

Intersemiotic translation of subliminal messages in brand logos



George Damaskinidis (EdD)
Loukia Kostopoulou (PhD)



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- Explore consumers' awareness of subliminal messages in advertisements; semiotics, symbolism and persuasion.
- Understand the hidden message of advertisements.
- Identify the symbols that appeal to the audience and how they work.
- Experimental procedure; semi-structured questionnaire and interview.
- Greek participants exposed to logos of international brands.
- Asked to identify their form, colour, logo, brand name or slogan.
- Aim to identify the interaction between the verbal and non-verbal semiotic elements; ways subliminal messages have a positive impact on the brand logo.

- Intersemiotic translation; include non-verbal semiotic systems; suggest language is not the prevalent semiotic system.
- By-pass the most powerful semiotic system; invest in non-verbal communication.
- Advertisers build on the verbal system combining it with visual cues.
- When verbal messages not included in the logos, they are implied and perceived by the consumer.
- Subliminal message is not easily decipherable; embedded in the verbal sign or part of the iconic visual sign.

- Consumer interprets an advertisement; level of overt/surface message; level of a hidden message.
- Strategy of “occultation”; no reference at all or a hidden reference to the economic profits.
- Symbols to convey the vision of the advertisers to public.
- Symbol as emphatic marker; to attract consumers' attention, display ideological, cultural beliefs or preferences.
- Subliminal messages; inherently deceptive; consumers don't perceive them at a level of awareness; no choice to accept or reject the message.
- Colours, animal figures, specific shapes; portray an idea, and perceived in a different way by cultures.

- Advertisers use subliminal techniques to have a greater control on consumers' behaviour.
- Motivational research has shown that there are eight hidden needs in human psyche, namely emotional security, reassurance of worth, ego-gratification, creative outlets, love objects, sense of power, sense of roots, and immortality.
- Advertisers often create subliminal messages that appeal to these hidden needs, thus aiming at controlling the subconscious mind.
- The debate on the effectiveness of the use of subliminal messages, especially in advertising starts as early as 1957, it was claimed that, by using subliminal messages in cinema advertisements of products, such as popcorn and cola, we could increase the consumption of these products.
- Experiments have proved the effectiveness of subliminal messages on the drink brand choice. There is evidence that there has been a change in the results, once the subjects were informed that a subliminal message existed.

Positive verbo-visual impact of the subliminal message on a brand logo

- Triggers emotions.
- Enrich the aesthetic and functional values of the brand design,
- Makes brand design look more innovative and distinguish.
- Attracts the consumers, catch their mind and leave an internal impression.
- Achieves a distinctive competitive position among the brand rivals in the market.

The research design

- Diagnostic rating: attributes of the product; components dissected into smaller elements; evaluated on detailed criteria.
- Qualitative experimental procedure; Subliminal Message Testing (SMeT),
- SMeT: measures the degree the subliminal message is identifiable; four stages: orientation, observation, questionnaire and interview
- Thirty five Greek adults; W (19), M (15); age 20s (9), 30s (10), 40s (13), 50s (3).

Subliminal Message Testing procedure

- Participant orientation; informed of the context of a research for brand logos; not our intention to identify the subliminal messages.
- A3-large white card with the logos printed on it.
- All participants Greeks; no background knowledge of the brands; familiarization with the logos.
- Five minutes to complete a closed-end questionnaire; elicit ability to identify subliminal messages.
- Messages correspond to “positioning statement”; particular product benefits to inform the receiver and perceptually position the brand.
- One-to-one semi-structured interview: revealed the logos containing the messages; asked participants to point verbal and visual elements.

The sample of brand logos with hidden elements



Logo	Semiotic elements			
	Form	Color	Meaning	
			Visual	Verbal
a	curved arrow (from 'A' to 'Z')	yellow (curve)	value	variety
b	letter 'C'	-	type	letter
c	letters 'B' & 'R'	-	variety	number
d	negative space	-	location	-
e	series of blue lines, name	blue (lines)	location	location, type
f	arrow, name	negative space	value	origin
g	typeface and two t's	yellow, red	type	name
h	curved & straight lines	-	type	acronym
i	negative space	negative space	variety	-
j	letter 'h'	-	service	letter
k	curved line, letters 'I', 'O'	negative space	type	name
l	two oval patches	green	type	letters
m	silhouette	negative space	product	name
n	patches on the mountain	negative space	location	-
o	two Ts, a patch, the dot of 'i'	red/yellow mark	product, value	letters
p	negative space	negative space	location	-
q	negative space	negative space	type	name
r	letter R and yellow circle	yellow (circle)	type, period	type
s	negative space	negative space	type	name
t	blue/white cones	blue/white	origin	name

No	Subliminal message	Logo
1	Happiness	a
2	Historical development. Products of the past.	t
3	Time period related to the product.	r
4	The vast variety of the products.	s
5	The value of the company [of humans].	g
6	Combining old and new technology.	h
7	The concept of direction.	f
8	Marine species.	i
9	Cathedral.	l
10	Number.	o,s
11	Athlete.	q, r
12	Human figure.	g, k, q, r
13	Information about the company (area/city/country)	c, e, j, l, n
14	Animals.	b, c, i, j, l, p
15	The shape of the product.	b, c, d, i, j, l, m, p, q, r

Participants' answers to the questionnaire and the interview

Sublim	Questionnaire	Answers to the research tools			Change in answers
		answers	Interview	words used to describe	
1	17	7		colour, smile	-10
2	17	13		sky, clouds, rotors	-4
3	9	12		sun, summer	+3
4	a(16), s(7)	a(5), s(13/12(3) - 31(4) - 131(4))		from a to z, numbers	-11, -4/-3
5	9	21		little people, (eat) (al)together	+12
6	10	3		old & digital	-7
7	15	8		arrow, change of colour, forward, exit	-7
8	23	21		aquarium, fishes	-2
9	5	15		bell tower, cones, Cologne	-10
10	o(27), s(8)	o(24), s(17)		Formula 1, colour (31)	-3, +9
11	q(30), r(12)	q(20), r(9)		golfer, bicyclist	-10, -3
12	g(13), k(13), q(34), r(6)	g(10), k(13), q(22), r(6)		little people, head-and-hands, orchestra conductor, face profile, human bending, golfer	-3, +9, -12
13	c(7), j(14), l(13), n(6)	c(8), e(9), j(13), l(10), n(16)		Alps, bridge, Cologne, San Francisco, skyscraper, Eifel	+1, +9, -1, -3, +10
14	i(30), j(31), l(32), p(20)	b(16), c(18), i(18), j(21), l(24), p(14)		chicken, bear, ape, lion, fishes, birds, elephant, giraffe, rhino, elephant	+16, +18, -12, -10, -8, -6
15	b(9), c(7), d(5), i(14), j(12), l(15), p(14), q(9), r(4)	b(12), c(8), d(17), i(11), j(7), l(14), m(10), p(11), q(14)		chicken's head, conic chocolate, house, animals, kiss/white shape, helmet/golfer, bicyclist, footprint	+3, +1, -12, -3, -5, -1, -3, +5, -4



How they look innovative and distinguish





Shelter



Attract the consumers, caught their
mind and leave an internal impression



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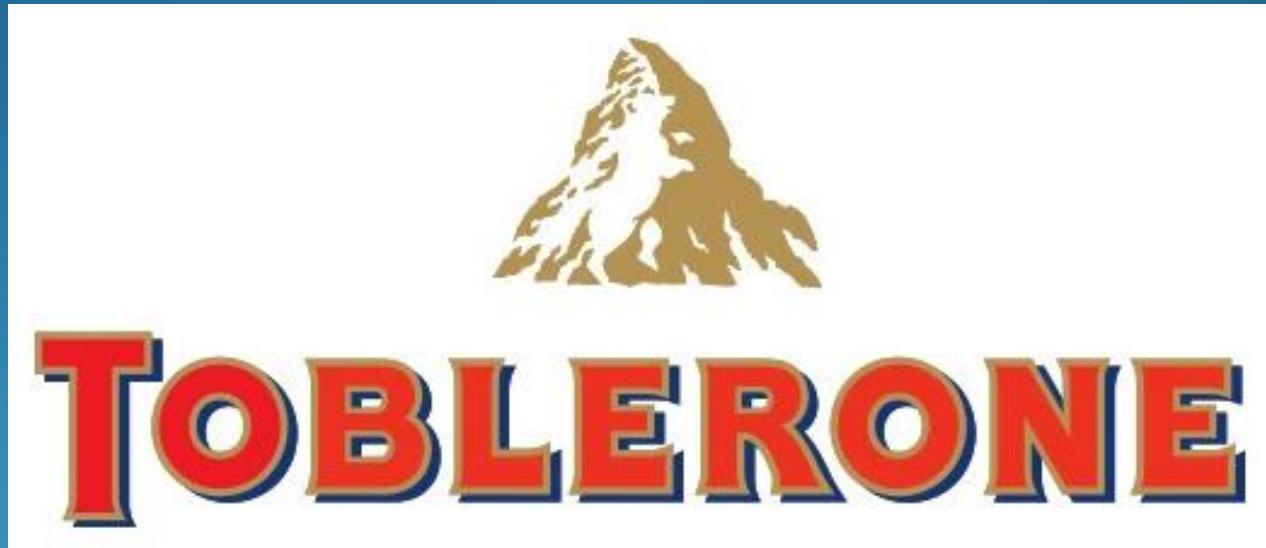
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Concluding remarks

- Similarly to previous studies; few participants, attracted by the subliminal message.
- After drawing their attention; start making the associations between the various semiotic elements.
- Methodologically; SMeT successful in making the subliminal message visible.
- Most important stage; interview, enabled participants to give their own view of the nature of the subliminal message.
- Research limitations: random selection of logos; distribution of subliminal messages to logos in the questionnaire; cultural background (and small number) of participant; experiment controlled environments.
- Future research: empirical studies; different brands of the same product; diverse socio-cultural contexts, age groups and research population.



Thank you very much for your attention

