Analysis of an Advertising Text: Discourse and Emotion
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT - By using discourse analysis as a means of examining the social processes that create ads, this paper contributes to Scott's (1994) call for a better understanding of both the forms that ads take and the way they might be read. Discourse analysis emphasises language, through texts and talk, as a constructive tool. Rather than using language to imply the presence of underlying psychological constructs, discourse analysis focuses on how people use language to construct versions of their worlds and what they might gain from these constructions. Instead of looking at an emotion (such as sadness) as being an internal, mental state, discourse analysts are more concerned with studying what people are doing when they are talking, or making claims about their emotions or thoughts.

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By using discourse analysis as a means of examining the social processes that create ads, this paper contributes to Scott’s (1994) call for a better understanding of both the forms that ads take and the way they might be read. Discourse analysis emphasises language, through texts and talk, as a constructive tool. Rather than using language to imply the presence of underlying psychological constructs, discourse analysis focuses on how people use language to construct versions of their worlds and what they might gain from these constructions. Instead of looking at an emotion (such as sadness) as being an internal, mental state, discourse analysts are more concerned with studying what people are doing when they are talking, or making claims about their emotions or thoughts.

The context for this research is provided by an advertising campaign for Xenical, a prescription only medication for weight loss. Critics of this ad campaign suggested that it was negative in that it created feelings of shame and sadness.

Based upon the same interview data that inspired the ad campaign, analysis within this paper explores the ‘emotional’ talk used by both the interviewer and participants, how this might have informed the construction of the ads themselves, and how in turn the ads might then be read.

Findings suggest that the interview data contained three dominant themes or discourses: ‘restriction’, ‘feelings’ and ‘dreams’. When examined within the specific interpretative context, these three themes combine to construct ‘negative’ feelings, including feelings of sadness and shame for the participants.

These same themes provide important insights into the construction of the final television ads. A brief analysis of each of the Xenical ads within the campaign demonstrates that these three dominant themes are also present, intertwined and central to the sadness that the ads portray.

By privileging texts and talk as social practices, this paper demonstrates that discourse analysis is able to provide an important contribution to the study of advertisements. But a much wider implication is that discourse analysis can greatly impact upon the way we do consumer research.

REFERENCES


