

The Power behind Images: Advertisement Discourse in Focus

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Abstract

This paper aimed at analyzing six different advertisements (product/non-product ads) to investigate the intentions and techniques of consumer product companies to reach more consumers and sell more products. Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) appear as a useful approach for they offer excellent methods, not only for analyzing texts and images adequately, but also for putting them in analyzable relations to socio-cultural processes and changes. Norman Fairclough's 3-D model and Kress and van Leeuwen's grammar of visual design were used to analyze the data. Thus, the results of the present study showed that when a private producer intends to persuade the viewer to buy a special product, s/he gives the power to the viewer. While the producer of the ad is the government, she tries to show her power. However, it could be understood from the results that the producers, generally tend to use their power and ideology to change people's behavior and thought.

Keywords: Discourse analysis, Critical discourse analysis, Ideology, Print advertisement, Text analyzing, Image analyzing

1. Introduction

The emergence of advertising refers back to the 1950s and 60s. In those days the goal of this new industry was hard-selling; however, with not very subtle strategies. These days it has changed into a commercial tool. Davidson (1992: 3) defines advertising as “a social language, a genre of spectator/reader experience, a technique of persuasion [...] almost a world in its own right, with its own languages, customs and history, and one that sets the tone and pace for large parts of our lives. Advertising is a topic which both causes and reveals existing social divisions.” Furthermore, Williamson (1978: 12) states that “ads are message systems designed to organize perceptions and create structures of meaning.”

Advertising has been a subject for many studies and the analyzing of advertising is of growing importance. Ahmed (2000: 11) believes that "whether from a quantitative, qualitative or interpretive perspective, whether a researcher follows the modern social scientific approach, critical theory perspective or postmodernist approach, analysis of advertising and other media content is of growing importance."

For most people advertising is something to encourage or persuade them to buy a special product. But advertisements do not only serve this purpose, they “also amuse, inform, misinform, worry, warn, ... though it may be argued that these function are all in the service of the main function” (Cook 1992: 5). Considering the other side of the coin, there are non-product advertisements as well that without promoting any products only advocate a change in behavior. The non-product ads are used in different campaigns and they show the effects of not adopting the advocated behavior. “Ads may not always be obliged to refer to a product, but they are still obliged to refer, however obliquely, to a change of behavior” (Cook, 1992: 224). Advertisements have been involved with our everyday lives: its mirroring of society and vice versa, its transmitting of meaning and message, and its social significance have lead people to consider it as a discourse type. Cook (1992: 199) also remarks that “advertising is not a remote and specialized discourse, but a prominent discourse type in contemporary society.”

Discourse has been described by Gee (2005: 1) as “language (oral or written) in use with more socio-politically oriented meaning.” Fairclough (1989: 42) goes further and defines it as “just a particular form of social practice” that in its center power and ideology influence and interact with one another. In order to investigate the use of power and ideology in discourse, critical discourse analysis (CDA) can be considered a useful tool. Wodak (1999: 8) describes it as follows:

Critical Discourse Analysis centers on authentic everyday communication in institutional, media, political or other locations rather than on sample sentences or sample texts constructed in linguists’ minds. [CDA] regards both written and spoken ‘discourse’ as a form of social practice. It assumes a dialectical relationship between particular discursive acts and the situations, institutions and social structures in which they are embedded: the situational, institutional and social contexts shape and affect discourse, and, in turn, discourses influence social and political reality. In other words, discourse constitutes social practice and is at the same time constituted by it (Wodak, 1999: 8).

According to Wodak, the aim of CDA, unlike traditional forms of discourse analysis that are concerned with the forms and features of texts, is “to unmask ideologically permeated and often obscured structures of power, political control, and dominance, as well as strategies of discriminatory inclusion and exclusion in language in use” (1999: 8). Ideology could be defined as an entire system of ideas, beliefs, and values, which provides a restricted view of the world. Ideology helps conceal social contradictions that lend legitimacy to those in power (Van Dijk, 1998). Van Dijk (1995: 17) remarks that “ideologies are typically, though not exclusively, expressed and reproduced in discourse and communication, including non-verbal semiotic messages, such as picture, photographs and movies.” Since every person has her/his own ideologies; in other words, every person (advertisers are among these people) is affected by her/his own ideological constraints as well as ideological constraints of the dominant power relations in society, the advertiser can impose her/his ideologies on others in society through advertising. This activity can be explained through using Hall’s (1973) encoding/decoding theory.

The term encoding describes the process of the production of the message, while decoding is about the reception and how the receiver makes sense out of the encoded message. The idea behind the encoding/decoding theory is very simple and Hall (1973: 3-4) illustrates it as a circle: “at the first stage comes the encoding process, with all the frameworks of knowledge in the back of the producer’s mind. On next level, the text/ad/whatever is, through its being transmitted, decoded and hopefully turned into a meaningful discourse and can thus be retransformed and read as a meaningful structure: In a determinate moment, the structure employs a code and yields a *message*: at another determinate moment, the *message*, via its decoding, issues into a structure. After having been read as a meaningful structure the message becomes part of the discourse which re-enters the circle when it has been established as knowledge-background for yet again another production of encoded messages. The production initiates the message, but production and reception are both determinate moments as it is here that the communication will work out or fail to fulfill its designated function. If ever the producer and receiver differ too much from each other, if they do not share the same values, ideas, cultures, etc., there is a strong risk of misunderstanding. If a misunderstanding occurs, then the preferred meaning has not been recognized or not been applied. This preferred meaning is the meaning that the producer would like to transmit.”

Hall (1973) applies this remark to the advertising business, as well:

In the advertising discourse, for example, we might say that there is almost no ‘purely denotative’ communication. Every visual sign in advertising ‘connotes’ a quality, situation, value or inference which is present as an implication or implied meaning, depending on the connotational reference (Hall, 1973:12).

Accordingly, ad can be considered as a kind of discourse that in its center power and ideology interact and can be used to express and impose one’s ideology. As a result CDA could be used to analyze this type of discourse to unmask the implicit ideologies behind it.

This study would use analytical paradigm of CDA described by Fairclough (1989, 1992, 1995a, 1995b) and methods for analyzing images developed by Kress and van Leeuwen

(1996) to analyze six different ads to reveal the hidden intentions behind them. Fairclough (1989, 1992, 1995a, 1995b) developed a model for CDA which constitutes three three-dimensional boxes, nesting one inside the other. The inner box presents the text, the box in the middle presents the discourse practice, and the outer box presents the socio-cultural practice. In other words, he believes that media discourse analysis is multidimensional and text must be related to the discourse practice and to the social practice of which it is a part. On the other hand, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) claim that images have their own grammar and rules: “we take the view that language and visual communication both realize the same more fundamental and far-reaching systems of meaning that constitute our cultures, but that each does so by means of its own specific forms, and independently” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: 17).

Therefore, images and languages can be considered as two diverging systems which form, shape, influence or even build the same culture. In printed advertisement these two are drawn together as multimodal messages.

The two analyzing paradigms, i.e. Fairclough’s 3D model and Kress and van Leeuwen’s grammar of visual design, will be discussed more in methodology section.

2. Methodology

2.1 Materials

Six different advertisements, i.e. product ads and non-product ads, had been selected for analyzing. Since the aim of the study was to pull back the “ideological curtain” to see the power and ideology behind images, the chosen ads have more visuals and less text (Plamenatz, 1970). In other words, they communicate through images and pictures. These advertisements are: a) Non-smoking Area, b) Use Electricity Wisely, c) Big Hamburgers, d) WMF, e) NIVEA: Goodbye Cellulite, f) NIVEA: Hair Care.

2.2 Models of analysis

2.2.1 Fairclough’s 3D Model

Fairclough (2003) defines 3 dimensions for every discursive event: 1) a spoken or written text, 2) a discursive practice which includes production and interpretation of a text, and 3) a piece of social practice.

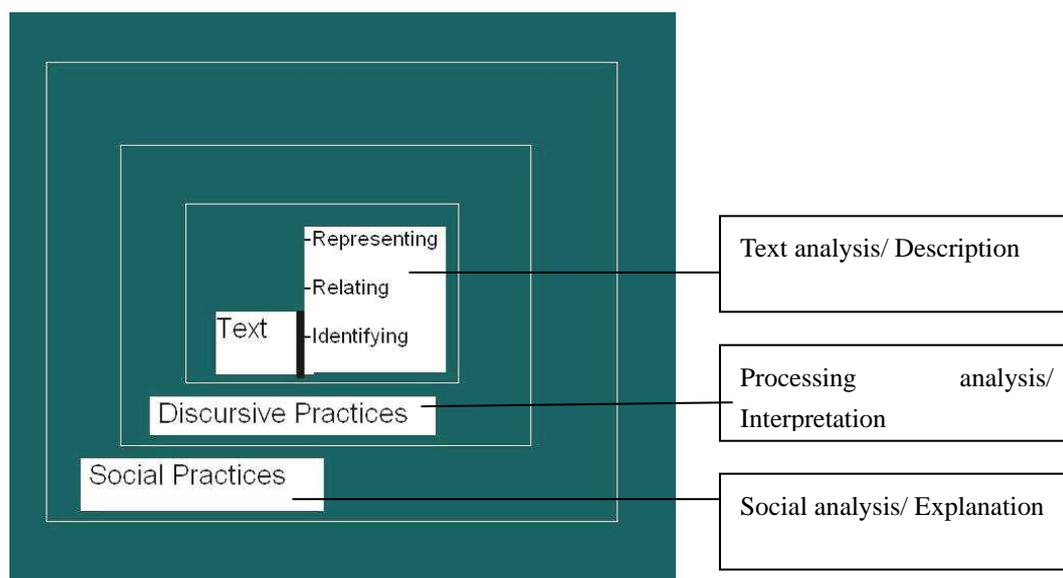


Figure. 1 Fairclough's dimension of discourse and discourse analysis (Janks, 1997: 27)

(Inner square= 1st dimension, middle square= 2nd dimension, outer square= 3rd dimension)

Janks (1997) shows how CDA can be used as a research tool by introducing Fairclough's concept of the interrelated three-dimensions of discourse (the dimensions being represented as boxes nesting one inside the other, see figure 1). The first dimension represents "the object of analysis (including verbal, visual or verbal and visual texts)" (Janks, 1997: 26). The term text, however, is not only linguistic units of sentences or clauses. All semiotic indications such as images, different colors, signs, sounds, etc. are considered as text. The second dimension can be described as "the processes by which the object is produced and received (writing/speaking/designing and reading/listening/viewing) by human subjects" (Janks, 1997: 26). This will be done by using questions like "who are the producers?" and "what are their objectives?" and finally, the third dimension of discourse could be described as 'power behind discourse' or as social practices, because it is containing "the socio-historical conditions that govern these processes [of production and reception]" (Janks, 1997: 26). It seeks to answer questions like: "with what kind(s) of discourse(s) or social practice(s) is the object of investigation interrelated?"

For each dimension there has to be conducted a different type of analysis: for the first dimension "text analysis or description, for the second dimension processing analysis or interpretation, and for the third dimension it is the social analysis or explanation" (Janks, 1997: 26). All dimensions are interdependent and therefore it does not matter with which kind of analysis one begins.

2.2.2 Kress and van Leeuwen's Grammar of Visual Design

The grammar of visual design, like that of linguistic structure, can be interpreted through analysis of cues and signs that have individual meaning and may string together to create a larger layered effect. The grammar is history and culture specific. By using different modes,

meaning is conveyed through design, production and interpretation (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996).

Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) define two components for visual discourse: represented participants and interactive participants. By represented participants they mean people or things that are mapped on an image, while by interactive participants they mean producers and viewers. Among all these participants exists relations. The relation between the represented participants can be considered as syntactic, between the represented and the interactive participants as semantic and between the interactive participants as pragmatic:

Interactive participants are [...] real people who produce and make sense of images in the context of social institutions which, to different degrees and in different ways, regulate what may be 'said' with images, and how it should be said and how it should be interpreted (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: 119).

Therefore, we can say that there are four main relations in the advertising discourse. These relations interfere with each other and are not completely separable. The first relation is related to the relations between the images (or between the represented participants). The next two are related to the position of the producer and then the position of the receiver towards the image, and the last part is related to these processes as a whole in social sphere.

The image (here the advertisement) is composed of signs (represented participants), and the signs are putted in certain relation to construct the structure of the image. In print ad communication, without the existence of the image, the relation between producer and receiver will not exist; therefore, the image's representation constitutes the relation between producer and receiver.

The social sphere and environment are stimuli for the producer. As a result by the stimulation from environment, the producer intends to publish certain message, and by using her/his available codes and knowledge, s/he composes the message to formulate the intention. The receiver by using her/his codes and knowledge interprets the message. If her/his codes are shared with the producer, the communication has taken place. And the effect of the message will return to the social sphere as a reaction of the receiver which can be for example a change of behavior.

The important note is that the communication or (better to say) the interaction between producer and receiver is (in mass media/ print as production) indirect, because of separated production-/reception contexts. However, the social sphere can help to determine this interaction. To identify the producer in mass media production is very confusing, because many persons and organizations work together. The company itself, the advertising company, the designer of the ad, the photographer, the depicted places and objects and so on seem to be all involved in the production process.

Another important aspect in mass media communication, in contrast to face-to-face communication is (as mentioned earlier) that the producer and the receiver of advertisings are separated from each other; "[...] there is a disjunction between the context of production and the context of reception, the producer is not physically present [...]", so s/he is not able to

intervene the process of reception (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: 199). Or with Kress and van Leeuwen's words "All they have is the picture itself, as it appears in the magazine. And producers, similarly, can never really know their vast and absent audience, and must, instead, create a mental image of 'the' viewers and 'the' way viewers make sense of their pictures." (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: 119)

Therefore, according to Ronald Barthes and his theory of "death of the author" we can conclude that when the ad is distributed, it is abandoned from the producer and is given to an endless range of interpretations which can be completely dissolved from any intentions of the producer. As a fact it is possible to detect three parts of a message, that at least one of them always takes place: an intended part which is clearly understood, an intended part which is not understood and a part which is understood but not intended. Which of these happens depends on a matter of shared codes.

According to different camera perspectives in films, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) detect different kinds of (represented) *social distances*, realized through spatial distance (like close/medium/long shot), which put the viewer either in a rather close and intimate, or in a rather reserved and distal position. These social distances correspond to those, people keep in everyday interaction (how close people near each other, depends usually on the social relation, which exist among one another).

Another form of positioning works through different horizontal or vertical angles, in which the represented participants occur. The horizontal angles decide, to what extent the viewer is *involved* in (frontal angle) or rather *detached* from (oblique angle) the depicted scenario. These different degrees of involvement or detachment correspond, to some extent, to possessive pronouns in language, with the differentiation, that in images these degrees are not fixed, while in language exist no different levels of 'ourness' or 'theirness'. The vertical angle represents a relation of power between represented participant and viewer (this is also adopted from film technology): a high angle depicts a higher power of the interactive participant towards the represented participant, i.e. images shown from below, or with a high angle, depict a sense of power or importance, as the subject is shown larger than life and looming over the viewers' eye line. While a lower angle shows a higher power of the receiver, i.e. images seen from above or produced by an angle pointing down usually depict a relationship of inferiority or distance. If they are in the same height, the power relation is balanced.

Describing the position of viewers vs. images does not explain the whole of the receiving process. A receiver is not only positioned by the image but also in by himself as an individual, which means that receivers always have their own complex framework of codes, knowledge about the world, attitudes, beliefs and expectations towards the received image, which additionally can differ in the contexts and situations, the receiving takes place. So, it can never be clearly defined, how the reader's reception and reaction will constitute, thus there does not exist anything like "the" reader.

2.3 Procedure

Since the analysis is based on Fairclough's 3D model and Kress and van Leeuwen's grammar of visual design, the procedure for each advertisement was as follows: at first each advertisement was analyzed based on the three dimensions of Fairclough's 3D model, i.e. description, interpretation, and explanation; then based upon Kress and van Leeuwen's model each advertisement was analyzed. However, as mentioned, identifying the position of the producer is not an easy task. As a result, finding the position of the producers of these advertisements cannot be done. Therefore, only the position of the receiver was defined for each advertisement.

3. Data Analysis and Results

3.1 Non-smoking Area

As can be seen in the picture (see Appendix A), there is a cemetery whose ground is green and there are many white crosses in it. However, there is a circle in the middle of the cemetery without any cross in it and in the middle of the circle these words written in white can be seen: "non-smoking area".

The producer of this non-product advertisement is not clear. One can conclude, however, that the producer is concerning about people's health and its objective to produce such a non-product ad is to warn people about smoking and its scaring consequence, i.e. death.

This non-product ad is mostly related to health. Therefore, it could be said that the discourse is mostly health discourse and as it has used crosses and English language in the ad; its receivers are English speakers Christian people. However, every person who knows English and Christian culture can interpret its meaning.

The viewer is positioned in a high angle. The ground, especially the non-smoking area, seems to lie beneath him and is overviewed by him. Therefore, the power balance is on the side of the viewer. The medium shot represents a normal social distance, like all day situation.

The colors used in this advertisement are green and white. These colors give peace and relaxation to the viewer. The non-smoking area is green and it seems that the producer intends to say to the receiver that by giving up smoking, s/he can obtain health and immortality.

As a whole, the viewer has the power to choose between smoking and not smoking or (better to say) between death and life.

3.2 Use Electricity Wisely

There is a picture of a very big gray billboard (see Appendix B). There are four lamps on top of it. All of them except one are off. It has lightened a little area on the billboard which these words written in blue can be seen: "Use Electricity Wisely".

This is also a non-product ad and its producer is anonymous. It aims at warning about the wisely using of electricity and the result of not using it wisely which is darkness. Therefore,

the producer can be government or somebody related to government.

This non-product ad is related to using electricity wisely. As a result, its discourse is saving discourse. The language in this advertisement is English, and like the previous one, every person who knows and understand English can understand the message.

The advertisement is positioned in a high angle and the viewer is beneath it, therefore, the power balance is on the side of the advertisement and its producer, i.e. government or her related companies. The long shot also represents the high social power of the advertisement and its producer.

The colors in this advertisement are dark and gloomy (dark blue for the sky, dark gray for the billboard, dark buildings). Only the area beneath the on lamp is bright. The dark colors could be frightening for the viewer. The viewer can feel the gloomy results of not saving energy.

As a result, the viewer has no power and s/he should obey the advertisement and use the electricity wisely to save energy.

3.3 *Big Burgers*

Here we have a picture of a woman (see Appendix C). We do not see the above part of her face, but we can see that she wears braces and there are two sticking-plasters on two sides of her lips. On the corner of the picture is written in red: *“burger king”*.

The producer of this advertisement is king burger and its objective is to introduce its new burger, i.e. big burger. Even a woman with braces cannot prevent herself to test it, even if her lips will be injured!

The big hamburger ad is introducing a product which is king burger and its discourse is food discourse. There is a woman in the picture implying that it is related to gender discourse.

The eye level angle shows a balance of power between represented and interactive participant(s). The close shot evokes a high involvement – the viewer is nearly too intimate with the woman.

Although no special color is used for the woman, the words are written in red and they are in a yellow circle. These two bright colors attract the viewer’s attention; invite her/him to try a big hamburger.

The viewer sees her/himself very close to the advertisement and because of balance social power; s/he can choose or reject the big burgers.

3.4 *WMF*

In picture there are a wooden cutting board and a fresh orange carrot on it (see Appendix D). Both the carrot and the cutting board have been sliced. At the bottom of the picture is written: *“Sharper than you think. The WMF Grand Gourmet knife with Damasteel blade”*.

The producer of this product ad is the owner of the WMF Company and aims at introducing its new knife. This knife is sharper than what you think. It is so sharp that can slice even the

wooden cutting board!

The WMF ad is introducing a product, i.e. a new knife and is related mostly to women; therefore, the discourse could be gender discourse.

The viewer is positioned in a high angle. The advertisement is beneath her/him and therefore, the power balance is on the side of the viewer. The medium shot shows a balance and normal social distance.

The colors used in this advertisement are bright colors (bright gray for tablecloth, bright brown for wooden cutting board, orange for carrot). These bright colors attract the viewer's attention and encourage her/him to read the ad.

The viewer, as a result, has the power to choose this knife or not. There is no power above to force her/him.

3.5 NIVEA: *Goodbye Cellulite*

There is a picture of a blue armchair (see Appendix E). One side of the armchair is pinned and the other side is not. On the soft side is written in white: "*NIVEA: Goodbye Cellulite*".

NIVEA Company is the producer of this product ad and it wants to introduce its new cr ème. Even if you rub it on a pinned armchair, its pins will disappear and its surface will be soft!

The discourse of this NIVEA cr ème could be considered as beauty discourse, because it is introducing a product related to beauty.

The eye level angle constructs a balance of power between the viewer and advertisement. The medium shot represents a normal social distance.

The colors used in this ad are blue and white. The color blue gives peace to the viewer. Although the pinned part of the armchair is lightened, the other part of the armchair will attract attention. Because it is dark and some white words are shining.

Therefore, the viewer has the power to choose the cr ème or not. There is no force.

3.6 NIVEA: *Hair Care*

In the picture a skull of a woman with its long copper hair can be seen (see Appendix F). This is the skull of a dead person; no parts of it remain except the skull and its hair. On the corner of the picture is written in white: "*NIVEA: Hair Care*".

Again NIVEA Company is the producer of this product ad and aims at introducing its new hair care product. When you are dead and nothing of you is remained, your hair will be there without any change and harm!

This ad is also aiming at introducing a product related to beauty; therefore, the discourse could be beauty discourse.

The high angle of the viewer shows that the power balance is on the side of the viewer. The advertisement seems to lie beneath her/his feet. The long shot also shows the high power and

high social distance of the viewer.

The ground is dark brown, the skull is white and its hair is copper and is shining. On the corner the words are written in white while their background is blue. It is the shining hair that invites the viewer to look at the ad and find the producer.

As a result, the viewer has the power to use or reject the product.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to analyze some advertisement, i.e. product ads and non-product ads in order to see when the producers use their power to imply something to viewers. Fairclough's 3-dimensional model and Kress and van Leeuwen's grammar of visual design for print ad-/mass media communication were used to analyze six advertisements: a. Non-smoking Area (non-product ad), b. Use Electricity Wisely (non-product ad), c. Big Burgers (product ad), d. WMF (product ad), e. NIVEA: Goodbye Cellulite (product ad), and f. NIVEA: Hair Care (product ad).

In order to better understanding of the conclusion, we need to take a look at terms such as power and ideology in discourse.

To explain the relation between power and discourse we need to look at Fairclough's (1989) work *language and power*, where he distinguishes between power in discourse and power behind discourse. Power *in* discourse as a form of social practice is exercised in various ways – for example in face-to-face encounters or in the discourse of the mass media. Power *behind* discourse describes the formation of the orders of social practices, which are themselves shaped and constituted by power relations.

Moreover, he stresses that power “is never definitively held by any one person, or social grouping, because power can be won and exercised only in and through *social struggles* in which it may also be lost” (Fairclough, 1989: 43).

Before we may ask who is exercising power over whom and in what ways, we should first know who is able to do so. This leads us to the subject matter of social struggle and the question of access and constraints on access to discourse. Fairclough (1989) refers to Pierre Bourdieu's concept of ‘*cultural capital*’. Cultural capital can be accumulated through the access to and the ‘possession’ of several ‘cultural goods’, such as education, use of language, access to exclusive social institutions and their practices, to high job positions, etc. These ‘cultural goods’ are unequally distributed or unequally accessible in society, “so that members of (...) the ‘dominant bloc’ (the capitalist class, the ‘middle class’, the professions) have substantially more of them than members of the working class – they are richer in ‘cultural capital’; (...) those who hold power at a particular moment have to constantly reassert their power, and those who do not hold power are always liable to make a bid for power” (Fairclough, 1989: 63-68).

Fairclough differentiates between three types of constraints on discourse: constraints on *contents*, on *relations* and on *subjects*. Talking about power relations in discourse, for the exercise of power in face-to-face encounters this would mean restrictions on firstly what is

said or done, secondly on the social relations people enter into in discourse (what they are doing), and, thirdly, the ‘subject positions’ people can occupy (who they are). In short: “Powerful participants control and constrain the contributions of non-powerful participants in these three ways; they more or less determine directly the discourse types exercised” (Fairclough, 1989: 46). On the contrary, for discourses where participants are separated in place and time, like in the mass-media discourse, the nature of power relations and constraints is less obvious, and that is why Fairclough calls these hidden relations of power. Because of this division between producers and consumers he emphasizes the ‘one-sidedness’ of this discourse type: producers exercise power over consumers.

Since the notion of ideology is a vital concept in discourse studies, Fowler’s (1991) conception of ideology in the media discourse shall be mentioned here.

From the perspective of critical linguistics, Fowler states that texts (or ‘representation of experience, of events and concepts’) already have been produced from a specific ideological viewpoint, and “that values, or ideology, differ systematically in different forms of expression[s used]” (Fowler, 1991: 66). The public is often unaware of this process. Even though people are able to occupy different (social) roles, to have different views of the world and to access numerous kinds of discourses, they do not seem to use these skills. “People are not terribly conscious of linguistic variety, or if they are, they are normative [and narrow-minded] about it: they tend to believe that there is a ‘correct’ mode of discourse for a given type of situation, either their own, or that of some prestige speaker” (Fowler, 1991: 66).

By analyzing these advertisements and defining the position of the viewers the followings were concluded:

- 1) Mostly the producers try to show that the viewer has the power to choose or not to choose something.
- 2) When the producers of the advertisement are the government, they want to show their power over people.

The ideology behind the latter could be that the powerful person should show her/his power; therefore, the powerless persons obey her/him. But the ideology behind the former could be that by considering the viewer more powerful and giving the power to her/him to choose or not to choose something, s/he will be more eager to choose that because s/he sees that s/he has the power to select or not.

As a whole, it could be seen that producers use their power and ideology to change the behavior and thought of people. By the way, if people become aware of this fact they can resist this effect.

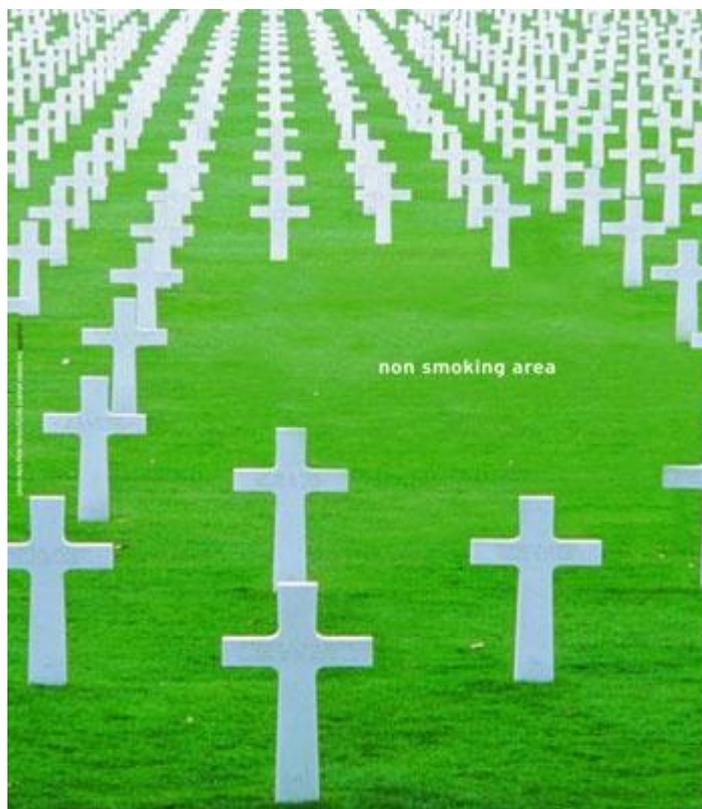
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Appendices

Appendix A. Non-smoking Area



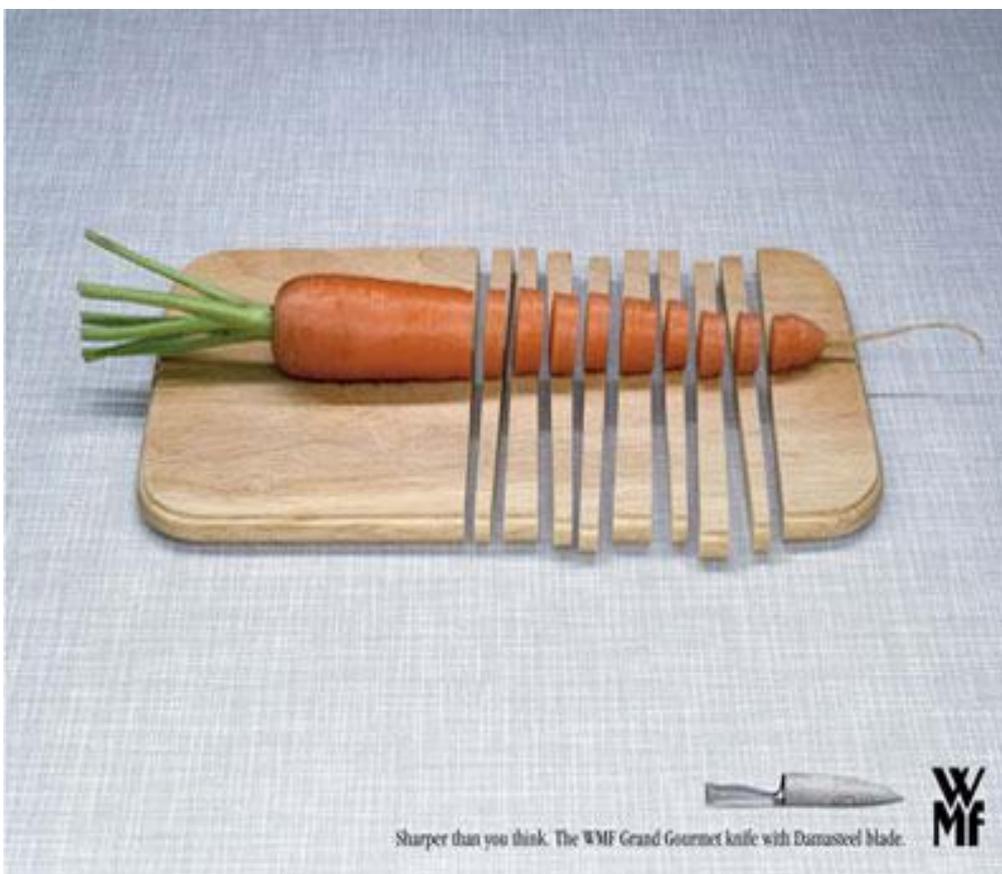
Appendix B. Use Electricity Wisely



Appendix C. Big Hamburgers



Appendix D. WMF



Appendix E. NIVEA: Goodbye Cellulite



Appendix F. NIVEA: Hair Care

