

“Train de Nuit”:

An Analysis of Sensory Engagement in Commercials

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Abstract

Contemporary advertising goes beyond communicating product details; modern-day advertising conveys a sensory product experience. One such advertisement is Audrey Tautou's commercial for Coco Chanel No. 5, a premium perfume, titled “Train de Nuit” (French for a night train). Although commercials are sometimes perceived as flat mediums (offering only visuals and sound), the Chanel No. 5 commercial challenges this notion by engaging with several senses. In particular, the Chanel No. 5 commercial engages with the (1) haptics and (2) chronoception (3) sense of place. Applying the concept of haptic visuality termed by Marks, the vestibular, kinesthetic, cutaneous, and tactile senses are triggered. Haptic senses are also stimulated through a combination of the camera angles, movement of the characters, and the setting. Next, chronoception is disoriented in the commercial through the rapidity of its pace, producing captive viewers. Finally, the sense of place is triggered by filming in Istanbul, to build emotional resonance with the target market.

Summary of Commercial

In the commercial, the main protagonist (Tautou) takes a night train to Istanbul. During the night, she meets a handsome man who is attracted to the scent of her perfume (here referred to as Davenport, after the model who plays the role). She falls asleep on the train and then awakes, missing an encounter with Davenport. She gets off the train at Istanbul and boards a ship. While taking pictures on the ship, she again sees Davenport. He is on another ship, so the two are not able to meet. The commercial closes with Tautou walking into the Haydarpaşa Terminal, and Davenport following her. Davenport embraces her, and the two are finally reunited.



Research Question: How does the Chanel advertisement “Train de Nuit” challenge the conventional 5 senses model?

Methodology

To answer this question, the commercial was viewed multiple times and analyzed. Research was conducted regarding senses and capitalism to aid the analysis.

RELATIONSHIP WITH CAPITALISM

Chanel commissioned the advertisement to refresh their brand and combat mundanity and repetition (in order to be relevant in the cultural economy, as described by Appadurai). The commercial was commissioned in the form of a short film.

“Train de Nuit” provides the viewer with an engaging sensorial experience. The engagement of multiple senses for capitalistic purposes is referred to by Howes as the sensual logic of late capitalism or hyperesthesia. In “Train de Nuit”, the viewer is purposefully overwhelmed with information to encourage consumption of products.

The commercial was released in May of 2008, and would be viewed only during a time of leisure (that is, watching television or watching videos online). This suggests that in post-modern society, even leisure activities require stimulation of multiple senses

A paradox exists between the brand of Coco Chanel (which is a premium, exclusive brand), and the selling of a mass produced product. Chanel counteracts this perceived loss in value by releasing advertisements that are categorized as art, rather than the common commercial (as art is perceived as more socially valuable than a commercial).

HAPTICS

One of the many senses engaged in “Train de Nuit” is the haptic sense. If one looks beyond the narrow 5 senses model, haptics can be subdivided into many categories such as the vestibular sense (relating to balance), kinesthetic sense (relating to motion) and cutaneous sense (relating to pressure and temperature).

“Train de Nuit” stimulates the vestibular sense through camera angles and frame motions. Sharp movements of the camera are purposefully employed in the commercial to be disorienting and make the viewer feel slightly off-balance.

Next, the kinesthetic sense is emphasized by actress Tautou's performance. By applying the concept of embodied simulation, which occurs when the viewer's body fuses with the actress's body, Tautou's movements enhance the kinesthetic sense. Tautou actively moves in the advertisement, causing the viewer to imagine their own bodies in motion.

The cutaneous sense is triggered several times in the commercial. A useful concept is that of haptic visuality, which is when eyes act as conduits for the haptic sense through texture and depth observation. The props in the commercial enhance the cutaneous sense through haptic visuality (such as soft pillows).

CHRONOCEPTION

Chronoception refers to one's sense of time. There are several instances of rapid chronoception in “Train de Nuit”. The most noticeable is when Tautou and Davenport meet for the first time on the train, and the window changes from sunset to midnight in the span of seconds. From a marketing perspective, rapid chronoception increases captivation and engagement. By disorientating the viewer's chronoception, the commercial seem shorter in duration, producing a captive body that is more susceptible to consumptive messages.

SENSE OF PLACE

The final sense engaged in “Train de Nuit” is the sense of place. In “Train de Nuit”, the sense of place is triggered by visible signs of Tautou's travel to Istanbul. Places are imbued with significant social meaning, and especially relate to memories.

The location of Istanbul triggers associations with its media representation. For example, Istanbul is often portrayed in films as a place of exoticism, travel, and mystery. Such a view is reductionist. Nonetheless, Istanbul prompts an emotional response (by triggering memory of media content), increasing the sensory engagement of the commercial.

CONCLUSION

Although commercials are sometimes perceived as flat mediums (offering only visuals and sound), the Chanel No. 5 commercial challenges this notion by engaging with several senses. If one looks beyond the 5 senses model (which postulates that all human being have only five distinct senses – that of touch, smell, taste, sight, and sound), several more nuanced senses are engaged in this commercial. At the macro-level, this means that capitalism, consumer engagement, and sensory engagement are intrinsically linked. In modern-day capitalistic society, consumer expectations have shifted from a focus on the product to a focus on the product sensory engagement.



Ref: Amazon