Culture & advertisement[1]

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Abstract

Nowadays, culture seems to be under negotiation. Culture is the sum of knowledge accumulated and transmitted by mankind. It is the cluster of specific beliefs, achievements, beliefs and traditions that form the background of a society (Marcuse, 1994). With culture plunging into the strides of the 21st century, an attempt was made to investigate the way in which it is promoted through advertising. We tried to investigate whether the uniqueness and peculiarity of each culture are being promoted separately, or whether they all come together in a crucible of values and are assimilated thus ending up with a "mass culture" construct. That is why we asked advertisers from different cities of Greece. The results and views of advertisers vary and divide public opinion, as sometimes there is respect for each of the value systems that each of us "carries" and sometimes anything that seems "different" it is not required.

Keywords

culture, advertisement, uniqueness, different, mass culture

Introduction

The effects of advertising on modern society are pervasive, unambiguous and long-lasting, as it plays an important role in defining 'reality' in a general or anthropological sense.

The mass media are crucial in that they are not simply 'media' but constitute a cultural industry. According to Baudrillard (1970), the whole of culture can be produced by the mass media itself, which has a technical rather than a symbolic character, which according to McLuhan is the deepest message of the mean.

According to Hall (1991), advertising has shifted from information to imposition of persuasion, playing a largely cultural function itself.

Today's society seems to be fragmented by a multitude of different social and cultural groups, whether intentionally or not, embodying foreign philosophies and ideologies to manage the messages they receive as a ticket to the act of communication. It is no coincidence, however, that the central finding of several investigations into the imposition of advertising is that the media is genuinely mass media, including women and men of different class, racial and cultural origin and origin. As Wilensky rightly puts it, "uniformity in behavior and taste is the key conclusion. Nowhere has a 'class' audience been so rapidly transformed into a' mass' public ' (Wilensky, 1964, p. 191)

The purpose of the present research on advertising is to identify how the latter can be defined by social reality and contribute to the perpetuation and reproduction of social status quo.

Theory

Mass culture, though not a phenomenon of our times, in its present form has been regarded as a well-systematically elaborated strategy of extermination, political inactivity and the passivity of the masses from those offices that have the economic, social, and political interests to maintain today's order of things. Mass culture, as McDonald says, seems to be very "democratic". On the one hand, it refuses to distinguish between anything, on the other, "its mill is grinding", and in the end chops it properly (Livieratos & Frafkoulis, 1990).

The products of mass culture are sets of myths, concepts and images that refer to cultural patterns and archetypes, which owe their particular form, dissemination and prominence to precisely these means of communication.

Mass culture in relation to mass communication consists of a dual ideological and technical structure. On the ideological side, it transfers a system of established values and knowledge of medieval origin to a minimal common culture (Baudrillard, 1970) while transmitting subversive messages.

According to Williams (1980), in the context of mass culture, the construction of stereotypes seems almost inherent. It's probably the only easy way to transmit something so easily to a large percentage of people, and the system seems to depend on it. He, however, argues that advertising is aimed at the subconscious's desires, impulses, and anxiety. Behind this change, there is the need for modern capitalist society to control "free" people, even though it is deeply hidden in the guts of the new society (Williams, 1980).

However, many critics of contemporary popular culture argue that the real impact of advertising is reflected in the cultural climate of society. Looking at the cultural effects of advertising is not a new phenomenon. Since the 1930s, the pre-capitalist

era critic of F.R. Leavis has been accusing advertising that it "provokes cheap, almost mechanistic reactions that urge the public to choose the most immediate pleasures with minimal effort." (Leavis, 1933, p. 3) He has also argued that advertisements corrupt emotions, impinge on language while enhancing social cohesion (Leavis & Thompson, 1993). Criticism of the ad negotiated the current situation as it drew attention to the impact of ads on people's critical reactions to their environment.

A more radical reaction to advertising comes this time from a group of academics and writers, known as the "Frankfurt School" (Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse). Although this group no longer exists, its positions remain topical, with a strong influence on critical, non-empirical sociology as well as on the long-term impact of advertising (Dyer, 2009).

Its main expresser is Herbert Marcuse, who says that while freight culture tends to provide a better standard of living, it tends to encourage social apathy. Marcuse (1968) argued that the modern world alienated people while modern mass culture sought to conceal or make up for the shortcomings of real life on a personal and social level. In particular, he noted that media, and in particular advertising, define the terms we think of when defining our whole mental attitude, preventing the individual from any kind of effective evaluation (Marcuse, 1968).

Horkheimer and Adorno, on their part, have rightly observed that the whole world is forced to go through the filter of the culture industry, since no one can oppose it because its attack is multifaceted (Tsardakis, 1990). As Lefebvre rightly points out that advertising is the most important mechanism of subjugating the masses to its rational culture industry, adding that the media (like advertisers) imposes this 'constructed' reality of industrial culture on the public (Tsardakis, 1990).

Finally, according to Williamson (1978), advertisements do not merely manipulate us, but do manage to weaken us by offering us models of the self as a social being in our different social relationships. Our ads sell something other than consumer goods, offering us an exchange structure between us and them, selling us ourselves. This "work" has been undertaken by the mass culture, with the promotion and dissemination of principles, standards and values of life that serve modern economic, social and cultural interests.

Methodology

For a better methodological approach to the issue examined, a selection of a qualitative method has been made based on which studying the people and place that will contribute to thoroughly comprehending the particular phenomenon is made possible without confining their freedom of expression (Creswell, 2011).

More specifically, qualitative research examines the experiences of people and the subjective ideas contained in them, focusing on the wider social and cultural framework (of values and ideas) in which they are ascribed. Its goal is not just to describe an attitude, but to fully understand it. It is worth mentioning that the theory of "semiotic" allows for the elasticity of choosing the investigatory method, by excluding some quantitative investigatory strategies.

Interviewing, as a methodological tool, focuses on a thorough research because it concentrates on exploring the emotions and thoughts of the subjects examined, combining the verbal speech with the body language (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). As a consequence, it constitutes the most appropriate method of collecting data when it comes to qualitative analysis.

The semi-structured interview provides the ability to focus on non-verbal messages, providing a more accurate insight concerning the interpretation of the answers given by the subjects that were examined (Robson, 2010). It gives priority to a diagram of preconceived answers, giving the opportunity to each researcher to modify their order, to insert or negate some questions as well as redefine a question, if that is essential (Robson, 2007). The interview is in the form of discussion. However, the researcher needs to focus on the details to consider the interview successful. In the current research, the method of recording is used in order to have an accurate transcription of everything said on behalf of the advertisers.

Following the collection of the data, the elaborate reading of the answers is in order which can be explanatory, cogitative or a combination of both (Mason, 2003).

The analysis of the content comes next. It is about a standard procedure which quantifies and codifies written speech in order for the outcome of the results to be valid (Kiriazi, 2004). In the current research, the analysis of the content follows the overall structure of the semi-structured interview.

In the current case, data was collected from four districts of Greece (Attiki, Thessaloniki, Ioannina, Patras) in order to garner the most representative samples possible. The current sampling is rated as 'typical', because the subjects of the study constitute the most suitable and 'normal' number of people (part of the population) one could inquire, concerning the particular issue (Creswell, 2011).

The convenient and random sample of advertisers amounts to 15 (advertisers), with a variety in employment experience, in the marketing department of multinational companies, while owners of smaller advertising companies are also included.

The research lasted for four months (December 2016 – March 2017) and a recorder was used for the accurate registration of the data, while the information received from every interview was transcribed accurately.

Findings – Discussion

The current research seeks to highlight the effects of the prevailing common market - common idea - common perception and attitude on the culture of each individual. More specifically, we investigated whether advertising can preserve our individual characteristics and elements as a culture, or, in contrast, the human masses enter a melting pot of cultures, resulting in a 'pre-made' common 'mold'. To make this clear, two basic questions have been presented which are presented below.

Advertisers were asked to record how the mass culture industry operates, what impact it has and what interests it serves.

In this question the majority of advertisers (12 out of 15) argued that this is being perverted, with advertising "walking" on a common path ignoring the cultural heritage and uniqueness that everyone "carries" in order to achieves its goal, other than selling the product being advertised. However, they themselves pointed out that this is 'part of the game' that dictates the phenomenon of the world market in order to serve 'greater interests'. In more detail, the answers given were:

> "As in other areas of the advertising industry, the primary goal of large corporations is to globalize and promote uniformity to achieve a global controlled mass" (An5)

> "We are all under the same umbrella, because this serves the greater interests" (An1)

> "Globalization if it does not unite the whole world, some will not buy. So, with advertising as a tool, it tries to make everyone have common habits" (An3)

In contrast, there was a small percentage of advertisers (4 out of 15) who sought to give a positive spin on mass culture as a way of managing global well-being. They argued that advertising enables us to cross paths of different cultures, ideas, and lifestyles, but without causing us to lose ours. More specifically they stated:

> "Let's not all be the same. To be united and to share common values and interests yes. This promotes advertising "(An4)

> "Advertising is more about the logic of 'Sing global-act local'. Yes, it reaches us in bulk but on the other hand it gives you control" (An15)

> "Bulkization is desirable already. It is easier to direct and influence a uniform mass of individuals than heterogeneous groups" (An4)

> "In a world where information reduces distances, people have more in common, so that mass culture is favored" (P6)

Conclusions

Several advertisers have argued that advertising has the potential to promote and enhance the transmission of values, especially ecumenical. However, it is something that the advertising industry deliberately avoids, since it is opposed to the marketing imperatives. However, a small percentage of advertisers believe that this is supported or even attempted on a small scale for the time being.

Regarding global advertisements, it seems that the plurality of advertisements tend to become universal. Advertisers talk about the perceptible prevalence of these as it is seen as the result of the global market in which we act and interact.

Taking into account the consequences of this uniformity of tendencies, attitudes and perceptions, several advertisers speak of a gradual leveling of uniqueness and diversity at individual and collective level, with a predominant aim of increasing profit.

It is therefore perceived that the power of globalization is not enough to break the limits of individuality and to treat the peoples as a common mass, although there may be common codes of communication, common concerns, common feelings and needs that characterize every person without exception (love, freedom, hunger, maternity - "empty-space theory"). However, in order for the public to be fully responsive, advertising must handle the individual characteristics and cultural elements that separate people from another with respect and immediacy in order to achieve its goal.

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