

Advertisement Redesign - Nivea, "Re-Civilize Yourself."

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Advertisements are audio and visual forms for companies and organizations to promote and sell their ideas, products, and services with a target audience in mind. There are often subliminal or hidden messages in these advertisements that one may overlook. It is important to analyze these messages in order to understand the information that is being relayed. As a consumer of multiple advertisements it is important to ask yourself three questions when breaking down an ad: What is the text saying? What is the image reading? And who is the target audience for the ad? Nevertheless, there are instances where the messages are straightforward and people can quickly catch on. An example of straightforward messages would be the Nivea campaign.

Nivea is a German personal care brand, and it is one of the leading international skin care companies. In 2011, the company released an advertisement, in Esquire Magazine's September issue, for men's shaving products through their "Look like you give a damn" campaign. One of their advertisements in this campaign featured an African American man holding a decapitated head of what was implied to be his former self, with an afro and a beard. As shocking as that sounds, and to top it off, in the middle of the ad Nivea wrote in big bold text, "Re-civilize yourself." What is that trying to say to the general audience but mainly to African Americans? There are many messages that are easy to catch on, but if we break down this ad by shapes, colors, positionings/usage of words, and even analysing a setting, we will be shocked to understand its true meaning.

The message from the ad is clear. Nivea's ad is targeting African Americans, specifically those who have afros and beards. Due to the way his arms were flinged to one side, and his

stance, it was insinuated that he was going to throw away his "former self" in order to get rid of it. On the top right, a box had the words, "Look like you give a damn" with Nivea's logo and the words "face body shave" underneath. In addition, a large text in front of the man read, "Re-civilize yourself". Therefore, by using Nivea's shaving cream, the man would civilize himself and be brought to a stage of social, cultural, and moral development.

After analysing and being able to pinpoint all of the major concepts (text, image, audience) we can continue to break down the message by utilizing the power of semiotics. Semiotics is the study of symbols and signs. With that being said we can include color. In this particular ad they have intentionally decided to use color schemes of grey, blue, and white. According to "Color Meaning: Meaning of The Color Grey," they have concluded that grey is a cool, neutral, and balanced color. The color gray is an emotionless, moody color that is typically associated with meanings of *dull, dirty, and dingy*, as well as formal, conservative, and sophisticated. Dark grays are masculine in nature (Bourn, 2010). Dark blue is associated with knowledge, power, integrity and professionalism. Lastly, white is a sign of purity and clean. The ad had a lot of sharp shapes as well, such as squares and in particular - lines. Some were designed to be at an angle, some thicker than others, and some in a vertical structure. Vertical lines are strong, firm, and rigid. What do lines signify? They can be referred to enhance stability, especially when using thicker lines. Diagonal thick lines usually signify power and boldness. Which can indicate the stereotype of a male figure which in this case was being used as the main subject.

However, when the advertisement reached the audience, the company received immediate backlash causing the advertisement to get pulled. The audience saw this

advertisement as offensive and racist and called it "one of the most pervading racial stereotypes applied historically to the black community" (Krupnick, 201). Many were enraged by the portrayal and stereotype of the African American man because it implied that if "black people" chose to wear their natural hair in afros then, they would look uncivilized, primitive, and stupid. People were also wondering whether or not Rihanna would break her contract and stop being the face of Nivea for future advertisements. Even till this day, a Twitter user tweeted at Nivea and said, "...the real question is how did this ad make it through multiple layers of approval? I suspect that you don't hire diversity" (*Tweet*). Another advertisement used in the "Look like you give a damn" campaign, featured a Caucasian man in a similar stance with a decapitated head of his "former self," In comparison to the "Re-Civilize Yourself" advertisement, the text in front of the Caucasian man read "Sin city isn't an excuse to look like this." The Caucasian man was only being portrayed as being a mess because of his full grown beard and hair, but there was no mention of him being "uncivilized". There are two completely different perspectives on each advertisement which further proved that they stereotyped the African American man.

Despite the backlash, Nivea responded immediately, took down the advertisement within the hour, and apologized. They reiterated their value for diversity and equality, as well as "trust, family values, and reliability" (G, 2012). The overall message to take away from this is the fact that companies and organizations have to keep their audience in mind, as well as the representations used in their advertisements. Not everyone has the same mentality and opinions, so companies and organizations should have a diverse set of opinions when presenting these advertisements before making them go public.

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