Cultural Daily

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Power & Control

Avery McDougal · Wednesday, November 22nd, 2017

What is the greatest form of power and control? Is it money, political office, or perhaps agency? No, not likely. Lexus would most likely answer with, “Easy, it’s the 2013 Lexus GS.”

2013 Lexus GS? What year is this?

Yes. that’s how much I love cars. I even sit here watching 5 year old TV commercials.

So let me break it (that old Lexus commercial) down for fun.

[embedvideo id=”tEvs8nPmNlw” website=”youtube”]

In 2012, Lexus developed a 30 second advertisement to market their latest luxury performance sedan. The advertisement consists of both exterior and interior video clips of multiple drivers driving the same Lexus around town with extreme sporting clips nestled between. The drivers are always the same: a male who is composed, confident and dressed exquisitely. The passengers are all female, calm, dressed exquisitely, and have some form of smile. Lexus uses a variety of rhetorical devices to gracefully play their target audience’s’ heart strings like a harp. Above all, Lexus targets their audience: affluent males in their 30’s-40’s, using color as a means to establish brand status, and symbolism to persuade their audience to purchase this vehicle.

To begin, let’s consider Lexus’ target market audience and speculate how they decided on this group. Lexus’ target market audience are affluent single males in their 30’s-40’s. First and foremost, all the drivers in this Lexus advertisement are male. Their passengers are all females who appear to be wooed by the males’ driver skill, in that, they all appear to be enjoying the experience, and in one instance, one of the passengers looks over at the driver with a smile as he takes a turn. The lack of children indicates these men are single.

This advertisement caters to men in this age group by showing them, they will not only impress women with this car and that they will also be desired for this car and the skill the car gives them. Affluence is also portrayed by having both the drivers and passengers dressed formally. This is a subtle way of saying, “If you’re going to sit in this Lexus, you better be wearing a suit or dress.” Finally, the extreme sports clips- skiing, parasailing-etc. aim to bring out that 20-year-old able-bodied male of themselves and increase their adrenaline while at the same time creating this association with Lexus. Lexus was keen to cater to their target audiences’ main interests, status, women, and sports.

The first noticeable rhetorical device employed, and which sets the tone for the advertisement, is the use of the color gray, or more specifically, the color silver. According to Brian Honigman of the Huffington Post, “Black, white, silver and gold are often used in the logos of luxury brands like Chanel, Prada, Michael Kors and others to enhance the feeling of sophistication.” (2013, n.d.). The advertisement primarily takes place in a city on a cloudy day which to the viewer gives the composition a gray hue signifying sophistication. In addition to the setting, the Lexus in the video is also silver. What’s more, cloudy days often gives the effect of being gloomy and sad. The way Lexus combatted this connotation is by letting some sun hit buildings, the drivers, and by inserting sport clips occurring on beautiful sunny days. Color plays a critical role in setting the tone and establishing Lexus as a luxury brand.

The second most prominent rhetorical device employed is symbolism. Lexus is trying to sell their notion that their brand is exclusive. Throughout much of the video, the Lexus is the sole car on the road, racing through the cityscape uninterrupted and as it pleases. Toward the end of the video, however, you can see parked cars in the background. The parked cars are shown as taxis and very likely symbolize their competitors.

They are shown as taxis, as a way of debasing their competitors. This could be considered a subtle version of comparative advertising. The Federal Trade Commission (1979) defines comparative advertising as “advertising that compares alternative brands on objectively measurable attributes or price, and identifies the alternative brand by name, illustration or other distinctive information.”

Although Lexus’ method is not objective, by showing competing car manufacturers as “background noise,” they subliminally send a message about these competitors to their audience, which can be simply put as, Lexus is superior. Also, the taxis are parked compared to the Lexus which is driving which separates Lexus from their competitors. It is easy to let the backdrop be accepted as, “this is where the advertisement was filmed.” But everything in this advertisement was carefully placed and intentional.

Lexus has gone out of their way to spend millions of dollars on this advertisement. They are well-aware of the rhetorical devices and the methods of persuasion that are dissolved almost entirely into their advertisements. They hone in on a certain group, research as much as they can into that group and create an advertisement they believe will grab their attention. Lexus knows they do not have long before an individual loses interest and any mistake can cost them just that. The result is a well put together advertisement that will make their audience think about Lexus subconsciously. Lexus hopes that when someone asks you, “What is the greatest form of power and control?” You will say, “The Lexus GS.”

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