



STUDYDADDY

**Get Homework Help
From Expert Tutor**

Get Help



STUDYDADDY

**Get Homework Help
From Expert Tutor**

Get Help

Sample Student
Micah Rickerson
English 1110.01
12/7/14

Manipulation of Fear in Wartime Advertising

Often, people do not realize the methods advertisements use to influence their thinking and persuade them to buy certain items. An understanding of these methods is important so that the viewer can make informed decisions about the products they buy. Advertisements often latch onto common anxieties in the time they are produced. Wartime conditions allow for advertisers to take advantage of the fears of the populace. During World War II, for instance, some advertisers aligned certain behaviors with support for the Axis powers, often presenting their products as the solution to treacherous or simply non-patriotic actions. Even though the civilian populace was not fighting overseas, they could still support the Allied effort through conserving resources and fighting the spread of disease. A 1943 advertisement by the American illustrator Boris Artzybasheff attempts to convince the reader to buy Ajax and Aero “Sanitary Paper Drinking Cups.” The ad is dominated by the forearms and hands of a being holding a metal ladle-like drinking cup. The hands are almost skeletal in nature, with the knuckle and joint bones of the fingers clearly showing. The finger nails are long and untrimmed. The veins are very prominent, and the arm seems slightly less bony than the hands. The metal ladle has a peeling outer layer and a dented side. In addition, water is dripping down the ladle. The text beneath the illustration is written from the perspective of disease. The personified character of disease says, “I am always waiting” and “You know me from away back...in the Dark Ages, I laid men low by the thousands.” Although the 1943 Ajax and Aero advertisement appears at first glance to be about selling paper drinking cups, in reality the ad reveals American WWII anxieties about

disease during wartime. The ad uses various methods of manipulating wartime fears to scare the reader into buying the paper cups.

All of these elements of the advertisement are ominous, jolting the reader. Paper cups seem like fairly mundane objects, but the ad uses strong tactics to make the readers anxious about their health. It seems as though disease is holding the ladle, based on the text below the image using the first person perspective. The unhealthy look of the hands and arms could serve as a warning of possible consequences when people fail to convert to paper cups. The being holding the cup is certainly not in prime health since the bones and veins are so prominent. In the image, the being is almost modeling the ladle. The hands are holding the ladle in a display-like position. The water dripping down the side of the ladle shows how easily disease can spread from the cup. If the ladle is sloshed just a little, then the infested water can tumble out and infect the surrounding people. Though the water in the ladle is supposed to be diseased, the appearance seems outwardly fine. It is not murky and reflects back the light shining on it. This reflects the microscopic nature of the the germs and bacteria that lead to human illness. The prominent nature of the being's veins seems to show just how easily the bodies precious organs can be infiltrated by outside contagions. The veins are so close to the surface that it seems like any small injury to the surrounding skin could leave the veins open to infection.

In the text, disease focuses on war plants when explaining the germ transmission occurring person to person as a result of drinking from the same cup. This is interesting because there are other situations when diseases could be transmitted besides sharing a cup of water. The text being written from the perspective of disease seems odd; why would disease want to warn people about itself? In the third paragraph, disease says, "I see drinking devices where men rinse their mouths and leave germs to breed only inches from the next who drinks- that encourages

me.” Disease is simultaneously advocating for sanitary drinking cups, and saying it is encouraged by poor worker sanitation. This inconsistency makes the text’s message somewhat confusing to understand. The entire ad uses a black and white color scheme, leading to a sense that the solution to water-borne disease is black and white. The obvious solution is to just buy the paper cups.

Disposable paper cups were invented and marketed through a collaboration between Boston innovator Lawrence Luellen and Hugh Moore of the American Water Supply Company. Luellen invented the cup and Moore played the role of making it into a business success. The cup was marketed as a solution to the problem of diseases spreading through the sharing of a communal drinking cup. According to Peter Smith of the Smithsonian, Moore’s marketing also served to “aid the campaign to do away with free water offered at communal cup, ‘tin dippers,’ found in public buildings and railway stations” (“The Unnatural History”). This implies that during the time that the paper cup was developed, a public health campaign was already underway that aimed to increase worker sanitation.

As stated earlier, readings about paper cups do not usually excite a person. However, using scary imaging and text, the reader becomes more interested in buying the product the ad is selling, paper cups. With such a terrifying prospect of death and disease, the paper cup information on the page is reassuring in its simplicity and sensibility. Buying the paper cups is shown as a panacea for the problem of disease transmission. The text’s descriptions of disease transmission during the Dark Ages and the 1918 influenza are scary because they reference times when millions of people died. Up against a scary prospect, such as the Black Death, who would not rush to buy the “sanitary” paper drinking cups? Bringing up the 1918 Spanish Influenza serves to remind the reader of the ease of transmission of disease during war-time. According to

Professor JS Oxford(,) “conditions in the [war] camp, with most soldiers housed in tents or temporary wooden barracks, were ideal for spread of a respiratory virus” (112). In other words, the 1918 Spanish Influenza’s widespread transmission was facilitated by the lack of sanitary living conditions during the war. In addition, “Stress and overcrowding, the partial starvation in civilians, and the opportunity for rapid “passage” of influenza in young soldiers would have provided the opportunity for multiple but small mutational changes throughout the viral genome,” (113) according to Professor JS Oxford. This shows that the wartime conditions allowed not only for the transmission of the existing influenza, but also for a mutated version to develop and spread. In 1943, the U.S. was engaged in the fighting of World War II, and the viewers of the paper cup ad may have made the assumption that the conditions that allowed for disease transmission during World War I were also present in World War II.

In 1943, anxiety would have been running high in the U.S., leaving Americans susceptible to ads targeting their insecurities about disease in the changing times. The American public may not have fully understood the ways that diseases transmit from one individual to the next, and out fear they would have been eager to buy any product that was supposed to protect them. During World War I, Vick’s Vap-O-Rub sales increased from \$900,000 to \$2.9 million “despite the fact that the rub had no medicinal effect whatever” (34) according to Robert Klara of the magazine Brandweek. This shows that fear based advertising can be highly effective in convincing people to buy a product. The advertising is especially effective if it capitalizes on “panoramic fear” and leads people to “scramble to find any kind of comfort they can, even to the point of absurdity,” (qtd in Klara 34) according to anthropologist Gavin Johnston of a behavioral science based branding consultancy. In other words, if people are made to feel overwhelmingly

afraid, they will buy almost anything to reduce their fear. In this case, the paper cups were the thing advertisers hoped people would rush to buy.

The Ajax and Aero advertisement also points to the larger theme of classifying everything during wartime as either friend or foe. Diseases, especially, were represented in propaganda as enemies alongside the axis powers. In the Ajax and Aero ad, disease is represented as a near skeletal person. In other ads from the World War II era, malaria and venereal diseases are prominently shown as various individuals that need to be vanquished. The venereal disease posters were especially attention grabbing due to their proclamations of certain infection from associating with women. According to Sam Sweet of the Paris Review, World War II posters “portrayed VD as a colleague of the Axis caricatures, and as the creeping specter of the grim reaper” showing that the producers of the posters felt that the most effective way to rally people to action would be to represent the enemy as a person. In addition, Sweet says “propaganda craves the personification of an enemy for its goals” lending further evidence to the idea that people are most responsive to human or living enemies.

The two main themes of the poster were using scare tactics to convince people to buy the sanitary paper drinking cups, and representing the enemy (disease) as a person to be defeated. These two themes complement each other rather than contradict each other because representing disease as enemy also elicits a fear response from the viewer of the poster. No one wants to contract a deadly disease, and portraying disease as being a wartime enemy would only further people’s fear of it. People would simultaneously be working to defeat the enemy, and also working to save themselves from the feared disease. Putting diseases up alongside Hitler and the Japanese only served to intensify the affect of the posters on the viewer. Now each time the viewer sees a tin dipper rather than a disposable paper drinking cup, the person is likely to

picture Hitler as well. The 1943 Artzybasheff Ajax and Aero poster reflects multiple tactics of advertising during World War II. The first tactic was the use of scary imagery with the skeletal hand holding the rusting tin dipper. The advertisement urged the viewer to buy disposable paper drinking cups from the company Ajax and Aero. By using death as the narrator, the text is able to further scare the reader. Fear of death is a huge motivator for people due to the natural survival instinct. People viewing the ad were presented with the threat of another disease outbreak as bad as the Black Death and the Spanish Influenza of 1918. The paper cup is presented by the ad as a cure to the fears of the populace. Since the U.S. was in the midst of World War II, people were probably more fearful and prone to advertisements than usual, making the ad especially impactful. Another tactic used by the advertisement was to label the enemy as clearly being disease. This gave Americans an avenue for supporting the war effort. This ad is important to modern day thought because although the U.S. is not currently in the midst of a World War, that does not mean ads will cease to latch onto the anxieties of the populace. People should be mindful of the way ads manipulate people's thinking to sell products.

Works Cited

Klara, Robert. "Caution: Fear Mongering May Be Hazardous To Your Brand." *Brandweek* 50.43 (2009): 34. MasterFILE Premier. Web. 26 Oct. 2014.

Oxford, J. S. et al. "World War I May Have Allowed the Emergence of "Spanish" Influenza." *The Lancet Infectious Diseases* 2.2 (2002): 111-14. *Science Direct*. Elsevier B.V. Web. 10 Oct. 2014.

Smith, Peter. "The Unnatural History of the Dixie Cup." *Smithsonian*. Smithsonian, 13 June 2012. Web. 10 Oct. 2014.

Sweet, Sam. "Protect Yourself." The Paris Review. N.p., 15 Aug. 2014. Web. 26 Oct. 2014. Website



STUDYDADDY

**Get Homework Help
From Expert Tutor**

Get Help



STUDYDADDY

**Get Homework Help
From Expert Tutor**

Get Help