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Task Two: Semiotic Analysis

Language can be defined as a system of signs which represent different ideas (De Saussure, 1959). The “sign” is made up of two different components: the signifier (the thing that we see), and the signified (the mental concept) (Semiotics: Sign, Signifier, Signified, n.d.). Saussure called this “semiology” (De Saussure, 1959). Since then semiology has become an important study of the ways in which we use language to communicate different ideas.

We can apply semiotic theory to different campaigns (whether they are political or simply for advertising). On a denotative level these things can just be seen as they are: for example, the colour blue is just what it is: blue. However, it isn't until we start to add the connotation to the signs that we can truly understand what is being expressed. In the case of the colour blue, that would invoke feelings of sadness (denotation and connotation, n.d.).



Figure 1. Mamac Ogilvy & Mather Dubai: Autocomplete Truth.

To show how important connotations are, we will look at the campaign shown in Figure 1 is The Autocomplete Truth by UN Women (UN Women ad series reveals widespread sexism, 2013). This campaign was made in 2013 and shows Google autocomplete searches that reflect on the views that society holds about women. The Google search is placed over the mouths of the models as if to represent the idea that women are being silenced, while the black background and clothing reinforces the notion that this topic is not only sad but also serious (Ferreira, 2019). Black can also be associated with endings and new beginnings (St Clair, 2016) which can imply that the idea of the campaign is to contribute to the end of women's oppression and

discrimination. As well as this, the models shown in this campaign are of different ethnicities and religions, which shows that discrimination happens to all types of women and that no type of woman should be left out of the conversation surrounding sexism. Underneath the Google searches is also a statement in small font which had the complete opposite view of women to what the google searches showed. This smaller font could indicate that those positive views of women are much less common than the negative views.

To explain why these sexist views of women are being held in modern society, we can apply Barthes' theory of the myth (Barthes, 1972). In *Mythologies*, Barthes gives an example of how the bourgeois, through their power and influence, have the ability to influence societal views. Knowing that men have been in social power throughout history and now (Ananthaswamy and Douglas, 2018), it can be seen that they have been pushing forward a patriarchal society.

To conclude, semiotics and the different theories within it, do in fact shape our understanding of language and imagery and the way in which we use it. It is especially important in political and activist spaces where strong symbolism is needed to convey a message, as things like the colour, the models, and word placement will have a subconscious effect on the way we perceive a campaign.

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Figure 1: Memac Ogilvy & Mather Dubai: Autocomplete Truth. Accessed:

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