

MPC MAJOR RESEARCH PAPER

HURTS SO GOOD

An examination of the use of sadness in not-for-profit advertisements

by

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ABSTRACT

Advertisements that evoke sadness have become increasingly popular. These ads are called *sadvertisements* and tend to depict a victim as well as the portrayal of something unjust or immoral. Using a visual social semiotic content analysis, this research paper seeks to determine the visual elements that convey sadness in five award-nominated not-for-profit print ads. This project also explores how sad advertising appeals might influence viewers. This paper found that the presence of sad facial expressions, a low modal representation, compositional features which evoke a sense of complicity on the part of the viewer, and the use of visual metaphors are the techniques used to convey sadness in a sample of award-nominated not-for-profit advertisements. This paper maintains that arousing sadness can generate sympathy, empathy, guilt, and/or compassion from the viewer. This study contributes to our understanding of how visuals convey emotion, and how emotion in advertising influences viewers.

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INTRODUCTION

Of the hundreds of advertisements an adult is exposed to every day, only about half make some sort of impact (Johnson, 2014). To make their content stand out, advertisers are producing more sophisticated and entertaining work than ever before (Rotfeld, 2012). When the lines between advertising and entertainment are successfully blurred – a phenomenon called *advertainment* – people seek out ads as a means of amusement. Engaging and thought-provoking content doesn't need to be forced upon reluctant viewers during commercial breaks or in magazine inserts. Rather, these ads take on a life of their own and can attract huge audiences through word of mouth, advertising awards, and social media shares.

In the past few years, advertisements that tug at the heartstrings have become increasingly popular, to the extent that they have earned their own moniker: *sadvertising*. A sadvertisement is an ad that depicts a victim with an explicit or implied lack of agency, as well as the portrayal of something unjust or immoral. Countless websites are devoted to sharing the best of this genre of advertising – in this sense “best” means those that are most likely to leave viewers in tears (Hays, 2015; Vitto, 2013; Dua, 2014). When executed successfully, a sadvertisement can draw a massive audience and spark a thoughtful conversation. Save the Children's *The Most Shocking Second a Day Video*, for instance, earned over 21 million views on YouTube in only five days, became the first ad from a non-profit organization (NPO) to be named YouTube's most popular

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advertisement of the month, and opened a dialogue about the Syrian civil war (Slate, n.d.).

NPOs like Save the Children face a unique challenge when producing advertisements. Instead of selling a product or service, NPO ads are intended to make viewers care about an issue or cause to which they may have no personal connection. Indeed, NPO ads seek to change perspectives, opinions, ways of life, and ask the viewer to give money without anything tangible in return.

Though NPOs have a reputation for producing emotional ads, evoking sadness to promote a cause or raise awareness can be problematic. Certain advertisements have been criticized for crossing the line to “poverty porn” or using “the Starving Baby Appeal” (Nathanson, 2013). These are ads that exploit the misfortune of others to foster awareness and support for a cause. Many of these ads fetishize the hardship of others, simplify their lives, and reinforce the divide between the Western and non-Western world (Nathanson, 2013). Though pulling at the heartstrings can help boost fundraising dollars, these ads pull too hard.

Despite the popularity of sadvertising, using negative emotions as a persuasive device is not a straightforward process. Studies have shown that negative emotions are harder to successfully evoke in advertisements than positive ones (Allen, Machleit & Marine, 1988). Accordingly, ads intended to arouse negative emotions are not as reliably successful as those intended to evoke

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humour or happiness. On top of that, ads that are *too* sad can debilitate the viewer and lead to depressive introspection (Small & Verrochi, 2009).

Though successfully arousing sadness in advertising is a difficult thing to do, many NPOs produce incredibly effective and creative sadvertisements that are recognized by the advertising community for their excellence. With this in mind, this research project seeks to examine five award-nominated NPO print advertisements with the goal of establishing how they convey sadness. This analysis is concerned exclusively with the visual elements of an ad that arouse sadness. This project will also explore how sadness, once aroused, might influence the viewer.

An analysis of how sadness can be conveyed in a compelling and persuasive manner is necessary for three reasons: first, there is a gap in academic literature in regards to which visual techniques effectively convey sadness in advertisements; second, an understanding of which visual techniques successfully convey emotion could prevent advertisers from crossing the line to exploitative sadvertising; and, finally, this analysis will enable future NPO advertisers to create compelling advertisements and, in turn, promote positive change.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review below is in five parts: part one lays the foundation of this study by outlining what sadness is and how it is studied; part two examines how emotional advertisements influence viewers; part three explores a controversy in academia about the nature of compassion and empathy; part four reviews the literature on visual metaphors; and part five explores semiotic theory, which serves as the theoretical framework of this research project.

Part 1: Sadness and The Study of Emotion

To analyze how sadness in advertising works, it is first necessary to understand what sadness it and how it is expressed. The following section begins with relevant definitions, followed by an overview of two approaches to studying emotion, and concludes with a discussion of the emotions that fall under the umbrella of sadness.

Defining Emotion

Terms such as affect, negative affect, emotion, feeling, and sadness appear frequently in the academic literature on emotion and advertising. Affect is defined as that which “encompasses all emotions, moods, feelings, and drives” (Barta & Ray, 1986, p. 235). Negative affect, as it pertains to advertising, is defined as “unpleasant feelings and emotions generated by ad exposure” (Huang, 1997, p.

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224). Emotion is defined as a “motivating experience and/or experience which has immediate meaning and significance for the person” (Izard, 1977, p. 49). Feelings are defined as shorter-lived and less intense versions of moods (Aaker, Stayman & Vezina, 1988). Sadness is the category most pertinent to my research. Shaver et al define a sad situation as that “in which the threat has already been realized” (Shaver et al 2001, p. 1077). Izard defines sadness as “a feeling of being downhearted, discouraged, miserable, lonely and helpless” (Izard, 1977, p. 289). Plutchik’s definition of sadness is more specific, namely: “unpleasure that is connected with ideas of something (bad) that has already happened” (Plutchik, 1980, p. 345).

This research project merges the above definitions and defines a sad situation as one in which something bad, threatening, immoral, or unjust is taking place or has already taken place. When it comes to advertising, a sad situation also tends to involve a victim with an implied or explicit lack of agency. Sadness itself is defined as the feelings of downheartedness evoked by this sad situation.

The Study of Emotion

There are two different approaches to studying emotion: the dimensional approach and the discrete approach. Those who adhere to the dimensional approach maintain that all human emotions exist within a larger dimension of emotion. Proponents of this view believe that the lines between emotional

responses are blurred and sometimes indistinguishable (Barta & Ray, 1986). To that end, the dimensional approach differentiates between several broad measurements of affect (Huang, 1997; Wells, Leavitt & McConville, 1971; Schlinger, 1979). Wundt (1897) proposed that there are three basic dimensions of human emotion, which are pleasurable-unpleasurable, strain-relaxation, and arousing-subduing. Various other emotional dimensions have been proposed since Wundt (1897), including attention-rejection, pleasantness-unpleasantness, and calm-excitement (Barta & Ray, 1986).

The discrete view proposes that emotions are specific and carry distinguishable characteristics (Huang, 1997). This approach is concerned with each emotional response that contributes to an overall impression (Huang, 1997). Numerous sets of basic emotions have been proposed by theorists who adhere to the discrete study of emotion. Descartes posited that the six primary human emotions are sadness, wonder, hate, desire, joy, and love (Barta & Ray, 1986). Ekman (1972) proposed a different list of basic emotions, which are surprise, anger, sadness, disgust, happiness, and fear. Izard (1977) and Plutchik (1980) maintained there are ten primary emotions. These authors add interest, contempt, shame, and guilt to Ekman's list (Izard, 1977; Plutchik, 1980). Shaver et al. (2001) propose a three-tiered hierarchy of emotions, which includes six primary emotions (joy, fear, love, surprise, anger, and sadness) as well as a comprehensive list of subordinate and tertiary emotions.

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In sum, the dimensional approach to the study of emotion proposes that there are broad categories of affect which cannot be further broken down. The discrete view, on the other hand, is concerned with specific emotions and how they interact with one another. This research project adheres to the discrete view of emotion, as this school of thought is more directly concerned with sadness and provides more precise descriptions of the emotion.

Sadness

Sadness is consistently cited as a primary emotion. Izard (1977) groups sadness with distress, discouragement, loneliness, isolation and downheartedness. Shaver et al (2001) maintain that the subordinate categories of sadness are suffering, sadness, disappointment, shame, neglect, and sympathy. Shaver et al (2001) also identify 37 tertiary emotions for sadness, which include hopelessness, guilt, regret, and pity.

In summary, sadness is a basic human emotion that encompasses or is closely related to many other emotions, including suffering, guilt, shame, sympathy, pity, empathy, and distress (Izard, 1977; Plutchik, 1980; Shaver et al, 2001; Fultz, Schaller & Cialdini, 1988).

Part 2: The Influence of Emotion in Advertising

Sadness is a negative emotion that people don't tend to enjoy, which begs the question: Why would an advertiser use images that evoke sadness in their advertisements? One reason why evoking sadness is an effective advertising technique is because it can result in prosocial behavior (Small & Verrochi, 2009; Merchant, 2010; Rucker & Petty, 2004; Bagozzi & Moore, 1994). Prosocial behaviour is defined as an action that helps another (Schroeder, 2015). Another reason advertisers evoke sadness is to inspire guilt, an emotion that can leave viewers vulnerable to persuasion. The following section will review the literature on guilt appeals in advertising and discuss the two major theories as to why negative emotions can inspire prosocial behaviour: the negative state relief model, and the influence of sympathetic and empathetic responses. The section concludes with a discussion of compassion and empathy, which many believe are problematic and self-serving emotions.

Guilt

Guilt is defined as “an emotional state involving penitence, remorse, self-blame, and self-punishment experienced after committing a violation or contemplating a future violation of internalized standards of proper behavior” (Huhmann, 1997, p. 36). Guilt is an emotion closely related to sadness, and has been shown to inspire anxiety, anger, and (in some instances) low levels of

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happiness (Lascu, 1991; Coulter & Pinto, 1995; Huhmann, 1997). Arousing guilt is an increasingly popular advertising technique (Jiménez & Yang, 2008). Studies have shown that ads that elicit guilt can be highly effective and have a strong influence on the viewer (Huhmann, 1997; Ruth & Faber, 1988; Jiménez & Yang, 2008).

There are several theories as to how guilt appeals work and what factors influence their success. Some authors theorize that guilt appeals are effective because they at once arouse a negative emotion and present the viewer with a means of relieving that negative emotion. For instance, if a viewer sees an ad that makes him or her feel guilty, that viewer might be more inclined to do as the ad suggests as a means of relieving their guilt.

In order for a guilt appeal to be successful, the viewer must feel as though he or she has some control over the situation in question (Huhmann, 1997). The efficacy of a guilt appeal is also influenced by the self-esteem of the viewer (Coulter & Pinto, 1995). Coulter and Pinto (1995) found that viewers with low self-esteem are more easily persuaded by the content of a guilt appeal (Coulter & Pinto, 1995). Finally, the amount of guilt aroused factors into the success of a guilt appeal. Heavy-handed guilt appeals can leave viewers feeling angry, as they interpret these ads to be intimidating personal attacks (Coulter & Pinto, 1995). On the other hand, ads that arouse low to moderate levels of guilt can inspire

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complex, self-conscious emotions and can be very persuasive (Coulter & Pinto, 1995; Jiménez & Yang, 2008).

In summary, guilt can effectively persuade viewers if evoked correctly. An ad which inspires guilt can be effective if it is subtle, suggests that the viewer is in a position of control, and if it offers an opportunity to relieve the guilt it aroused in the first place. The mental state of the viewer also influences the efficacy of the guilt appeal.

Negative state relief model

Numerous authors theorize that sadvertisements arouse prosocial behavior by fostering a desire to replace negative emotions with positive ones (Merchant, 2010; Rucker & Petty, 2004; Bagozzi & Moore, 1994; Small & Verrochi, 2009). This is known as the negative state relief model. Bagozzi and Moore (1994) classify sadness, fear, tension, and anger as negative emotions.

Merchant (2010), Rucker and Petty (2004), and Bagozzi and Moore (2009) maintain that charities create ads that arouse negative emotions so that viewers will attempt to get rid of those emotions by donating money or volunteering time to that charity. As people generally want to feel content, they take action when they experience a negative mood state like sadness. According to these authors, heeding an advertisement's call to action by helping others is a means to an end. People feel sad when they see these ads and, since they don't

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want to feel sad, they donate money or time in order to feel better. Thus, according to this theory, evoking sadness is an effective persuasion device precisely because it's an emotion people don't like to experience (Merchant, 2010; Rucker & Petty, 2004; Bagozzi & Moore, 2009).

Merchant (2010) and Rucker and Petty (2004) found that audiences can be further persuaded to take action when a negative emotion is presented with the prospect of a positive emotional outcome (Merchant, 2010; Rucker & Petty, 2004). In essence, a sad charity ad that gives viewers an opportunity to feel better by donating money often encourages viewers to do exactly that. This technique also tends to leave audiences with positive feelings about the ad (Rucker & Petty, 2004).

Though a sadvertisement can prompt prosocial behavior, Small and Verrochi (2009) note that this does not mean a sadder advertisement will arouse more prosocial behavior. Different levels of sadness are associated with different thinking styles. If the sadness aroused by an advertisement is too extreme, it leads to a deep, introspective style of thinking that prevents people from connecting to others (Small & Verrochi, 2009). These viewers may feel that giving money to the charity is not an adequate means of alleviating such an overwhelming negative emotion (Small & Verrochi, 2009).

In sum, these authors argue that viewers find negative mood states like sadness uncomfortable. The viewers try to replace sad feelings with positive ones

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by engaging in prosocial behavior, such as donating to charity. If the sadness is too debilitating, however, the viewer will be too incapacitated to donate (Merchant, 2010; Rucker & Petty, 2004; Bagozzi & Moore, 1994; Small & Verrochi, 2009).

Empathy and Sympathy

Another major theory as to how negative emotions prompt prosocial behavior is that these emotions elicit sympathy and/or empathy. According to this theory, viewers appraise the plight of the subject of an advertisement and give to charity out of compassion.

Stern and Escalas (2003) studied both sympathetic and empathetic responses to advertisements in an attempt to determine how these two reactions relate to one another in terms of consumer responses (Stern & Escalas, 2003). The authors define and differentiate between sympathy and empathy: “[W]hereas sympathy stems from the perspective of an observer who is conscious of another’s feelings, empathy stems from that of a participant who vicariously merges with another’s feelings” (Stern & Escalas, 2003, p. 570). The results of Stern and Escalas’ (2003) study demonstrate that viewers have higher opinions of ads which inspire sympathy and empathy.

Bagozzi and Moore (1994) focused on empathetic reactions to public service announcements. The authors measured four different types of empathetic

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responses: perspective taking, which is defined as the attempt to adopt another's point of view; protection motivation, which is a form of empathy concerned with the urge to defend somebody or something in distress; fantasy elaboration, which is a form of empathy that stems from elaborating from the information presented; and compassion/pity, which is defined as feelings of concern for another (Bagozzi & Moore, 1994). Bagozzi and Moore (1994) found that ads that arouse empathy tend to encourage prosocial helping behavior. They theorized that this is because empathy triggers a sense of morality. When viewers feel empathy for the subject of an advertisement, they donate money because they want to restore a sense of justice in the world (Bagozzi & Moore, 1994).

Small and Verrochi (2009) focused their study on sympathetic responses. They found that individuals are more likely to give to charity after viewing an advertisement that elicits sympathy (Small & Verrochi, 2009). Small and Verrochi (2009) examined how the facial expression on a subject's face in a charity ad influences both sympathy and giving. They examined facial expressions because the face is understood to be the principal mode of nonverbal communication (Small & Verrochi, 2009). Using theories of emotional contagion and sympathy, the authors suggested that viewers catch the emotions on a subject's face (Small & Verrochi, 2009). Furthermore, Small and Verrochi (2009) maintain that viewers are more sympathetic and inclined to donate when they see sad expressions as opposed to cheerful or neutral ones (Small & Verrochi, 2009).

Significantly, Small and Verrochi (2009) found that sad and sympathetic reactions are diluted when viewers are given the opportunity to read dry statistics about the victim's plight. The authors theorized that analyzing statistical information discourages viewers from thinking with their heart (Small & Verrochi, 2009).

In conclusion, these authors theorize that sadvertisements encourage prosocial behavior because they arouse sympathy and/or empathy (Small & Verrochi, 2009; Bagozzi & Moore, 1994; Stern & Escalas, 2003). When the audience can appreciate what the subject of the ad is going through, and feel compassion for their plight, they are more likely to donate to that charity. These authors also demonstrate that ads that arouse sympathy and/or empathy boost positive reactions from viewers (Stern & Escalas, 2003). A sadvertisement that elicits sympathy and/or empathy is thus effective on two fronts: its ability to inspire giving, and its likability.

Part 3: Compassion

A discussion of empathy and compassion would be incomplete without reference to the debate about the nature of these emotions. Numerous authors argue that compassion is problematic because it can be exploited for political purposes (Berlant, 2004; Spelman, 1997). On top of that, many see compassion as a pleasurable and self-serving emotion that people use to measure their self-worth

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(Berlant, 2004; Woodward, 2002; Spelman, 1997). According to this line of thinking, compassion does not lead to positive social change but rather reinforces pre-existing power hierarchies and makes the compassionate person feel moral and virtuous (Berlant, 2004; Woodward, 2002; Spelman, 1997). On the other side of this debate are authors who maintain that compassion is a positive response that can both bring people together and foster a sense of community (Nussbaum, 1996; Henderson, 1987). Though these authors note that an awareness of individual differences is necessary when attempting to understand the suffering of another, they maintain that a compassionate response is a rational and reasoned one (Nussbaum 1997; Henderson, 1987).

There are several reasons why compassion is a contested emotion. Berlant (2004), for instance, maintains that the act of feeling compassionate is a way of acting out one's social privilege. The author argues that compassion is inherently concerned with relations of power, as the person who feels compassion is in the position of being able to ease the anguish of another (Berlant, 2004). Berlant (2004) believes that compassion does not require a true connection or genuine understanding of another's plight, and can even reinforce the power imbalances that brought about suffering in the first place (Berlant, 2004). Similarly, Boltanski (1999) argues that though compassion may inspire somebody to give to charity to help relieve suffering, this helping behavior creates a weak and disingenuous bond that does not promote an appreciation of or true involvement with the

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suffering person. The author maintains that giving money to charity has two effects on the donor: first, it makes the the donor feel better about him or herself by alleviating negative emotions, and second, it reinforces a belief that he or she is virtuous (Boltanski, 1999). Boltanski (1999) argues that this gives rise to complacency and does not generate social change.

Volger (2004) and Berlant (2004) stress that compassion revolves around an assumption that everybody experiences pain and suffering in the same way. This assumption ignores the social and political structures that are the source of power imbalances in favor of a socially acceptable script. The authors maintain that feeling compassionate in the face of suffering is the socially correct response which helps people self-identify as virtuous, regardless of whether or not structural imbalances are acknowledged (Berlant, 2004; Volger, 2004).

Nussbaum (1996) is one of the most prominent authors who believes that compassion is a positive emotion that can influence social change. Nussbaum (1996) proposes three situations in which such a sympathetic response is appropriate: first, when the observer believes that serious harm has been incurred upon the sufferer; second, when the sufferer is not personally responsible for his or her anguish; third, when the observer recognizes that he or she shares the same basic needs, wants, and/or potential as the sufferer. The author notes that our personal history influences our emotional reactions, and thus we can never truly know how another person experiences suffering (Nussbaum, 1996). Regardless,

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Nussbaum maintains that compassion forges connection and community (Hillsburg, 2014).

In conclusion, some authors consider emotions like compassion, pity, and empathy problematic. These authors maintain that compassion and related emotions are not only egoistic and self-serving, but also prevent social change from occurring because they distract from the systematic power imbalances that create suffering in the first place. On the other side of this debate are authors who believe that compassion can inspire true altruism.

Part 4: Visual Metaphors

The use of visual metaphors is an increasingly popular advertising technique and is therefore important to consider in the context of sadvertising. A visual metaphor is defined as a picture which causes “a receiver to experience one thing in terms of another” (Reichert, 1999, p. 1). Visual metaphors allow advertisers to effectively and concisely convey rich layers of significance and meaning (McQuarrie & Phillips, 2005). Indeed, advertisers increasingly use fewer direct messages in their ads and opt instead for metaphors in text, imagery, or both (McQuarrie & Phillips, 2005).

The use of visual metaphors in advertising is a form of indirect persuasion that is popular for several reasons. Visual metaphors tend to pique the viewer’s curiosity and are considered more interesting than ads that contain straightforward

and explicit messages (Reichert, 1999). Viewers also invest more time looking at ads that contain visual metaphors (Gray & Snyder, 1989) and tend to be more receptive to the message being conveyed (McQuarrie & Phillips, 2005). This can be attributed to the fact that these ads merely imply claims, which leave the viewer feeling as though he or she is independently drawing conclusions. Another reason visual metaphors are effective is because viewers are not always consciously aware of the connections they are drawing between the two objects or concepts being compared (Messaris, 1997). In fact, some authors speculate that visual metaphors are a popular advertising technique precisely because indirect claims do not have to be defended in legal situations (Tanaka, 1994; Rossiter & Percy, 1983; McQuarrie & Phillips, 2005).

Numerous authors argue that ads which contain a visual metaphor require a higher level of cognitive processing on the part of the viewer (Reichert, 1999; Toncar & Munch, 2001; Chang & Yen, 2013; Morgan & Reichert, 1999). Toncar and Munch (2001) explained that ads which contain a metaphor deviate from that which is expected, and thus demand that the viewer work to understand what is being presented. Many cite this higher cognitive processing as the reason ads with visual metaphors are more effective and persuasive than those that do not contain visual metaphors (Reichert, 1999; Toncar & Munch, 2001; Chang & Yen, 2013; Morgan & Reichert, 1999).

Proctor, Proctor, and Papasolomou (2005) mapped the process by which people understand visual metaphors: first, the viewer interprets the image literally; second the viewer interprets the image figuratively; third, the viewer generates a narrative; fourth, the viewer resolves conflicts within the image; and finally, the viewer reacts with an emotion. Several authors note that the way in which a metaphor is interpreted hinges on the personal experiences of the viewer (Proctor, Proctor, & Papasolomou, 2005; Grafton-Small & Linstead, 1989; Bulmer & Buchanan-Oliver, 2004). Proctor, Proctor, and Papasolomou (2005) demonstrated that differences in gender, cultural heritage, prior experience, and personal interests all influence how a metaphor is perceived.

There are numerous kinds of visual metaphors. Chang and Yen (2013) differentiate between explicit and implicit metaphors: the former is an image in which the subject is clearly distinguished from the other elements, while the latter is an image in which the product being promoted is not in the advertisement. Implicit metaphors are more dependant on the imagination of the viewer. Phillips (1997) illustrates the differences between strong and weak pictorial implicatures. The metaphor in a strong pictorial implicature is obvious, while the metaphor in a weak pictorial implicature is subtle and demands that the viewer work to understand the message. McQuarrie and Phillips (2005) argued that weak pictorial implicatures are more effective, as the viewer can draw numerous inferences from the metaphor.

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Although personification is not typically considered a metaphor, research by Delbaere, McQuarrie and Phillips (2011) brings these two concepts together. The authors argue that personification is an effective advertising technique because it triggers an anthropomorphic bias in viewers (Delbaere, McQuarrie & Phillips, 2011). Anthropomorphism is defined as “seeing the human in non-human forms” (Delbaere, McQuarrie & Phillips, 2011, p. 121).

Anthropomorphism is intrinsically linked to empathy, an emotion closely related to sadness and distress (Harrison & Hall, 2010). Delbaere, McQuarrie and Phillips (2011) note that personification metaphors can inspire positive emotional reactions from viewers, induce a sense of connection to the advertised product or service, and reduce counter-arguing.

Stern (1988) cautions that not all viewers will understand a metaphor’s intended message. Toncar and Munch (2001) support Stern’s (1988) finding, and note that advertisers who choose to convey a message through metaphor run the risk that the viewer will misinterpret that message (Toncar & Munch, 2001). The risk of miscomprehension is strongest in abstract metaphors with weak pictorial implicatures (McQuarrie & Phillips, 2005).

In conclusion, ads that contain visual metaphors are generally more persuasive and effective than those that do not. Viewers look at these ads longer, are more receptive to the message being conveyed, and find them more interesting to look at. On top of that, these ads stimulate higher cognitive processing, attract

attention, and stimulate pleasurable contemplation (Mohanty & Ratneshwar, 2015; 2014). Visual metaphors with weak pictorial implicatures tend to be more effective than those with strong pictorial implicatures, though they run a greater risk of misinterpretation. If the viewer does not comprehend the metaphor being depicted, the ad is no longer as effective (Mohanty & Ratneshwar, 2014; 2015).

Part 5: Semiotics:

As advertising is a way of conveying meaning, an examination of advertising must consider how this process works. To that end, semiotics – a school of thought concerned with the process of constructing and communicating meaning – forms the theoretical foundation of this research project

Classical Semiotics

Semioticians argue that meaning is created through signs, which are images, sounds, and words that signify something else (Hall, 1997). This school of thought is thus based on the notion that everything we experience is negotiated through signs. Classic semiotics is often associated with Saussure (1966), who proposed that a sign consists of the signifier, which is the image, sound, or word, and the signified, which is what we interpret the signifier to mean. Saussure maintained that there is no inherent relationship between the signified and

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signifier. Rather, their link is arbitrarily assigned and meaning is derived from an unspoken cultural consensus (Hall, 1997).

Social semiotics

Social semiotics is a branch of semiotic theory that unites language and society, which linguists had traditionally separated. This theory is concerned with the processes of meaning-making, such as visuals, language, oral communication, gestures, facial expressions, and music. These are known as semiotic modes. An analysis of how various semiotic modes interact is called “multimodal” semiotics (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). Social semiotics sees signs not as static codes but rather as the materials with which people make meaning. According to social semiotics, the way in which individuals make meaning is dependent on their culture and social structure. This theory posits that evolving social, cultural, and historical conditions can change the meaning of a code (Hodge & Kress, 1988).

Social semiotics sees communication as a two-pronged process that involves the production and the interpretation of meaning (Kress, 2010). Van Leeuwen (2005) defines a semiotic resource as that which conveys meanings, be it a facial expression, a dance, an image or a text. Semiotic resources possess what Kress (2010) terms “meaning potential,” which refers to the theory that the meaning of a semiotic resource is determined in part by the circumstance and/or era in which it is used.

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In summary, social semiotics is a branch of semiotic theory that is predominantly concerned with the relationship between text and the social context in which that text is produced.

Visual Social Semiotics

Visual social semiotics is the branch of social semiotics most relevant to this research project because it is concerned with the elements in an image that create meaning. When operationalized, this theory can be used to analyze the visual techniques in an advertisement that evoke sadness in an attempt to persuade viewers. Visual social semiotics borrows from social semiotics the belief that social processes are fundamental to meaning-making (Harrison, 2003). Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 2006) establish a framework for examining images in a visual social semiotic context. They base this framework on Halliday's (1978) representational, interpersonal, and compositional metafunctions. The following sub-section explains these metafunctions and details how Kress and van Leeuwen (1996; 2006) apply them to images.

Representational Metafunction

The representational metafunction is about the world of an image and focuses on the represented participants (RPs) in that world (Harrison, 2003). RPs are the people, places, and things in an image. There are two structures of the

representational metafunction: narrative and conceptual. An image can also possess elements of the two. Images with a narrative structure tell a story and are characterized by the presence of a vector, which is a strong, oblique line. A narrative image can have action or reactional processes. An image which contains a vector created by a body, limb, road, bar, or other similar elements constitute an action process. An image in which eyelines form a vector constitute a reactional process (Harrison, 2003).

Images with a conceptual structure do not contain vectors (Harrison, 2003). These images represent a certain timeless essence. There are three kinds of conceptual processes: classificatory, in which the RPs are members of a class or group; analytical, in which the RPs are a piece of a larger whole; and symbolic, in which the RPs are significant because of the meaning they carry (Harrison, 2003).

Interpersonal Metafunction

The second metafunction that Kress and van Leeuwen (1996; 2006) propose is the interpersonal metafunction, which is concerned with how images engage viewers through gaze, social distance, and perspective. This metafunction is also concerned with how the RPs relate to one another through the same features.

According to Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 2006), the gaze of an RP is laden with meaning. When the RP is looking directly at the viewer, the image

creates a connection and makes a demand. When the RP is represented as not making eye contact with the viewer, something is being offered. In this case, the viewer becomes an observer (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; 2006).

Social distance and proximity are also features of the interpersonal metafunction (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; 2006). The proximity of RPs to the viewer and to other RPs influences the level of intimacy they share. The closer the RP is to the viewer, the greater the intimacy they share. This is a reflection of how humans interact in everyday life, in that strangers are physically far away from us while we stand closer to the people with whom we are intimate.

Horizontal perspective is another feature of the interpersonal metafunction. The horizontal angle of an image indicates the level of involvement between the RP and the viewer (Harrison, 2003). When an RP is facing the viewer at a frontal angle, there is an implication of connection and participation between the two. On the other hand, a sense of detachment is fostered when an RP is presented indirectly to the viewer (Harrison, 2003).

Vertical perspective is the final feature of the interpersonal metafunction. This feature indicates the power dynamics both between RPs and between the viewer and the RPs (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996; 2006). The viewer looks up to RPs who are featured at a high angle. This is reminiscent of the expression “look up to somebody,” and places the viewer in a position of subservience to the RP. Conversely, the viewer looks down upon RPs who are featured at a low angle,

which places the viewer in a position of power. RPs who are featured at a medium angle look at the viewer horizontally, which denotes equality between the two (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; 2006).

Compositional Metafunction

Finally, Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996; 2006) compositional metafunction is concerned with how the layout and organization of visual elements within an image influence meaning. Information value, salience, modality, and framing are elements of the compositional metafunction (Harrison, 2003).

The information value of an RP is conveyed by its placement within an image. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), an image is comprised of the following zones: left-right, top-bottom, center-margin. Images that adopt a left-right structure feature familiar and common-sense information on the left and new information on the right. The information on the left is called the "given" and the information on the right is called the "new." New information demands more attention from the viewer, as it is unfamiliar and/or controversial (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). Images that adopt a top-bottom structure, on the other hand, tend to be less contentious. That which is ideal or fantastic is featured in the top half of the image while real, true to life elements are featured on the bottom half (Kress

& van Leeuwen, 1996). Finally, images that adopt a central composition feature the most important piece of information at the center of the image.

Salience is another system of the compositional metafunction, and is concerned with the elements that viewers notice first and find the most striking. Size, sharpness of focus, tonal contrast, colour contrast, and foreground and background elements are all factors that contribute to the salience of an image (Harrison, 2003). Manipulating these elements will direct the attention of the viewer to that which is important. For instance, large elements that are in sharp focus with strong tonal and colour contrast have the greatest salience and thus attract the most attention. Salience can also create a hierarchy of importance, especially when combined with the information value data (Harrison, 2003).

Framing is a compositional system concerned with the connection or disconnection of visual elements. The use of space, colour, and vectors all influence how united or divided the elements within an image appear (Harrison, 2003). Frame lines that divide RPs communicate alienation or separation while frame lines that hold RPs together communicate belonging and cohesion. A pictorial frame line surrounds the whole image and emphasizes that everything within the image is connected (Harrison, 2003).

Finally, modality is concerned with the compositional elements that influence an image's credibility and believability. The three markers of modality that pertain to colour are: colour saturation, colour differentiation, and colour

modulation. On one end of the colour saturation spectrum is black and white, while the other end is vibrant colour. Colour differentiation varies from a monochromatic palette to one with an array of diverse colours. Finally, an image with high colour modulation has various shades of the same colour while an image with low colour modulation has no such variety (Harrison, 2003).

Contextualization is another marker of modality. Contextualization appears on a spectrum of full contextualization, in which there is a detailed background, to an absence of background altogether. An image with more contextual information has higher modality (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). An image with no context appears generic and disconnected from space and time.

In conclusion, semiotics is predominantly concerned with how meaning is created. Social semiotics stresses that meaning can only be created and understood by looking at evolving sociocultural codes, and visual social semiotics looks at the elements of an image that create meaning as well as their social context. Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996, 2006) visual social semiotic framework is similar to linguistic grammar, and can be used to read images. The authors maintain that an image conveys meaning through representational, interpersonal, and compositional metafunctions (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996, 2006).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In summary, NPOs have a reputation for producing sad advertisements, otherwise known as sadvertisements. This research paper defines a sadvertisement as an ad that depicts a victim with an explicit or implied lack of agency, as well as the portrayal of something unjust or immoral. Sadness is a primary human emotion closely related to or encompassing many other negative emotions. Though an individual's reaction to a sad appeal is dependent on personal experiences and beliefs, a sadvertisement can lead to guilt, sympathy, empathy, and/or compassion. In turn, these emotions can inspire prosocial behavior like donating to charity, and/or can lead to an egoistic sense of moral self-satisfaction. Advertisers increasingly use visual metaphors in their appeals. This is because the use of visual metaphors is an effective indirect persuasion technique that can successfully elicit emotions like sadness. As advertising in general is concerned with conveying meaning, visual social semiotics is an appropriate tool to dissect and infer meaning from advertisements. When operationalized, visual social semiotics helps explain both how an advertisement conveys sadness and how it engages the viewer.

In light of these findings, my research questions are as follows: RQ #1
What visual elements convey sadness in award-nominated NPO sadvertisements?;
RQ #2 How do these elements influence the viewer of the ad? Analyzing and

comparing five award-nominated NPO sad advertisements using a visual social semiotic analysis will enable me to answer these questions.

DATA COLLECTION METHOD

Each year, the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity recognizes the best advertisements and marketing campaigns of the preceding year. The highest prize is the Gold Lion, followed by the Silver Lion, then the Bronze Lion. This research project analyzes five NPO ads that were nominated in the Press award category. This category recognizes the best print advertisements intended for magazines, newspapers, advertorials, and single page inserts of the previous year.

The nominated ads are available in the archives of the Cannes Lion website. I limited my sample to ads in the Press category that were produced for NPOs. I further narrowed that sample by excluding NPO print ads that do not evoke sadness. To be considered sad, an ad had to meet two characteristics: the depiction of a victim with an implied or explicit lack of agency and the depiction of something unjust or immoral. In 2015, there were 13 NPO ad campaigns that evoked sadness in the Press category. I randomly selected five campaigns and then randomly selected one ad within each of those five campaigns. I did this by giving each campaign a number between one and 13 and then used an online academic random sampling service called “Research Randomizer” to select five

campaigns (Urbaniak & Plous, 2013). I then used the same process to select one ad from each of those five campaigns.

This data collection method allowed me to compare and contrast NPO sadvertisements that were recognized as being effective and creative by the advertising industry.

METHOD OF ANALYSIS:

I performed a visual social semiotic content analysis to analyze the visual elements of these five award-nominated NPO sadvertisements. This approach allowed me to examine and compare the recurring visual elements in these ads and determine which visual elements conveyed sadness. I characterized and compared the sample of advertisements using a qualitative approach. A qualitative analysis supported an in-depth assessment of the signs, symbols, and meanings within the advertisements. This project followed an inductive approach. I began by noting specific observations about individual advertisements, and drew my conclusions from the patterns and commonalities I observed.

There are very few detailed analyses of exactly how a sad NPO advertisement works. Semiotics analyzes how meaning is formed, which made it the perfect tool to understand and interpret how these ads communicate emotion. The visual social semiotic method presented by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996;

2006) in particular offered a way to identify the visual strategies at play in these advertisements.

FINDINGS/ANALYSIS

Figure 1: UNICEF

Description of the ad:

This ad was produced for UNICEF to raise awareness about cyberbullying. The ad depicts five young girls, three of whom are standing in a line with their arms outstretched pointing smartphones towards a larger girl. This larger girl stands above a dropped towel with her arms across her chest, looking downwards. A notably thinner girl looks on and stares contemptuously at the larger girl. The scene takes place in an old, dilapidated locker room, presumably after a swimming lesson. The ad is in black and white and features a text box in the bottom right-hand corner.

Representational metafunction:

In regards to the representational metafunction, the image's five RPs are young girls who appear to be between the ages of 12 and 15. Three of these girls stand rigidly with their arms outstretched at 90 degree angles. Their identical and militaristic stance is reminiscent of a firing squad. These three RPs are holding smartphones directed at another RP, who is heavier, has a pained expression on

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her face, and is looking downwards. The final RP stands furthest away but in the center of the image and looks scornfully at the larger girl.

The presence of strong vectors gives this image both an action and reactional narrative structure. The outstretched arms of the girls in the firing squad, the left arm of the onlooker, and the eye lines of these four RPs are all directed at the larger girl. The shadows of the three girls in the firing squad form a vector which points to the onlooker, indicating that they are connected.

These vectors indicate that the action in this image is initiated by the four girls on the left and is directed at the larger girl on the right. The larger girl's pained expression and vulnerable stance indicate that she is a victim, and evoke sadness. The girls in the firing squad have neutral expressions on their faces, implying that they are following orders and acting without emotion. The onlooker's sneering expression, proximity to the firing squad, and relaxed but confident posture indicate that she is the leader of the firing squad. Thus we can see that the RPs are four bullies (a leader and three followers) and a victim.

This image tells a story. These girls have just finished a swimming lesson, which we can infer from their wet hair and uniform swimsuits. The wet towel on the ground in front of the victim suggests that it was snatched away from her by one of the bullies. The fact that the victim is heavier than the other girls implies that body size is the source of this conflict. This conveys sadness by emphasizing that the violence in this image is unnecessary and based on superficial values.

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The uniform bathing suit is a symbolic element embedded within this image. A uniform is a symbolic code that signals conformity, standardization, and regulation. The presence of a uniform in this ad emphasizes these concepts while also stressing the fact that these girls are almost identical in all respects save for their weight.

This ad uses a metaphor to defamiliarize bullying. The meaning behind this metaphor is: “smartphones are weapons” and “bullies are a firing squad.” By taking the place of weapons, smartphones adopt their attributes. Likewise, by taking the place of a firing squad, the bullies adopt the attributes of a firing squad, also constituting a metaphor.

This advertisement evokes a world in which cell phones and social media platforms are weapons. In this world, people carry lethal weapons as casually as one carries a smartphone. This evokes sadness by encouraging the viewer to see everyday items in a new and worrying light. The viewer must imagine a world in which taking and sharing photographs with a smartphone is akin to shooting somebody with bullets. The lack of adult supervision and control in this world has also given rise to new and aggressive power structures among youth. Young girls are armed, form hierarchical militaristic gangs, and commit acts of war in public institutions. This challenges the viewer to associate young girls with war criminals – a shocking and sad comparison.

Interpersonal metafunction:

The interpersonal elements within this image stress that though the viewer is not part of this world, he or she is nevertheless invited to scrutinize this scene in a detached manner. The image is taken from a high angle, as though taken from a security camera or from the perspective of a fly on the wall. This stresses that the viewer is glimpsing a world in which he or she would not normally belong, and also places the viewer in a position of power relative to the firing squad RPs and the victim. The vertical and horizontal angle at which the leader of the bullies is featured fosters a sense of equality between this RP and the viewer. This implication that the viewer and the leader are equals suggests that the viewer is complicit in the crime – an implication that inspires both guilt and sadness. The viewer has witnessed something he or she was not meant to see. Therefore, a decision *not* to take action to protect the victim is akin to taking part in the violence.

Compositional metafunction:

In terms of the compositional metafunction, the victim is the largest and most salient RP. She is standing in front of a set of lockers which makes her shadow appear larger and rounder than those of the other RPs. This emphasizes not only that she is the most important piece of information in this image but also the significance of her weight relative to the other girls. Another important

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compositional element is the shadows of the bullies, which form a frame line that both connects the bullies and excludes the victim.

This scene is connected with a specific location, namely a dilapidated locker room. Paint is peeling from stained walls and the locker in the center of the image is missing its door. This state of disrepair reinforces a sense of neglect that transfers onto the girls. The fact that the room is so clearly uncared for diminishes any hope that somebody will rescue the victim from the bullies. This girl is not just a victim of bullies, but a victim of a society that does not look out for her.

Synthesis:

This ad conveys sadness by depicting bullying in a new and disturbing light that shocks the viewer into reconsidering the issue. Bullying is an age-old phenomenon and, for that reason, is often disregarded. However, by likening cyberbullying to death by firing squad the viewer is encouraged to empathize with the plight of the victim from a new perspective. The victim is not simply a girl being teased by her school-mates but is rather a person about to be murdered, as much by societal neglect as by her malicious peers. The pained look on the victim's face also evokes sadness, as viewers can "catch" emotions revealed with facial expressions.

This ad also conveys sadness by violating three mythologies western society values: first, that children are innocent; second, that this kind of brutality

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no longer exists in schools; and third, that smartphones make the world a safer place. Not only are the girls in this picture not innocent but their brutality is reminiscent of the Gestapo or Nazi SS. The old-fashioned uniforms and desaturated colour reinforce the notion that the violence in this photograph belongs in an era long past. Today, parents often cite safety as the reason their children carry smartphones. Likening a smartphone to a gun shatters this justification and not only encourages viewers to see that smartphones are double-edged swords, but also that they have changed what life looks like for a school-aged child.

Figure 2: Greenpeace

Description of the ad:

Another ad that contributes to an understanding of how sadvertising works is Figure 2, which was produced for Greenpeace to highlight how drilling for oil impacts wildlife. The ad features a diorama (a three dimensional scene in a box or frame) hanging on a concrete wall. The scene within the diorama depicts an Arctic offshore oil rig, with a ship on one side and a helicopter on the other. A thick sheet of ice separates these elements from the large underwater kingdom below, in which six pipelines that stem from the oil rig impale a mother walrus. This walrus is battered and bruised, her mouth is open in pain, and her blood covers the pipelines that impale her. Beside her is a walrus cub with an alarmed

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expression on its face. There is a small bronze plaque on the wooden frame of the diorama.

Representational metafunction:

The RPs in this advertisement are a mother walrus, her cub, and an Arctic offshore oil rig. This image has a narrative structure and its most prominent vectors are the pipelines that radiate from the oil rig. The mother walrus also forms a vector which guides the eye from the oil rig towards her cub. The story this action tells is that of an oil rig battering and killing a walrus, leaving her cub to fend for itself. The wall of ice separating the two worlds implies that those on the oil rig are ignorant of or indifferent to the devastation going on below.

Everything above the sheet of ice, with the exception of clouds and more ice, is human-made. The absence of trees, birds or other animals drives home the point that the world above the ice is monopolized by humans. The oil rig itself is symbolic of human innovation, greed, and exploitation. The fact that the vectors emanating from this rig are killing one animal under the water and bereaving another signifies the devastating consequences of drilling for oil in the Arctic.

The fire on top of the rig is a symbolic element embedded in this image. Fire is humankind's first innovation and is, on one hand, a symbol of progress, hope, and human achievement and, on the other, a symbol of destruction. Oil is

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similar to fire in that it represents innovation and possesses both helpful and destructive qualities.

This image is an allegory, as the oil rig and walruses embody abstract ideals. The oil rig represents greed and human intervention while the walrus and her cub represent ocean wildlife. Therefore, the message being conveyed is that human greed and interference in the ocean is devastating the natural world.

Indeed, the world within the frame is heartless, sterile, and governed by blind greed. The material interests of human beings take priority over everything else. Though nature is the largest and most salient element of this world, it is no match for the machines produced by human kind or for the lust for wealth that fuels their construction. The wooden frame around the diorama evokes a second world, one in which people observe the scene within as something that happened long ago. In this second world, people in a gallery or museum are reminded of the era in which human beings destroyed the natural world, much like we observe dinosaur bones in museums today. The wooden frame and museum setting thus evoke a sense of time passed.

Interpersonal metafunction:

In terms of the interpersonal metafunction, the RPs are presented as subjects for the viewer to study in a detached manner. The walruses are featured from a frontal and medium angle, which both involves the viewer in their world

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and denotes equality. The oil rig, on the other hand, is featured from a public distance and from a low angle, which puts the rig in a position of power and fosters an impersonal relationship with the viewer. This disparity in social distance between the viewer and the three RPs fosters a stronger relationship between the viewer and the walruses than between the viewer and the oil rig.

Compositional metafunction:

Regarding the compositional metafunction, the oil rig is placed at the top of the image, which denotes that which is ideal. In this context, an oil rig in the Arctic ocean is considered a new solution to the world's energy problems and represents innovation, technology, and the strength of human advancements. The placement of the walruses in the lower half of the image, on the other hand, represents the very real and negative consequences of this human intervention in the ocean.

The mother walrus is by far the largest element in this image. She is disproportionately larger than the other elements, which emphasizes her importance. The oil rig, ship, and airplane are excessively small, implying that oil rigs are less important than the animal kingdom living below the ice. The size of the walrus also emphasizes that though the oil rig appears insignificant, it is the cause of tremendous devastation below the surface of the ice. The size of the walrus also accentuates its pained expression, its broken tusk, and its many

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wounds. Though in real life a walrus may seem small and unimportant, in this advertisement it is the only truly significant element, and its suffering cannot be ignored or overlooked.

The image has several notable markers of low modality, including the visible strings that hold up the airplane and the clouds, the low colour differentiation, and the fact that the walruses look as though they were made from clay.

The wooden picture frame around the diorama emphasizes that everything within the frame is connected. The sheet of ice in the top quarter of the diorama forms a strong frame line that separates the underwater world from the world of humankind. This accentuates the disconnect between the animal kingdom and the world of human innovation and technology.

Synthesis:

This ad conveys sadness in part through the use of two metaphors. First, the two walruses form a personification metaphor. The expression of agony and fear on their faces are very human in nature, which triggers an anthropomorphic bias and encourages viewers to empathize with their plight. The second metaphor in this image is the pipelines which stab the mother walrus in its back. In reality, oil rigs do not injure wildlife so directly. This metaphor conveys both that Arctic pipelines are killing wildlife and that a certain level of trust has been brutally

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violated. Thus the viewer sees human-like animals being murdered by somebody or something that they trusted. This level of betrayal and the brutal depiction of a creature being killed fosters sadness.

The orphaning of the walrus cub also generates sadness. Babies tend to inspire sympathy as they are understood to be innocent and dependent on others for survival. This cub will likely die without its mother, an idea which generates sympathy and sadness.

The sadness this ad conveys is exacerbated by the fact that the diorama is on display in a museum or gallery, which implies that the brutal scene within happened in the past. Evoking the passing of time has a tendency to make people sad, as it conjures memories of the people, places and things now absent from their life. The museum or gallery setting thus fosters a sense of guilt because it forces viewers to imagine a future in which it is too late to help these animals. The viewer must look to the future and imagine how they will feel if they stood idly by while this devastation was taking place. Therefore, this ad conveys sadness both through the use of metaphor and by conjuring a future in which human intervention has killed all the walruses, rendering them a distant memory.

Figure 3: 28 Too Many

Description of the ad:

Another award-nominated ad that conveys sadness is Figure 3, which was produced by the anti-female genital mutilation charity 28 Too Many. The ad depicts the British Union Jack flag which has been cut in half and crudely sewn back together with wire. The flag is battered, stained with blood, and the fabric is worn thin in several areas.

Representational metafunction:

Regarding the representational metafunction, there are two RPs in this ad: The Union Jack flag, and the cut down the middle of the flag. This cut symbolizes a vagina, and the crude stitching alludes to a form of female genital mutilation (FGM) in which a woman's labia is cut in order to narrow the orifice of the vagina.

The flag is a symbolic process embedded in this image. It is symbolic of the United Kingdom, a nation that stands for concepts such as democracy, freedom, culture and refinement. The flag in this image is torn, bloodied and battered. This desecration is symbolic of protest and makes an allegorical political statement. On the surface, the image is just a crudely sewn and battered flag. The deeper meaning, however, is that FGM happens in the UK.

Interpersonal metafunction:

In regards to the image's interpersonal meaning, the viewer has a close relationship with the RPs, and is involved in the world of the image as an equal. This intimate relationship between the RPs and the viewer adds to the sense of unease, discomfort, and sadness that the image evokes. First, this sense of intimacy encourages the viewer to confront the fact that FGM happens in the United Kingdom and should no longer be ignored. Second, the close proximity between the viewer and the mutilated vagina alludes to the fact the viewer might live close to perpetrators or victims of FGM. If the viewer were to ignore the issue after seeing this ad, he or she would be complicit in the wrongdoing, as the UK is a democratic nation dependent on its citizens to bring about social and political change.

Compositional metafunction:

An examination of the ad's compositional meaning reveals both connection and detachment. The flag's red and white lines and six blue triangles guide the eye to the implied vagina and hold the RPs together, which promotes a sense of unity. The strong line that the implied vagina forms down the center of the image contrasts with this sense of connection. The line breaks the flag in two and represents a rupture or scar on the face of the United Kingdom. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) note that strong angles signify that which is human-made and

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inorganic. The authors also note that triangles convey a sense of direction and a sense of conflict and tension (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). This is certainly the case in this image, in which the sharp angles and asymmetry in the fabric of the flag guide the viewer's eye to the vagina and evoke a sense of pain and discomfort.

In terms of modality, the ad's full colour saturation, high differentiation, modulated colour, sense of depth, and presence of light and shadow emphasize legitimacy and reliability (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). These visual elements depict the flag and stitching in a naturalistic style. In other words, what the viewer sees when looking at the image is similar to what he or she would see when looking at a real, vandalized flag. This naturalistic style suggests that the viewer can trust what is being depicted. At the same time, the image does not realistically depict FGM. Rather, it alludes to it. This unrealistic depiction of FGM allows the viewer to look at the image and contemplate its message. A realistic depiction of FGM would be too gruesome and shocking to examine, and would make for an ineffective ad.

Synthesis:

The metaphor in this ad evokes sadness by bringing to mind a mutilated vagina and the girl or woman who was subject to this horrific practice. The crude stitching and blood stains both enhance this allusion to pain and suffering and

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inspire sympathy from the viewer. Beyond that, the notion that this brutality occurs in an advanced country forces the viewer to recognize that there are oppressed and abused girls and women in the UK whose plight goes unnoticed. The juxtaposition of the Union Jack with the mutilated vagina emphasizes that the values and rights associated with this flag are being withheld from this vulnerable segment of the British population. This is sad because it evokes feelings of wrongdoing and injustice, which in turn instills a sense of guilt, as the people of a democratic nation share responsibility for the state of affairs in their country. Thus the viewer feels sadness and sympathy for the implied victim in this ad as well as guilt for the wrongdoing that should not exist in a nation like the United Kingdom.

Figure 4: The Surfrider Foundation of Europe

Description of the ad:

Another Cannes Lion award-nominated ad that evokes sadness is featured in Figure 4. This ad was produced for The Surfrider Foundation of Europe to illustrate that pollution makes the ocean uninhabitable for the creatures who call it home. The ad is modeled after the early 19th century oil painting “Le Radeau de la Méduse” (Raft of the Medusa) by French painter Théodore Géricault. However, Surfrider’s advertisement features sea animals instead of people clinging to a sinking raft. A few animals, including seals, a shark, and a dolphin are trying

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desperately to signal to something in the distance, presumably a ship. A gilt frame, red wall, wooden floor, and protective barrier are also visible in the margins of this advertisement.

Representational metafunction:

In regards to the representational metafunction, the RPs in this image include a multitude of animals, the most prominent of which are the seals, shark, and dolphin at the top of the image. The strongest vectors in this ad are created by the fins, noses and eyelines of the animals. The dead fish on the bottom left of the raft also create vectors which guide the eye to the top right. The direction of their bodies is continued by the gaze of the animals at the top of the raft, as well as the flipper of the seal on the uppermost part of the raft. The sail, mast, and ropes are also vectors which guide the eye downwards toward the animals.

These vectors tell a story, namely that these animals are desperately clinging to a raft for life and are signaling for help. Their vessel is sinking, the clouds are dark, and the wind is strong, emphasizing the hopelessness of their plight. A raft is a human-made vessel symbolic of escape, desperation, hardship, and the fight to survive. These animals, however, should not need a raft to survive in the ocean, which is their natural habitat. This image thus draws attention to the desperate plight of sea creatures struggling to survive in polluted waters, and evokes sadness because it alludes to suffering and despair. The animals in this ad

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constitute a personification metaphor, in that their situation and expressions are human-like. This further emphasizes sadness making their struggle easier for viewers to relate to.

Interpersonal metafunction:

An examination of the interpersonal metafunction reveals that the viewer has a personal relationship with the RPs. The horizontal angle signifies that the viewer and RPs are equals, a relationship further emphasized by the fact that the animals are anthropomorphised. These elements suggest that animals are not so dissimilar from humans. The viewer is also close enough to the RPs to discern the expressions of distress on their faces and fully appreciate their suffering, which both inspires sympathy and makes their plight difficult to ignore. To be so close to creatures calling for help empowers the viewer to take action. In real life, if somebody were this close to a person or animal in distress they would have a certain moral responsibility to help them. To turn and walk away without helping would be an act of cruelty. Similarly, to turn and walk away from this advertisement without taking action could also be construed as an act of cruelty.

Compositional metafunction:

In terms of the compositional metafunction, the RPs are featured in the center of the image, indicating that they are the most important piece of

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information. Most of the dead or dying RPs are featured in the bottom half of the image, signifying that which is real. The animals crying and waving for help are in the top half of the image, signifying that which is ideal or fantastical. This compositional structure stresses the reality that many animals are dying because of pollution and also that animals cannot actually work together to signal for help.

Regarding frame lines, the gilt frame and wire barrier emphasize that the elements within the painting are connected but also separate from those observing the painting. Within the painting, the ocean forms a frame line which holds the animals together and indicates that they are united in their suffering.

Synthesis:

This ad is effective in large part because it does *not* accurately depict the effect pollution has on sea life. Rather, the metaphor in this image allows the viewer to understand the struggle of sea animals from a human perspective that is easy to sympathize with. Unlike death from polluted water, drowning is a threat that is easy to imagine. The animals are also anthropomorphic, which we can see from their circumstance (clinging to a raft), their facial expressions, and their cries for help. Expressions of pain and distress are easy for viewers to understand, and serve to both evoke sadness and foster sympathy. Thus, metaphor is one way in which this ad evokes sadness.

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Another effective way this ad evokes sadness is through its allusion to Géricault's original painting *Le Radeau de la Méduse*. Géricault was inspired by the sinking of the frigate La Méduse in 1816, a disaster which killed over 130 people and was caused by an inept and inexperienced captain. The 15 survivors on the raft resorted to murder and cannibalism to survive. The disaster and Géricault's painting are representative of the powerful human instinct to survive by any means necessary. Two notable comparisons can be made between the original painting and this advertisement. First, the original disaster was attributed to the captain's stupidity, much like the disaster depicted in this advertisement is attributed to stupidity on the part of human kind. This comparison evokes guilt by suggesting that humans are responsible for the devastation of sea life. Second, the original disaster was avoidable, much like the crisis sea animals are experiencing today. This comparison inspires sadness by drawing attention to the fact that the suffering these animals are experiencing is pointless and preventable.

While the painting in this advertisement evokes death and despair, it also evokes hope, as the animals see a ship in the distance that could rescue them. This signals a sense of urgency; the animals are calling for help and it is up to humans to rescue them. The raft in this ad is far more submerged than the raft in the original painting. This deviation from the original painting evokes sadness by suggesting that these animals are running out of time and will soon die if they are not rescued.

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Significantly, the painting in the advertisement is old, cracked, and hangs on the wall of an art gallery. Thus, the viewer is looking at a depiction of something that happened long ago, much like somebody would look at *Le Radeau de la Méduse* in a gallery today and think of the tragedy that occurred in another era. Evoking time inspires sadness and, in this case, also creates a sense of ambiguity. The viewer must ask him or herself: were these animals rescued, like the original castaways, or did they drown? Whether or not humans were able to recognize the desperation of sea animals and act accordingly remains unanswered in this advertisement. This ambiguity adds tension and heightens the emotions inspired by this advertisement.

Figure 5: Save the Children

Description of the ad:

Finally, Figure 5 is an advertisement produced for Save the Children intended to draw awareness to the use of child labour in the textile industry. This ad also effectively uses sadness to convey a message. The advertisement resembles a high fashion magazine spread and features a model wearing a black and white striped dress. The most striking feature of the advertisement is that the black and white horizontal stripes of the dress transform into bars halfway down the ad. Behind these bars is a small black child who wears a sad expression.

Representational metafunction:

With regards to the representational metafunction, the woman and the child are the only two RPs in this image. The woman adopts a confident stance and touches her face as though she is admiring herself in a mirror. The positioning of her limbs takes up space, which suggests strength, confidence and assertiveness. In contrast, the child is small, takes up very little space and is, in fact, barely visible.

The vectors in this ad give it a narrative structure and demonstrate connection and flow of information. The two most striking vectors are formed by the woman's arms and the neckline of her dress. Her arms create a semicircle vector in the top half of the image which guides the viewer's eye to the child within the dress. The neckline vector serves the same function. The child would be almost imperceptible without these vectors.

The woman is the actor within this image, as her limbs form the vectors. She initiates the action directed at the child, signifying that buying clothing manufactured using child labor is an act directed at children. The stripes of her dress transform into bars halfway down the ad, which converts the bottom half of her dress into a cage. Her dress consequently adopts the attributes of a cage (such as punishment, captivity and lack of freedom) and constitutes a metaphor.

This ad evokes a world in which Western women are exploiting children from the non-Western world. Clothing, style, and the pursuit of beauty hypnotize

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these women and leave them unable or unwilling to look beyond their material possessions. The confidence and power that these women possess are founded upon the exploitation of children. This world is also populated by powerless, subjugated, and invisible children. These children are alone and the only life they know is one of exploitation. Through the clothing they manufacture, these children can see that there is another world of which they are not a part.

Interpersonal metafunction:

Regarding the interpersonal metafunction, both RPs look directly at the viewer and thus both acknowledge and demand something of the viewer. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) note that facial expressions can influence the way in which a viewer is involved with an RP. The woman and the child have contrasting facial expressions and thus demand different things from the viewer. The expression on the woman's face suggests that she is cheerful and blithely unaware. Her gaze demands that the viewer either desire her or desire to be her. The expression on the child's face conveys despair and dejection. His or her gaze demands to be seen, acknowledged, and saved by the viewer.

In regards to social distance, the woman is pictured from a far personal distance. Like the ideals that the fashion industry presents, she is just beyond arm's reach. In terms of the child, only his or her head, face and hands are visible.

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This creates an intimate relationship between the viewer and the child. Both RPs are featured at a frontal angle, further stressing involvement with the viewer.

Significantly, the child is shot from a high angle, which leaves him or her subservient to the viewer. This camera angle is reflective of real life situations in which we “look down upon” those we consider inferior and thus constitutes a conceptual metaphor. This metaphor inspires guilt on the part of the viewer, who would not normally look down upon exploited children. The woman looks horizontally at the viewer, implying that she and the viewer are equals. This enhances feelings of guilt by implying a complicity. If the viewer and the woman are equals, then the viewer is also responsible for the imprisonment of the child.

Compositional metafunction:

In terms of the compositional elements of this image, the woman is the most salient, prominent, and important RP and is the first element that captures the viewer’s attention. She is also featured predominantly in the top half of the image, which denotes that which is ideal and is highly valued (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). The fact that the dress is black and white striped is reminiscent of an old-fashioned prison uniform, further emphasizing the metaphor that the dress is a prison for this child.

The child’s small size, blurry focus, and low colour and tonal contrast imply that he or she is less important than the woman. Viewers likely experience a

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delay before they even perceive him or her. However, the child is featured near the center of the image, which suggests that he or she is the focus of this message.

In terms of framing, the black and white lines of the woman's dress create a strong division between the woman and the child. On the other hand, both RPs exist within the same figure and are thus connected. Another important compositional element in this image is contextualization. The absence of contextual elements both mimic the layout of a fashion magazine spread while suggesting that this woman and this enslaved child could exist anywhere. This advertisement is thus directed at everybody who buys clothing produced using child labour, regardless of country. The absence of contextualization, the hyper-saturated colours, and the high colour differentiation are all also markers of low modality.

Synthesis:

This image conveys sadness in large part through the use of metaphor. In this advertisement, a dress is a prison. This shocking juxtaposition encourages the viewer to see his or her own clothing in a new and ominous light. The thought that the clothes we wear were manufactured by children is sad for two reasons: first, child labour is inherently cruel and unjust; second, it means that we are actively supporting an exploitative and barbaric system.

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The child's sad expression also evokes sadness by encouraging sympathy from the viewer. Children are perceived as innocent and in need of care and nurture. The depiction of an isolated, defeated, and imprisoned child tugs at the heartstrings and promotes a desire to care for this child. The child is also barely perceptible in this image. The idea that oppressed children in the non-Western world are invisible to those in the West conjures feelings of shame and guilt, while also arousing a desire to protect the child.

Finally, the woman herself is a symbol that contributes to the overall sense of sadness in this advertisement. She is a fashion model, and thus represents coveted ideals such as beauty, power, confidence, and wealth. The fact that this woman represents that which is desirable makes the viewer feel guilty because she also represents imprisonment, greed, captivity, and injustice. Therefore, the viewer must confront the fact that his or her desires are problematic and misguided. This introspection inspires guilt, tension, shame, and sadness.

DISCUSSION

My first research question seeks to ascertain which visual elements convey sadness in these five award-nominated ads. My findings reveal that the answer lies in the presence of sad facial expressions, a low modal representation, compositional features which evoke a sense of complicity on the part of the viewer, and the use of visual metaphors. My second question is concerned with

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how sadness, once evoked, then influences the viewer of these ads. Based on my findings, arousing sadness can generate sympathy, empathy, guilt, and/or compassion from the viewer.

First, all five ads depict a victim bearing a sad or pained expression. According to the theory of emotional contagion, expressions of sadness and pain are contagious and transfer to the viewer, who then also feels sadness and pain (Small & Verrochi, 2009). Thus one way in which these ads convey sadness is quite simply by depicting an RP with a sad expression.

Another notable feature these ads share is that none of them depict a naturalistic representation of reality. Rather, they all possess markers of low modality. Small and Verrochi (2009) note that if an ad is too sad it will debilitate the viewer and inhibit prosocial behavior. The markers of low modality in these ads serve as a cushion that allows the viewer to look at, examine, and contemplate the images without being traumatized by them. If these ads depicted naturalistic representations of suffering, they would be too shocking to look at and could lead to the incapacitating level of sadness discussed by Small and Verrochi (2009). A realistic depiction of FGM or a murdered walrus, for instance, would be too gruesome to look at and would thus be ineffective. Therefore, the low modality renders the ad more effective because it protects the viewer and allows him or her to take time to digest the message instead of looking away in horror.

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While a sad RP conveys sadness, and low modality allows the viewer to invest in the image, these techniques alone do not necessarily make a sadvertisement effective or compelling. Indeed, how the RPs relate to the viewer is another important ingredient of an effective sadvertisement. The vertical and horizontal perspective in two of these ads suggest that the viewer is complicit in the wrongdoing, which arouses a sense of guilt. In Figures 1 and 5, the viewer is positioned at a high vertical angle in relation to the victim, an effect which puts the viewer in a position of dominance. Figures 1 and 5 also position the viewer at a medium angle in relation to the wrongdoer in the ad, which denotes equality. Instead of implying that the viewer is a savior who can fix the problems of the world through his or her virtuous moral compass, these ads use visual techniques to make the viewer feel complicit in the crime. This evokes guilt and shame, and encourages the viewer to reconsider his or her place in the world.

The most striking visual technique found in all of these ads is the use of visual metaphors. Though the depiction of a sad and subservient RP evokes sadness, visual metaphors lend a creative element to these ads that serve to pique the curiosity of the viewer, promote higher cognitive processing, permit a deeper contemplation of the issue being presented, and enhance the sadness already being communicated. These metaphors reroute the viewer's previously held associations and beliefs and present a new and upsetting reality. By using metaphor to defamiliarize our use of technology, the democratic system, our relationship with

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the natural world, and our longing to be desirable, these ads present the world in a new light and challenge the viewer to re-examine his or her beliefs. The firing squad metaphor in Figure 1, for instance, asks that the viewer look at smartphones as though they are weapons and teenage bullies as though they are killers. This conveys sadness both because it is both shocking and also because it demands that the viewer adopt a dark perspective.

Metaphors also take time to decipher, so the viewer spends more time looking at the ad in an attempt to interpret the layers of meaning. This extra time spent looking at the ad means that the viewer is more invested in the subject matter, is more likely to have an emotional reaction, and increases the probability that the viewer will remember the ad. Thus the visual metaphors in these ads serve multiple functions: They express sadness by shocking the viewer and inviting him or her to adopt a new perspective; they are interesting to look at; they are enjoyable to decode; they result in a higher level of cognitive processing, and are more memorable.

Significantly, the visual metaphors in these ads can also trigger empathy, an emotional reaction closely related to sadness and distress (Fultz, Schaller and Cialdini, 1988). The personification metaphors in Figures 2, 3 and 4 encourage a type of empathetic response called “perspective-taking,” which is defined as the attempt to adopt another’s perspective. Personification metaphors trigger an anthropomorphic bias and encourage the viewer to imagine the experience of

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another in human terms. For instance, the expressions of pain on the faces of the walruses in Figure 2 are human-like, and thus easy for viewers to identify with. In Figure 4, the animals wear human-like expressions of distress, are in a human circumstance (namely, clinging to a raft), and are waving for help, which is a human gesture. These anthropomorphic features imply that animals and humans possess similar mental states, and thus experience pain, distress, and sadness in the same way. Again, this makes it easier for the viewer to adopt the animals' point of view. Similarly, Figure 3 lends human characteristics (namely, a mutilated vagina) to a defaced flag, and thus encourages the viewer to take the perspective of the implied victim. This personification metaphor asks that the viewer take the perspective of a powerless and oppressed RP who has undergone tremendous suffering. This ad demands a lot of the viewer, as empathizing with that sort of suffering could evoke not only sadness but also vulnerability and discomfort.

These ads also inspire the three other kinds of empathetic responses proposed by Bagozzi and Moore (1994): protection motivation, fantasy elaboration, and compassion/pity. Figure 1, Figure 5, and to a lesser extent Figure 2 evoke protection motivation, a form of empathy concerned with the urge to defend somebody or something in distress. All of these ads depict wrongdoing against a child. Children are considered innocent and harmless, and most people feel an instinctive response to protect a child from threat or danger. Therefore,

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Figures 1, 5, and 2 arouse empathy by featuring a victimized child for whom the viewer has an innate urge to protect.

The ads also all evoke fantasy elaboration, a form of empathy that stems from an elaboration of that which is depicted in the ad. For instance, though almost no information is given about the child in Figure 5, the viewer might imagine what his or her life is like and draw empathy from those elaborations. Figure 3 also demands fantasy elaboration from the viewer. While the image implies a mutilated vagina, it also encourages the viewer to think about the girl who underwent this mutilation, who is subject to oppression and brutality, and who lives unprotected by the state in which she lives. Again, this ad encourages the viewer to draw empathy from a world beyond what is being depicted. All five ads also evoke a sense of time passing, which again encourages fantasy elaboration. In Figure 1, for instance, the old-fashioned bathing suits as well as the fact that the photo is in black and white evoke the past. At the same time, the action taking place (taking a photo) alludes to events that will happen in the future, when the bullies share this photograph with others. Ads that evoke the past and/or the future encourage fantasy elaboration because they ask the viewer to think beyond what he or she sees in the image.

The final empathetic response proposed by Bagozzi and Moore (1994) is compassion/pity, which is defined as feelings of concern for another. These ads all clearly feature a victim for whom the viewer might feel compassion. There is a

debate in the academic community, however, over how compassion functions. While some argue that compassion can inspire true altruism (Baston, Duncan, Ackerman, Buckley & Birch, 1981), others think it is a problematic emotion. Berlant (2004), for instance, might argue that these ads evoke an fruitless (albeit pleasurable) moralism and present a black and white vision of the world that is appealingly straightforward, though ultimately dangerous. Berlant believes that compassion is intrinsically linked to relations of power and privilege. By evoking compassion, it can be argued that these ads reinforce the power dynamics and relations of privilege that gave rise to these social, political, and environmental issues in the first place. Berlant argues that compassion is a pleasurable and self-serving emotion. To that end, the sadness the viewer feels while looking at these ads might reinforce a belief that he or she is virtuous and moral and thus generate satisfying, self-congratulatory feelings. Berlant (1999) cautions that sadness and compassion can be seen as proof of injustice, and the positive feelings that come from relieving that sadness can be mistaken as proof that justice has prevailed.

Thus, according to this theory, the sadness these ads convey is effective because it reinforces a belief to which people are very attached, namely that they are good and principled. Though compassion makes people feel virtuous, it does not, however, require any true sense of connection or understanding of another's plight. Furthermore, it does not necessarily precipitate social change.

A different interpretation of Berlant's theories might suggest that these ads are effective because they call into question our belief that we live in a moral, progressive, and socially conscious world. Seen in this light, these ads reveal that our conceptions of "the good life" are merely fantasies, and suggest that if we scratch the surface and look at our ideals and conceptions of the world through a critical lens we will see that there is a more ominous reality at play. By shattering these fantasies, the ads call for a sense of ethical responsibility and generate a collective moral conscience. From this perspective, these ads are effective because they problematize the ideals we hold dear. For instance, Figure 2 problematizes our attachment to oil and our desire for wealth by showing that the cost of these attachments is the exploitation of animals. Therefore, applying Berlant's theory from another angle suggests that these ads are effective because the sadness they convey shocks the viewer into reconsidering his or her attachments. Therefore, these ads depict sadness through emotional contagion, low modality, evoking a sense of complicity and guilt, and by eliciting empathy and compassion. Visual metaphors not only enhance this sadness, but also add an element of creativity that enhances the overall impression of the ad and its message.

CONCLUSION

This research paper has detailed the visual elements that convey sadness in five award-nominated NPO advertisements. This study contributes to our understanding of how visuals convey emotion, and how emotion in advertising influences viewers. This knowledge will help NPO advertisers produce compelling work that has the potential to promote positive social change. Understanding how to convey sadness effectively could also prevent advertisers from creating exploitative ads that fetishize the hardship of others.

One limitation of this study was that it did not examine ineffective advertisements. A comparison of the visual techniques used in ineffective advertisements with those used in effective ones would shed more light on best advertising practises. Another limitation is the exclusion of textual components. Examining both textual and visual elements would contribute to a more well-rounded understanding of how the ad functions. Finally, though this sample of ads was recognized by the advertising community for excellence, exactly how they influenced viewers remains unknown. A study that includes interviews, focus groups, or surveys would reveal whether or not these ads actually arouse prosocial behavior or encourage a change in perspective.

In conclusion, though a sadvertisement may evoke painful emotions, it has the potential to attract a large audience, raise awareness, and challenge viewers to

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adopt a new perspective on the world around them. When all is said and done, though a sadvertisement may hurt, it hurts so good.

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APPENDIX

Figure 1



HURTS SO GOOD

Figure 2



HURTS SO GOOD

Figure 3



HURTS SO GOOD

Figure 4



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Figure 5



A DRESS SHOULDN'T COST A CHILDHOOD.



Save the Children

Visit savethechildren.net and help support this cause.

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