

Proposal

Research in Practice

Subliminal, Storytelling, Psychology

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Illustration BA (Hons)

Word Count: 2505

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Introduction

In this proposal I shall express my ideas for an extended essay and practice-based study, of producing an illustrated brand, product packaging and advertisements. I will explore the keywords storytelling, subliminal and psychology. Illustrated product packaging is the most effective method of marketing as the emotional response is not only a one-time investment for the customer, but an experience that can be revisited.

“As a fundamental aspect of selling and advertising an experience, product or service, illustration not only communicates the answer to the customer need but establishes a brand, and a voice they can trust.”

(Victionary, 2015)

Storytelling

It is crucial for a brand or product to come with a story for the viewer to engage in, like a different and far more intriguing world that has materialised within our own. “It is no coincidence therefore, that an ancient tradition like storytelling should appear in a new form as a tool for brand building” (Fog, Budtz and Yakaboylu, 2005, pp.17) Brands employ use of symbols and visual expressions that resonate with our personalities and values. (pp.18)

With storytelling comes narration, a critical feature in deciding how an illustration is delivered to the viewer. Strategically choosing a focalisation from which to view the illustration further immerses an audience in whichever way the artist desires.

“Styles of narratives which will rationally and emotionally influence the consumer and lead them to purchasing behaviour are fictionalized in advertisements. A story is narrated by using the information given in an advertisement, namely, by entering the perspective of the consumer”

Yilmaz et. al, 2019, pp.53



Fig. 1 - Favre, M (2016) first person and observer narrative for maximum immersion effect

Illustrations can place the viewer in any perspective it wishes, to immerse them in the story. First person places the viewer in the scene, omniscient narration tells us its deepest thoughts, and we can simply watch from the style of the observer (Yilmaz et. al, 2019, pp.38) As illustrators, the power is in our hands to choose a focalisation that will capture the desired outcome of the brand or product. This focalisation becomes a silent narrator.

Narrative is the most direct way of drawing us into a character, and addressing and motivating the viewers' thoughts, feelings, senses, and experiences. (Ozer, 2019, pp.50) Research has outlined the methods and modes of narrative in advertising and branding, such as internal/external, autonomous/illustrative, literal/metaphorical, and receptive/participatory, and with these we can further adjust the composition of our art and illustration to deliver the desired effect (Ryan, 2005, pp.19)

It is with this fully immersive intention that we can cast the atmosphere through the entire experience, making packaging just as important as the product itself. "Although (an) idea is available for a single advertisement, the same illustration could be run continuously throughout an entire campaign" (Larned, 1925, pp.84), demonstrated by product displays, packaging, shelves, and counters shown below.

Fig. 2 - Too Faced Instore



Fig. 3 - Too Faced Limited Edition Palette, consistent with brand visual



"One of the hallmarks of a successful interactive production is that it envelopes the user in a rich, fully-involving environment... Interactivity stimulates as

many of the five senses as possible: hearing, seeing, touching—and, in some virtual reality environments, even smelling.”

Miller, 2004, pp.58



Fig. 4 - Kat Von D Palette



Fig. 5 - Kat Von D Instore



Fig. 6 - Kat Von D Fragrance

“(Storytelling is) what we build our ideas around. It’s the very fabric of our thoughts. If the idea is the foundation of the creative process, then the story is the vehicle that delivers it, making it memorable and provocative.”

Hegarty, 2014, pp.48

Consumers now wish to immerse themselves in positive experiences in a response to a need to healthily escape their everyday lives, and illustrating a world within ours addresses their needs, concerns, hopes and aspirations (Duffy, 2005, pp. 6) For a successful experience, the story cannot only exist in its packaging and advertising. The product itself is the investment. "...some of them are menacing, others erotic, and still others seem to embody a celebration of joy and beauty.” (Hine, 1925, pp.26) Thoughtful packaging is vital to a brands’ presence.

"The brand equity resides in a purely graphical concept, a combination of colors, type- faces, logos, and overall design style The appearance of the container is nevertheless an extremely important part of the brands identity " (pp.181)

Subliminal

From stories we can bring to life through display counters, advertisement strategies and product packaging design, subliminal symbolism and semiotic connotations are constantly at work. Observing these associations, a visual composition can be built without using direct wording to evoke subliminal emotional associations in the viewer.

“Although language is a basic model, semiotics has cast its net wider, and looks at any system of signs whether the substance is verbal, visual or a complex mixture of both”

Dyer, 1982, pp. 91

For example, ‘car’ can mean safety and status, a shampoo can be associated with sexual attraction and gratification, clothing can bring us an exciting new lifestyle, individuality, and reassurance that we belong. (Baldwin and Roberts, 2006, pp.78/79)

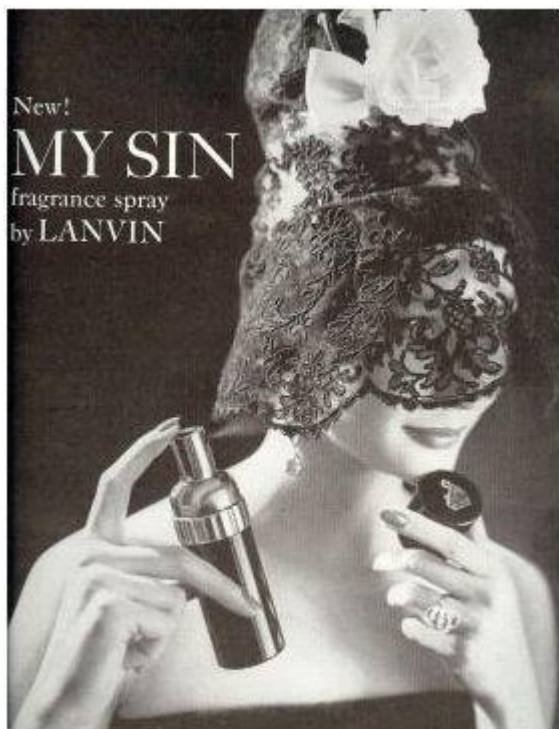


Fig. 7 - Lanvin 50's Advert



Fig. 8 - Romantic Galaxy Illustrated Advert

The limitless nature of illustration can take advantage of this ability to not only display the most whimsical and surreal visions, but also to tell a story through the choice of medium and visual language in which it portrays the most mundane and

unpleasant situations. Photography does not possess this human touch of empathy and truth; it is too polished and artificial.

A perfect example of effectively communicating through this phenomenon is in fragrance and perfume advertising. Being difficult to sell a scent, and scent attached to our feelings, advertisers must allude to suggestions of the feeling it can promise us. Sensual visual language such as showing an attractive female with heavy eyes, luxurious clothing, and using motivational phrases (Quartz, 2016) instils the message that this item will make us more desirable.

Once the message arrives with the customer, it does not stop there. The customer, through their newly acquired extension of self, becomes a subliminal influence on those they encounter in everyday life.



*Fig. 9 – Starbucks Seasonal Cups
become a sought-after accessory*

"The ubiquitous and pervasive nature of these (everyday) encounters means that they represent a common form of exposure to consumers and their chosen brands... because they are commonplace occurrences, information gleaned from these brief exposures may have a strong impact on an observer's choice of brand"

Illustration to advertise came before photography and manipulation even in wider influential media such as magazines. It also comes with the full disclosure of honesty and fulfilment that it is simply a visual expression of the feeling that is available, whereas photographs can sometimes deceive, and create an uncomfortable adverse effect when the products' direct nature or image is incompatible with the viewer.

"The cover image operates not only as an object of vision for male, but also for female audiences. As viewers, we might imagine ourselves to be a male or female spectator looking at the model with envy or desire"

Rice, 2014, pp.237

Cosmetic advertisements and product pictures were initially beautifully illustrated pieces of work that contributed to the overall experience of owning a part of the aesthetic. The drawn model would sometimes be accentuated and depicted in unnatural proportions to sell a certain appearance, though it was clear that it was an artists' stylistic rendition of an overall visual language and should only be thought of as such.

Illustration provides an opportunity to target a specific person, and research has shown that when those who are considered influential purchase a product, demand for it increases and creates what is known as the bandwagon effect (Wu et. al, 2015, pp. 157)

The study by Wu et. al (2015, pp.164) confirms:

“Brands help the individual to develop a sense of personal identity and that the act of using them disseminates information about that identity... they are involved in a “self-creation project” conducted through the medium of objects that have meanings to which they aspire.”



Fig. 10 – Illustrated Luxury Edition Whiskey Packaging

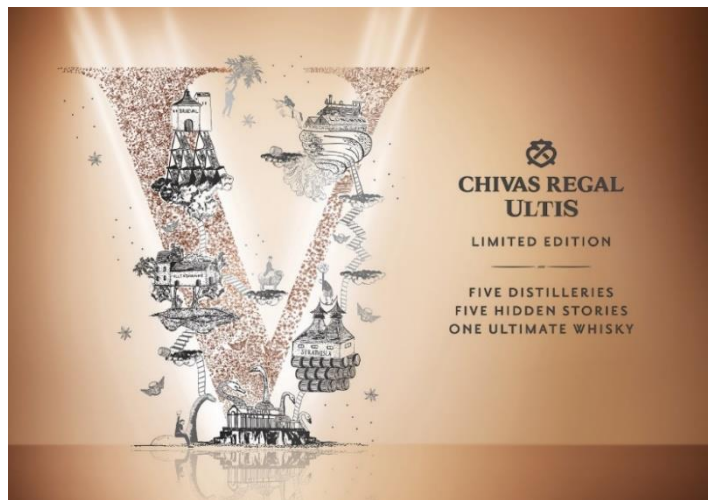


Fig. 11

A consideration to note from Verwijmeren et. al (2010) shows that the technique of subliminal messaging is notably lesser effective when a brand or product purpose is not yet established, and so is best used by mid-range companies and brands. (pp.211)

It is with this respect that subliminal persuasion has been described as the technique that will help to win wars without using any weapons. (Sofi et. al, 2018, pp.1598)

Psychology

The theories and laws from the field of psychology are what will build the entire framework, for a composition designed to achieve a particular response. For example, Kano's theory of Attractive Quality has been applied to studies in relation to customer selection. Application of the theory in this area allows us to better explain "the roles that different quality attributes play for customers" (Witell et. al, 2013, pp.1241) so that we can address these qualities in artwork for the desired attention. Studies and experiments that refer to these established connections are invaluable to any commercially targeted artwork and can offer insight into what works successfully, and possible adverse outcomes, as well as areas that are lesser explored for those wishing to break rules and discover new ones.



Fig. 12 – Haagen Dazs Special Edition Packaging and flavour



Fig. 13 – Colour corresponding to contents

Another theory that is fundamental to art is understanding of colour. "Each color affects us uniquely. Even the slightest variation of a single color can have a profound influence on our behavior. In wise hands, color can become a powerful tool" (Bellatoni, 2005, pp. xxviii) Creating the artwork from the ground up allows us to

accurately select combinations, adjust saturation, create dramatic and unignorable statements, with an appreciation of this theory alone. We can even alter how the viewers' mind receives a product, stated by Becker et. al (2010, pp.18) in an investigation that showed:

“...adding a small percentage (i.e., 15%) of yellow to the overall green color of 7-Up cans led consumers to experience the taste as more ‘lemony’ (even though the drink itself had not been manipulated)”

It is possible to modulate specific taste evaluations and impact an overall evaluation by including the portrayal symbolic meanings on product packaging. (pp.22) This is a notion that has inspired me to observe the entire field of visual communication for this proposal into an illustrative project, as the vast amount of existing knowledge and research can constantly be related and connected to creation of an image of any kind.



Fig. 14 – reusable and beautiful teabag storage



Fig. 15

We have a desire to personalise, identify and express ourselves through every decision we make. Our purchases are an extension of our self. It has been

observed that millennials require greater levels of personalisation (Sweeney, 2004, pp.8) and alongside the limited-edition packaging strategy there lies an ability to create a sense of scarcity, exclusivity, and luxury. Illustration is an ideal vehicle for this due to its personal nature and opportunity for customisation. Self-expression is significantly associated with social and economic value, and it is shown through our purchases (pp.6)

"The sense of shortage gives certain customers a feeling of curiosity that drives them to want to buy an item urgently...the appeal of scarcity has thrived for a long time on luxury brands...The "trading up" phenomena reflects the inclination of customers to attain success by purchasing high emotional value goods"

T. M. Ha, 2021, pp. 2

Another psychological motivator that can be used is the experience of nostalgia. By appealing to the targeted demographic or viewers' prior knowledge, "nostalgic cues in an advertisement may enhance the production and concomitant rehearsal of self-referencing, nostalgic thoughts and personal connections," influencing a desired call to action. (Meuhling and Sprott, 2004, pp. 31-32).

Nostalgia can be defined by two types; personal i.e., "family," "music," and "pets" as well as abstractions such as "the way society was," and historical i.e. "They don't make them like they used to," "Things used to be better in the good old days" and "We are experiencing a decline in the quality of life" (Specht and Kreiger, 2016, pp. 60). Whilst we may be inclined to illustrate scenes that appeal to the masses, the experiment by Meuhling and Sprott concluded that advertisements targeting subjects

and occasions of personal nostalgia outperformed that of the historical nostalgia study. Both nostalgic examples surpassed the results of non-nostalgic advertisements. (pp.112)

Adorning our surroundings with art that expresses who we are and offers us a sanctuary upon observation should not only pertain to our walls. Through delightful packaging and products, our material purchase becomes an experiential one. Research from Halkias, Kousi, and Baumgartner (2020) concluded that while the existing variables for measuring the exact amount of improvement in mood was complicated, it consistently increased, nonetheless.

“Our findings suggest that people should not dismiss material purchases. Instead, they should be more deliberate when making purchase decisions and opt for goods and services that are instrumental in expressing their self.”

Halkias, Kousi, and Baumgartner, 2020, pp.381-382

Context

A personal motive to create atmosphere is always present in my practice, perhaps as a healing or coping mechanism for others and myself. I am fascinated with the reasons behind creative decisions, particularly packaging and branding with a strong and evident character.

“Product packaging makes the application of illustrations more extensive... design consists of three elements, symbols, graphics, and words. In addition to introducing products, the brand image is also set up at the same time.”

Chu, 2018, pp. 540

An opposing idea, that contrasts with my intention of consciously choosing elements that create a particular mood, stated that invoking specific emotional responses must be a serendipitous event. Choices should not be based solely upon an intellectual or abstract notion, and the process must be related to viscerally. (Bellatoni, 2005, pp. xxix) This is an idea that I will be mindful to revisit during my practice and ensure to vary my sources of inspiration and feedback. This will also remind me to assess different methods to gather as many emotional responses as possible, and gently steer the project whilst allowing it to organically develop.

Packaging illustration is the perfect vehicle for mindful consumption, as previously explained by Halkias, Kousi, and Baumgartner (2020). It allows us to cope with impermanence by making the most of each use and what we surround ourselves with. A functional product becomes artwork we can keep, developing sentimental value, or a memory keepsake.

“The role of possessions in these cases is not only to act as ballast to keep us stable, but to serve as familiar transitional objects that, like the child's security blanket, provide us a sense of support as we confront an uncertain future.”

Belk, 1990, pp.669

Practice

I plan to develop a branded, advertised product with a focus on creating a desired atmosphere and narrative. "In eighteenth and nineteenth century France, perfume and cosmetic containers became a strong influence on the creation of packaging as we know it" (Hane, 2005, p.33), and knowing this I would like to focus on cosmetics, fragrances, and wellbeing products. I feel this would provide an

extensive amount of information about the development of this area of illustration, as well as being part of my future goals as an artist for branding and packaging.

Fig. 16



Fig. 17



Fig. 18



Research Question

Can illustrated branding be made to induce a specific response in a customer base by using psychological techniques and subliminal symbolism?

I would like to further specify the emotional response I aim to achieve, as this would add further structure to my extended essay and offer opportunities to contrast and compare relevant information.

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