercial “A Magical Holiday”

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ABSTRACT

In indirect advertising, an advertisement does not boldly show the products on the video. The object of the study in this thesis is a video advertisement of a clothing line, H&M, consisting a story about a family in the holiday season. This thesis aims to show that commercials of H&M “A Magical Holiday” uses multimodality in order to attract the audience through six modes: linguistic, audio, spatial, oral, visual, and gestural modes. In this study, I analyzed the modes by Multimodal Discourse Analysis by Kress and Leeuwen onto the six modes to analyze the advertisement, using the study by Chan and Chia on modes in multimodality. This research is using qualitative analysis by Schreier (2012) since it deals with the connection between all the semiotic modes to bring the message of the advertisement. I analyzed the data by putting the scenes into 6 tables based on the modes. After that, I analyzed the interrelation between each modes. Based on the analysis, the modes helped the advertisers to convey the real message of the video. Beyond the moral message of the story, the advertisement is a marketing tool to promote their products.

Key Words: indirect advertising, multimodal discourse analysis, semiotic modes, H&M

INTRODUCTION

Wherever we live in this world, we would never be able to escape from advertisements. From a long time, advertisements have been one of the ways for a company to inform and as well to educate people about their products or services. To market the products, a company can do direct and indirect marketing. While direct marketing deals with direct selling to the potential customers, in indirect marketing, usually the products would be advertised in media such as TV, magazines, and such. With the fast-forwarding world, the internet is now a favorable platform to place the advertisement in addition to TV commercials. In a commercial video, there are also two types of advertising style used. One is the direct advertisement, a kind of the hard-selling type that would directly ask the viewers to buy the products. The other one is the indirect advertisement, an advertisement that does not boldly show the products on the video. Instead, they would place their products in a form of a story. Although some advertisers made indirect advertisements in spite of the cost of TV commercials, it is usually common to use direct advertisement to make the most of the expensive fee.

In the case of fashion industry, it is even more common to use direct advertising. For the past years, most clothing brands usually fill the one to two minutes of the slot to show off their clothes worn by popular models with a sprinkle of background music. However, indirect commercials have been the new trend over the years. The reason behind it is that the advertisers want to reach the audience's feeling more. Harris & Sanborn stated in their book, *A Cognitive Psychology of Mass Communication*, that in one way or another, ads attempt to tie the product or service to our deepest and most basic psychological needs (Harris & Sanborn, 2004). In another way, the advertisers want the audience, or, consumers, not only fills their needs when buying the products but also feel like they are better people. As the trend of advertisements

changes, clothing brands follow the stream of using indirect advertisements. Just like the object of the study, some clothing brands such as ZARA and Prada actually made 3-or-more-minute short-movie-like advertisements to promote their products. H&M, a clothing line that usually does direct marketing for their advertisements, launched a collaboration with a music video and film director, Johan Renck, to create an indirect advertisement for the holiday season in 2017 after collaborating with Wes Anderson for their holiday advertisement in the previous year. Johan Renck is a Swedish famous director for music videos and films. He has directed numerous music videos such as Madonna's *Nothing Really Matters* and *Hung Up*, Robbie Williams' *Tripping*, Beyoncé's *Me Myself and I*, and many more. In the film industry, he has directed episodes of the famous TV series *The Walking Dead* and *Breaking Bad*. The collaboration with H&M for the advertisement "A Magical Holiday" is not their first one. He has collaborated in the making of H&M advertisements in 2007 and 2011. The story itself begins with a family of three, acted by Nicki Minaj as the mother, Jesse Williams as the father, and Langa Somhedlwana as the daughter. Then, the father told a story to his daughter about a parallel fantasy world. In the parallel universe, the brave little girl wanted to track down the evil brother of Santa Claus, here called as Father Christmas, who stole every child's present. On the journey, she met the fabulous fairy named Wisest Thingy and a supernatural Fastest Fairy to help her. At the end of the story, she succeeded to save the presents and delivered them to the kids in the parallel universe.

In analyzing this advertisement, I use Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA). MDA itself is a way to analyze how various semiotic resources in the video collaborate and help make the meaning-making process and finally be interpreted by the audience. Kress (2009, p.5) defines Multimodality as a 'unifying theory' of semiotic resources. People have studied about images, for example, for a very long time. People have also studied about music, gestures, colors, etc. for a long time as well. Multimodality is a roof that covers all of these semiotic resources. As technology and media keep evolving as time goes by, monomodality is now shifted to multimodality. Multimodality itself is the combination of different semiotic modes — for example, language and music — in a communicative artifact or event (Van Leeuwen, 2005, P28). Monomodal communication, like using only words in advertising, is not really working anymore. Salience is needed to make something stand out from the others. Therefore, advertisers use multimodal communication, using many modes, to create something to reach the target. Based on The theory of Kress and van Leeuwen (2009) on multimodality, the modes in every text can vary so much. It can involve color, image, animation, writing, speech, layout, music, gesture, etc. depending on the object of the study.

In this study, I applied the Multimodal Discourse Analysis onto six general modes to analyze the advertisement, using the study by Chan and Chia (2014) on modes in multimodality, adapting the theory of modes by Anstey and Bull (2010). The theory proposed six main modes, which include: linguistic mode, audio mode, spatial mode, oral mode, visual mode, and gestural mode. To put it simply, linguistic mode is the printed form in the text and showed by letters, words, and sentences. Audio mode refers to all the background music and sound effects in the video. Spatial mode refers to the setting and the environment of the specific scene including the position, direction and else. Oral mode, or known as verbal mode, specifically refers to monologues and dialogues between the characters. Visual mode refers to the images in the form of people, objects, and places which includes colors, shapes, viewpoints, and since this is a fashion advertisement, the fashion of the characters. Gestural mode refers to physical movements and body languages such as body position, gesture, and expression. After analyzing each mode, the next step would be the integrated analysis of the relationships between modes, specific roles, and functions of the modes, and the integrated messages and narratives.

LINGUISTIC MODES



Text: *Happy Giving!*

Linguistic modes in this video advertisement are shown in written words. In the video, the linguistic modes are used as an announcement and a reminder to the audience. According to the five functions of language by Geoffrey Leech (Informational, Expressive, Directive, Aesthetic, Phatic), the function of written language in this video is informational and Directive. Written language is a powerful tool to give information about something clearly, and it is shown in the video through the message about giving to others and the mention of donation.

In figure 4.1.2, the linguistic mode is shown in the sentence: Happy Giving!. This sentence is put at almost the end of the video. Putting words at the end of the video works as a reminder of the whole video. Usually, the words sum up the story and give the audience the main purpose of the video itself. The word “Giving” cannot be separated with the holiday season. Usually, on Christmas Day, the children get presents from their families as a tradition. Relating to figure 4.1.1, this sentence is also made to give meaning and understandings of what people do on Christmas Day. Furthermore, although this sentence has nothing to say about buying the H&M products, the sentence is made to ask the audience to buy their products indirectly. The word “Giving” connotes buying the products. It means that if the audience buys H&M’s products, they can give their loved ones and also give other people, that later would be explained. As mentioned in the second chapter, the advertisers want the audience, not only fills their needs when buying the products, but also feel like they are better people (Harris & Sanborn, 2004) as they consume the products. By buying the products, the advertiser wants the audience to feel better because they can give holiday presents for other people that are less fortunate. By putting the sentence at almost the end of the video, the meaning of this slide is for the audience to be reminded of the purpose of this video, which is to advertise the products. This can be seen as a sly move from one perspective, but it is also a smart marketing move.

AUDIO MODES

I analyzed the background music and sound effects in the video for the audio modes. For this part of the analysis, I am not going too detailed for the melodies, chord, and other musical aspects. I analyzed the music based on what I know and what I feel when listening to the background music and sound effects. The background music and sound effects can be heard throughout the entire video.

In scene 3, the first scene of the bedtime story to begin, the audio mode is projected through the background music titled “In the Hall of the Mountain King” by Edvard Grieg. This song was first played in the five-act play *Peer Gynt* (1867) in a dream-like fantasy scene with trolls, goblins, and gnomes. Therefore, this type of song adds a magical and fantasy-like mood to this scene and to show that the bedtime story is about something magical. When listening to the music, it is very cheerful and it gives the ‘young-ish’ feeling to it. In the video, this background music is only played when the scene is inside the bedtime story of the father. When the scene changed into the real life (not in the bedtime story), the background music stopped. Thus, the background music also has a role of separating the scenes in the real world and the scenes in the bedtime story. On the other hand, this type of music reminds the audience of Christmas time. Christmas time, then, is much related to shopping and giving presents. One of the main reasons why the advertisers chose this music is because they want to bring the Christmas vibes going on so that people have the urge to go shopping for presents.

SPATIAL MODE



I analyzed the spatial modes in the video by using three common components of spatial modes: setting, camera angle, and position. The setting of the scene contains the location where the scene takes place. The camera angle is the perspective of the overall scene and shows the audience what the focus in front of the camera is. Meanwhile, the position is the blocking, where are the characters at, and the meaning behind the blocking.

In the scene, the story takes place in the kitchen, with Christmas lightings on the window. The two actors in the scene are having a small conversation about their daughter. To support the gestural mode of the father making tea for the mother, the producer choose kitchen as the setting. A kitchen can be said as one of the most important parts of a house. Other than that, kitchen is very related to holiday season. Usually, families do the grand cooking on holidays like Christmas, and it is a very exciting and warm place for the children during holidays where they can cook their meals together with the family or sneakily taste the mother's cooking. The setting and placements are designed to enhance the holiday feeling of a family at home. The camera angle of this scene is using the two-shot technique, where only two characters are shown together in one frame. This type of camera angle is usually used when both of the characters in the shot are important. The angle shows that they have an equal position in this story, that is as a parent. Moving on to the position, none of the characters is in the center of this scene. The director is using the popular 'rule of third' where the characters are in one-third of the frame not in the middle. This position implies to 'design balanced and unified images' (Ryan & Lenos, 2012).

ORAL MODE

Spoken words are analyzed as the oral category in this video. I analyzed their way of talking and the pace of the talk, including the relation of the words and the whole story itself. Moreover, I analyzed also the relation of the words with the other modes. In this video, the oral speeches are shown most of the story by the narration of the father.



The father said, "Well, once upon a time, there was a little girl who had a Chemistry box!"

In the figure beside, the daughter wanted to hear a bedtime story from her father. The father then said, "Well, once upon a time, there was a little girl who had a (looking at the chemistry box) chemistry box!"

The words 'once upon a time' is like a spoiler about what he was going to say. These words give the

audience a feeling that the scenes after are going to be a fairytale or children's story. The brief pause in the middle of the sentence, in addition to his eye going up left and then to an object (chemistry box), reveals that the father is making the story up and still in the process of finding the idea. Eyes going up left is often associated with thinking and imagining. After he was thinking, then he saw the chemistry box. Therefore, he added the chemistry box in the bedtime story. If we look closer, bedtime stories are something that children like. It is the time where they can spend time with their parents. The advertisers hoped that when children see this advertisement, they would be interested and sucked into the storyline. As a result, they would be interested in the brand and they would want to be the heroes or heroines just like the girl in the video.

VISUAL MODE

The visual modes are probably the most important modes in the video with the reasoning that it contains the main colors of the scene and also the style or the outfit that the characters were wearing in the video. Because this video is an advertisement for a clothing brand, so everything the character wear is from their collection. They used the scenes as the sections of the collection.



Overall, the advertisement itself did a good job choosing the actors. Their last commercials directed by Wes Anderson was dominated with Caucasians. However, with the uprising issue of people with colors, the advertisers chose a dark-skinned family to play the main role. By doing this, the advertisement satisfies the demand of race equality. In addition, it can also add to a more diverse market. The purpose is to make the

people of colors feel somehow ‘respected’ and then willing to buy their products. Moreover, this video also shows what the perceptions of the world nowadays is. In the video, I noticed that there was an Asian actress who played the role of the girl in the internet world. Asians have the stereotype of the people who know everything and are good at everything. This matches with the role of the Asian lady in the video as ‘the internet’ because she the person who knows everything.

In the scene above, the children are wearing the collection of H&M from the kids’ collection. As this scene is the resolution in the story, the advertisers show the audience the kids’ collection, the most important one, at the end of the bedtime story. Kids’ collection is the most important one because the main target of the advertisement is children. The children in the video are receiving big gifts and wearing Christmassy accessories such as reindeer headbands. The outfits of the kids in the video are also shown below on their website from the kids’ section.



GESTURAL MODE

The last modes discussed in the video is the gestural modes. The gestural modes consist of three main aspects: movements, facial expression, and eye contact. These three aspects are all very important to understand the body language of the character as well to support the oral modes for each scene. Of course, the gestural modes are always shown throughout the whole video.



In the figures above, the husband was making his wife a cup of tea. First of all, this situation is not commonly used in Asian culture. In Asian culture, the wife is the one who makes tea and other chores because of the patriarchal culture. Besides, in western culture, both of the parents have similar roles in the household. This situation can only happen because the story takes place in western culture. A cup of tea often symbolizes leisure. This movement implies that he handed the leisure time from himself to the wife. It can be also predicted that after this scene, it was the husband's turn to look after their daughter. For the facial expression: the wife in this scene, first, lowers her eyelid and raises her eyebrows. It shows submissiveness in a sexual relationship. Then, she looks up while walking away, which shows child-like characteristic. Eye contact: The husband in this scene looks at the wife below the chin for quite a long time. This eye-contact gives her the intimacy gaze that also means they are in a romantic relationship, which, in this case, is true.

INTERRELATION BETWEEN MODES

Now that the modes are all analyzed, the next layer of the research is the interrelation between the modes. After exploring the interrelation, I looked at the roles of each mode. To see how the modes work together in a scene, I have selected a scene (scene 5) about the evil brother of Father Christmas, where the interrelation of the modes can be seen most clearly. In this specific scene, there are 4 modes that I have analyzed before. From these modes, we can see the connection between them and how they support each other.



In the scene, the narration goes like “And then she went home. She sent all her Christmas gifts back to the kids in the parallel universe. They were so happy.” When the father said, “she went home,” then the camera went to the girl's bedroom. To support the next sentence, the camera went to the kids in the parallel universe who are receiving the presents happily as shown in the gestures. Through the focus of the scene, which are shown by the position of the present (in the middle of the scene), the advertisers want to emphasize the importance of receiving the gifts, so the audience would be even convinced to buy their products.

As this is the resolution part of the story after the Evil Brother of Father Christmas disappeared, everyone was happy. This is also supported by the visual modes of the scene. In the previous scenes, the main colors were blue and white. However, in this scene, the kids wore H&M's red, blue, green, and white clothing, which are the joyful color of Christmas. Beside to showcase their most important collection, the kids' collection, this scene was put at the end of the video to remind the target market, which is families, about how important present-giving is. The modes all combined bring the happy and joyful Christmas vibes to the scene, which is very important to make the audience feel the need to buy Christmas presents.

As you can see, the modes in the scene are much related to one another. They are made to support each other to create bigger meanings. For example, from scene 5, you can see that twist and correction are the main messages of the scene. Therefore, all modes work together to create the message more vivid.

After analyzing, I realized that each mode has a role in conveying the message to the audience. First, the linguistic modes have the role of direct communication with the audience in this video. The modes provide ‘facts’ and ‘truth’; therefore, the linguistic mode is used to inform the audience about something. In addition, the audio modes have the role of giving the vibes by the music played in the scene. For instance, in scene 5, the change of mood from figure 4.5.2 to 4.5.4 is felt even more because the background music also changes. Thus, it supports mainly the visual modes to set the mood of the scene. Furthermore, spatial modes give the audience the point of view of the story. For example, in this video, based on the camera angle, the children’s perspective is chosen. It is shown by the lower angle, possibly the same height as the daughter’s eye level. Oral modes have the narration and informative role. Similar to linguistic modes, oral modes in the video stated facts and truth. As stated previously, the oral speeches are mostly the narration of the father in the video. Therefore, it holds the highest hierarchy of all the modes since the main story in the video is orally said. The visual modes hold the key point in this advertisement since it gives the audience the image of the products. On the contrary with the linguistic and oral modes, the visual modes provide the audience what cannot be shown by linguistic and oral modes. Like the example of the study of Jancsary et al (2016), I also find that the visual modes make the message more tangible. Lastly, the gestural modes’ role is mainly to support oral and visual modes through body language. As a non-verbal communication, gestures are very important to give emotions to the oral and visual modes

CONCLUSION

In this research, I find that a commercial video consists of many aspects (or modes), such as: Linguistic modes, audio modes, spatial modes, oral modes, visual modes, and gestural modes. In this thesis, I analyzed the semiotic modes in the video commercial of a clothing brand H&M titled “A Magical Holiday”. To decode the message of the video, I used the theory of Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) by Kress and Leeuwen with the framework from the study of Chan and Chia about six semiotic modes. After analyzing, I realized that the meaning-making process is a process done by both the makers and the audience. When the process is successful, the message from the advertisers can be conveyed to the audience. However, for indirect advertisement’s case, the interpretation of the message can vary from person to another person. What might be right for one person may not be right to the others and vice versa.

From the analysis and findings, I noticed that other than conveying the message “caring about others”, the video contains many aspects that aim the audience to buy their products hidden in their modes. When the audience only look briefly at indirect commercials like this video, they might only see the first layer of the message, which in this case is ‘Caring about Others’. However, by looking at the semiotic modes, the hidden message and purpose of the advertisement can be revealed. First of all, because the brand is selling clothes, obviously, the actors are all wearing the collection from H&M. However, the wordings and the message of the story all lead to the conclusion that this video is a marketing tool for people to buy the products of H&M although it may be noticed only by some people.

It is also interesting how the modes in the video can all collaborate together to create meanings. This study has opened my eyes to the importance of each mode in a discourse. Every mode is important and needed, although there are some hierarchies in the video, to make the scene complete and make the meaning-making process successful. In this video, the oral modes and visual modes are more dominant. The oral modes contain the narration of the main storyline,

and the visual modes show the unspeakable factors, such as colors and fashion, which is very crucial in the advertisement. After that, the rest of the modes have equal parts in supporting the oral, visual, and other modes.

As the rising number of indirect commercials, I find that nowadays people do not want to be 'forced' to buy something; therefore, the advertisers make indirect advertisements. Before doing the research, I thought that indirect advertisements were a waste of money because I thought that people would just not get the advertisement. This study shows how indirect advertisements can not only show a story to the audience but also affect people's behavior. I realized that although the audience may not realize it, they are being persuaded just by watching the short-movie / advertisement.

I hope that this study would be helpful to those who want to make a research on the same topic. Should I have a recommendation for future studies in Multimodal Discourse Analysis in video commercials, I would recommend taking a longer period to study and research deeper to understand better about the meaning for each mode.

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