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The Constitutive Nature of Non-Profit Advertising and Its Effect on Agency: An Analysis of the Campaigns of Childfund International and (RED)

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*THE CONSTITUTIVE NATURE OF NON-PROFIT ADVERTISING AND ITS
EFFECT ON AGENCY: AN ANALYSIS OF THE CAMPAIGNS OF CHILDFUND
INTERNATIONAL AND (RED)*

AN HONORS THESIS

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Project Title The Constitutive Nature of Non-Profit Advertising and its Effect on Agency: An Analysis of the Campaigns of ChildFund International and (RED)

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Abstract

Many rhetorical scholars choose to study the persuasive effectiveness of an advertisement instead of the reality that the ad creates. While this is a beneficial endeavor, in the case of non-profit advertisements it allows for the meaning the advertisements create to be passed over. The meaning is assumed to be positive because the effect of the successful persuasion of the ad results in a beneficial outcome, helping others. The literature review examines rhetoric as constitutive, or capable of creating the meaning of the audience, and then explores how through this constitutive nature an advertisement can affect the agency of an audience. This theory is then applied through a critical analysis of an ad from ChildFund International, and an ad from (RED). The argument is then made that in these ads the audience is constituted specifically as a consumer, and that this constitution of the audience forms their agency in a self-destructive way.

Introduction

Advertisements are not only used to sell goods and services, but are used to form an organization's identity. Even more so, advertising creates the meaning of the audience. This is what rhetorical scholars examine when they consider rhetoric as constitutive, or capable of creating and influencing the meaning of the audience. While non-profit organization advertisements are not usually analyzed past an examination of their effectiveness, studying these ads and their constitutive abilities can provide insight into the way that they influence the identity of their audience. This role complicates the constitution of the audience, and in turn affects the agency of the audience.

Two humanitarian-based organizations that use advertising to present their causes to the public are ChildFund International and (RED). These two organizations are well-established and have made significant contributions to their causes, poverty and AIDS, and provide two very different examples of non-profit advertising strategies.

Audiences often assume that non-profit advertisements are positive because of the altruistic nature of the organization represented in the ad. The funds or awareness raised ultimately help those in need, so there seems to be little reason to critically analyze the ad. However, this "free pass" that is often given to non-profit advertisements has resulted in a severe lack of rhetorical scholarship surrounding the rhetoric of non-profit advertisements. Many scholars have given ample time to the study of the effectiveness of techniques used in these advertisements, but few have looked at the implications that these ads have on the agency of the audience.

This paper will critically analyze non-profit advertisements using the theory of rhetoric as constitutive. This theory is important because it illustrates how ads can create the reality of the

audience. The theory will then be applied in two separate case studies of ads selected from both ChildFund International and (RED). The application of the theory of rhetoric as constitutive will identify and analyze different tactics of the ads not based on effectiveness, but based on the influence and effects that these advertisements have on reality. This application will illustrate that the ads constitute the audience as consumers and leave them no other identity within the process of humanitarian aid. Through this constitution, the ads in fact take away the agency of their audience in the situation of humanitarian aid. This is because the audience no longer has the ability to make choices regarding, or actively influence, their own reality.

Humanitarian Aid

Many humanitarian issues had surfaced around the time of the early 2000s, the same time that these ads were aired. The earthquake had just occurred in Haiti (Roodman) and the war in the Middle East was reaching a period of restructuring the government and infrastructures of areas affected by the war (USAID). Undernourishment was also a huge issue at this time, affecting 925 million people worldwide (State of Food Insecurity in the World p.10). All of these issues were receiving organized responses from the United States, and the politics of these issues seemed to be taken into consideration as well.

Both of the ads examined also came at a time where humanitarian aid had been well established. World Humanitarian Day was also celebrated for the first time in 2009. This is a day meant to commemorate those killed while working on humanitarian causes, and to celebrate the spirit of humanitarian aid (World Humanitarian Day). More focus had been placed on effective humanitarian aid and making sure that organizations were meeting base standards. The Humanitarian Accountability Partnership had just revised in 2010 their 2007 version of the “Standard in Humanitarian Accountability and Quality Management.” This organization was

created to encourage accountability, and the standard created included benchmarks to be used in assessing humanitarian efforts (The history of HAP). The renewal of these standards as well as the creation of World Humanitarian Day illustrated a shift in consciousness regarding humanitarian aid. Humanitarian aid was becoming a natural part of personal and foreign affairs even more so than it was before.

An opinion article in the *New York Times* in 2011 also discussed a recent movement toward humanitarian tourism or “voluntourism.” This is a trend toward volunteering as part of a vacation. It is a way to see a different part of the country being visited, for a day or two, and then head back to the vacationing (Mitchell). Humanitarian aid at this time had become about the experience. A person wanted to have something a picture or story as evidence of their aid to take back with them as evidence of their humanitarian work, otherwise the experience of giving seems lack-luster. This is a trend that has continued, and illustrates further the immersion of humanitarian aid into everyday life.

Constitutive Rhetoric of Advertisements

Charland analyzes the reality that the ad creates through the theory of constitutive rhetoric. In constitutive rhetoric the “audiences are not considered to exist outside rhetoric as the subjects of its address, but rather to ‘live inside’ the rhetoric that constructs them” (Stein, p. 173). What this means is that the audience is analyzed as “embodying and, thus, participating in the discourses that attempt to persuade them [this] allows for a rhetorical view of an ideological discourse” (Stein, p. 173). Charland explains that constitutive rhetoric “positions the reader towards political, social, and economic action in the material world and it is in this positioning that its ideological character becomes significant” (p.141). In this way constitutive rhetoric both shapes the audience and reinforces already present ways of thinking.

Charland deals with ideology through looking at three different ideological effects of constitutive rhetoric. The first is that constitutive rhetoric “constitutes a collective subject” (Charland, p.139). What this means is that the audience exists through the narrative of the rhetoric. The audience then has an “identity that transcends the limitations of the individual body and will” (p. 139). The audience is then not a physical entity separate from the ad, but a part of the ad that holds ideologies that are being formed and defined by the ad.

The second ideological effect is the “positing of a transhistorical subject” (Charland p. 140). Charland goes on to explain that the audience “transcends the limitations of individuality at any historical moment and transcends the death of individuals across history” (p. 140). This means that the audience is an individual entity that is separate from the rest of time in that no individual historical event has altered it, but it is formed by the rhetoric.

The final ideological effect is “the illusion of freedom” (Charland, p. 141). Freedom does not truly exist in the ad because “the narrative is already spoken or written” (p.141). This means that the audience has no other choice but to go along with what has been decided by the narrative. The “structure of understandings” created by the narrative forms the ideologies of the audience in a way that they have no ability but to go along with them or risk contradicting their identity (p.141).

The approach of looking at the ideological meaning of the ad is beneficial and necessary to constitutive rhetoric because it takes into consideration the way those ideologies that already exist play in the audience’s acceptance of the ad. Viewing the ad as constitutive takes the analysis one step further in that it looks at the ideologies as creating an identity for the audience that they do not have the ability to control or choose. This is because in the theory of constitutive

rhetoric the audience is the expression of the ad, and thus is formed by the ad without their knowledge.

The reinforcement of ideologies is not innately positive, just as non-profit advertising is not innately benevolent. Montes-Armenteros describes ads as a cultural exchange that shapes the way society functions. He explains that, “The repetition, reinforcement, and perpetuation of relations within the social grid are guaranteed by the cultural exchange, an exchange that in capitalist societies is one of commodities and meanings attached to them” (Montes-Armenteros, 1998). Advertising is a cultural exchange attached to commodities, and this attachment allows advertising to shape and reinforce the ideas of an audience regarding the relationships, issues, and the general make up of society. These relationships contain inherent power struggles surrounding gender, class, race, or in the case of non-profit advertisements, those in need. The perpetuation of norms surrounding these relationships that takes place in advertising only furthers the power struggles.

The constitutive nature of ads is based off of the cultural exchange of advertising that Montes-Amenteros addresses, as well as the reinforcement of cultural norms and ideologies. Advertising has the ability to shape and alter the reality surrounding an issue by using societal norms and ideas to create a new solution or face for a complicated issue (Charland, p.142).

The analysis of the “1984 Macintosh Apple” ad by Sarah Stein provides an example of the way that the theory of constitutive rhetoric has been applied to advertising before. Stein uses the theory to analyze the specific aspects of the ad and how these aspects contribute to the constitution of the audience. At the time of the ad Apple was attempting to establish a market for personal computers. Because of this, the ad constituted the audience in a way that formed their identity along the same lines as the brand. For example, Stein discusses the symbolism of the

political leader in the ad as representative of Stalin or capitalism (Stein, p. 183). This political leader was in contrast to the heroine of the ad, who was acting outside of the masses in order to stop the leader. This comparison constitutes the audience through the placement of the heroine, as freethinkers capable of making their own decisions, and as people capable of functioning outside of the capitalist norm (Stein, p. 183). At this time that norm was IBM. The ideologies of the population come into play in the role they play in constituting the audience. Playing on the freedom and anti-capitalist movement of the time allows the ad to create the identity of the audience in a way that is beneficial to the company. This is just one of the ways that Stein examines the constitutive capabilities of the 1984 ad.

Kenneth S. Zagacki also uses constitutive rhetoric in his examination of G.W. Bush's Iraq war speeches. He argues that Bush's speeches were examples of failed constitutive rhetoric because Bush attempted to label the Iraqis as something they were not. By using democracy, something outside of the Iraqi history or set of ideologies, to describe their wants, Bush actually created more of a "constitutive paradox" (p. 276). Zagacki argues that this would have been more beneficial if Bush had assumed that it would be their own kind of democracy and not American democracy. This illustrates the key connection between ideology and constitutive rhetoric.

In the same way as with Stein and Zagacki, the theory of rhetoric as constitutive can be applied to non-profit advertisements. Non-profit advertisements aim to remedy the contradiction that audiences face regarding poverty through playing on their ideologies in order to achieve a specific constitution of the audience. According to the World Bank, the United States is qualified as a "high income" country, while most of the least developed countries lie in Africa and Southeast Asia (World Bank). The contradiction here is that issues like hunger and AIDS are a huge problem worldwide, but are not as visible to audiences in the United States.

Issues of poverty and disease are not issues that people in the United States have a set relationship with. Because of this, non-profit organizations have the opportunity to form the audience to the issue. The organizations do this by constituting the audience as a consumer. The issue can then be easily dealt with because the context fits with an audience's ideologies. This formation of the meaning of the audience makes the cultural exchange of advertising possible because non-profits and their causes then become commodities and the audience the consumers. This commoditization provides the audience with a simple opportunity to assist those in need through a product that has been identified as effective, easy and just. Often systemic issues are simplified in order to allow the viewer to feel powerful through their ability to provide assistance and make a lasting difference, when in actuality the issue will likely take decades to resolve or requires system reform. Dealing with humanitarian issues becomes nothing more than another daily transaction.

Through this constitutive move to shape the audience as consumers through advertising, non-profit organizations limit the role that the audience is allowed to play, therefore forming their agency in a self-destructive way. Marilyn M. Cooper discusses agency as a person's ability to function and make decisions on their own based on their ability to interact and assimilate with their surroundings, with the person then being an "agent" (p.426). Rhetorical agency is then "the process through which organisms create meanings through acting into the world and changing their structure in response to the perceived consequences of their actions" (p. 426). This ability to construct and interact with the world around them is part of what helps a person to form relationships and develop. It also allows a person to assimilate into their surroundings.

Cooper explains further that, "They change themselves through these interactions, and at the same time instigate changes in others with whom they interact" (p.438). Having agency,

specifically rhetorical agency, allows a person to influence and be influenced by his or her surroundings. The ability to shape their surroundings is key for an audience because it allows them to choose the way that they want to interact with an ad. The aspects of this interaction will form the way that an audience views the world around them. It also influences the ability the audience has to make changes in the formation of meaning through the choices an audience member makes surrounding an ad. Agency allows for growth and change, and is inherent in defining someone as a person capable of experiencing this growth and change.

Advertising has the power to form this agency through its constitution of the audience. By putting the audience in a limited role, the audience has less power and no agency. If an ad defines the audience as a consumer through the use of ideological assumptions, the audience is not given the ability to be anything else or to participate in the meaning making process. This forms the audience's agency in a limiting way and gives the power solely to the advertisers.

Case Study 1: Child Fund International: Voice of the Child

Rhetorical Context

Presbyterian minister Dr. J. Calvitt Clark originally founded ChildFund International in 1938. At that time the organization was called China's Children Fund because its work focused around orphanages in China. It then became known as the Christian Children's Fund in 1951 because of their international expansion, and finally changed to ChildFund International in 2009.

The organization serves communities in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, and the Americas. In 2012, ChildFund International donated 82 percent of funding to their service programs. It is a founding member of the Child Fund Alliance; a group of twelve organizations focused on benefiting children in poverty, and has been approved by the Charity Navigator, the American Institute for Philanthropy, and the Charities Review Council. The organization focuses on

children in its ad campaigns through encouraging viewers to sponsor a child, relating to these viewers that there will be correspondence and a connection between the donor and the child. The ad described is typical of ads presented by this organization.

While the organization maintains that their focus is on children, its programs also work to support families and the overall community. These efforts include 12 percent of its programming funds being spent on micro-enterprise efforts. By spreading its focus in this way, the organization aims to take a more holistic approach to humanitarian aid (ChildFund.org). Other focus areas include health and sanitation, nutrition, and education, with education requiring the most funding.

Description of Ad

The ChildFund “Voice of the Child” ad begins with two young children of different non-white races giving short statements about the difficulties of their current condition. These children give their statements in front of very rough, underdeveloped, and rural backgrounds. No specific location is given in regards to where the ad is set. The houses are not well taken care of and there are no paved roads or signs of modern technology. The statements are given by the child in what is assumed to be their native language. A translation by a child voice speaking in English with a strong accent is voiced over the top of the statement. Through out the ad somber music is playing.

These statements include camera shots of the impoverished area surrounding the children, and shots of the children crying. In the shots of the children crying, the camera often closes in on the face of the child. The ad then breaks to an older white male, also in the impoverished area, asking the audience to imagine what it is like to be in the situation of these children. There is a notable contrast between the clean new clothes the man is wearing, and the dirty worn down

clothing the children are wearing. While he is discussing the children, a shot of a crying black woman comes on and the man brings up the pain of worrying about losing “yet another child.” The scene breaks to a shot of another young child giving a statement about his life’s difficulties. Some of these statements through out the ad include a sister dying, getting sick with a fear of never getting better, and going to bed hungry.

The older white male is then shown with the black female child from one of the previous shots, and he begins to talk about how the audience can help children like her. A number to contact the organization also appears at the bottom of the screen. The man speaks about how it is “unacceptable” that these children should suffer, and that “you and I can actually save them one by one.” While the man speaks about the difficulties the children face and how the audience can help them, shots of children in rural areas with very sad faces come across the screen. The shots include the first name and age of the child in text on the screen. These shots include a child in a very basic and not modern kitchen while the man talks about hunger, a child in front of dirty water while the man talks about disease, and a child sitting on a dirty mattress with no blankets while the man speaks about child trafficking. There are also a few shots of children sitting in areas full of trash.

Descriptions of the cost, 92 cents a day or 28 dollars a month, appear on the screen. Another crying child in front of a rural and dirty background is pictured, followed by shots of children already seen in the ad. The man gives an explanation of how the potential donor can receive correspondence with the child that they choose to sponsor. A child already seen in the ad is then translated in a sad child’s voice as saying, “Will anybody help me?” and the ad ends with the man informing the audience again of how they can contact the organization to help.

Analysis

The ChildFund International ad “Voice of the Child” works to portray many people are suffering in poverty as part of its surface meaning. The surface meaning also illustrates that the viewer has the power to build a relationship with those in need through donations. The meaning intended by the organization aims to illustrate that if a person donates they will be helping an individual child, like the ones in the ad. The organization also wants to illustrate that if a person donates they will have an opportunity to make a connection with the child. The ideological meaning of the ad deals with the concepts of race, pity and naturalization.

In non-profit advertisements like the ChildFund ad, the group in need is often presented as belonging to a non-white race. This presentation of race provides a separation between the group in need and the American audience, which has a high Caucasian population. By forming this separation, the ad constitutes the audience and their relationship with the subjects of the ad in a way that creates an “us” and “them” dichotomy. This results in the otherization of those in the advertisement through an inability of the audience to recognize those in the ad as being fully human, or a human in the same way as the audience.

In his article on the media response to the Haiti earthquake, Murali Balaji confronts this issue of separation. He discusses race as being key to creating distance between the audience and the group being helped, turning them into an “Other” (p. 52). This “Other” becomes easier for the audience to consume and allows their role as the “helper” to become clearer. Those in the ad become “Others” through the environment that they are presented in. The country or ethnicity of the subjects of the ad is never identified, and they all seem to exist in the same place. This takes away the individuality of the countries of people represented, and places them all into one category – poor. The audience is not meant to question the individual issues that resulted in the poverty presented, but are to view poverty as one issue that needs to be solved. The relationship

between the audience and the subject of the ad is then constituted as an “us” and an “other,” and the audience is discouraged from forming the relationship any differently.

If the impoverished people in the ad were white, it would take away from the ad’s efforts to frame the reality of the audience surrounding the issue of poverty because, 1) white people are not usually thought of in terms of this extreme kind of poverty, and 2) white people are not normally placed in undeveloped settings unless they are conquering them. Going against these meanings would harm the effort to change the audience’s reality regarding poverty in order to frame them as consumers.

The older white male in the ad is given the charge of instructing the audience regarding how they should handle the poverty the ad presents. He is the person in the ad that is least associated with poverty, wearing clean clothes and speaking about how unacceptable it is for children to be living in these conditions. He furthers the otherization and issues of race by introducing the audience to multiple children of varying age, gender, and race that the audience members could choose to sponsor. This presentation of a “selection” of children takes away the individuality of the issues that the children are suffering from and turns them into an object that the audience can possess. The man also furthers the perception of the “other” by asking the audience to imagine things they have never experienced. For example, he says, “Can you imagine what it is like to know that there is nothing to eat tomorrow?” This is not something that most of the first world audience would have ever experienced, placing the children and their afflictions outside of the realm of understanding for the audience and into the role of the “other.”

The use of the older white male creates a parallel to the children that is necessary for the ad to complete its constitutive process. Balaji states, “The media’s deployment of natives’ voice legitimizes discourses of power and inequality, rationalizing pity as a constructive emotion

towards those being pitied” (p. 64). By using the native voices of the children juxtaposed to the voice of the older male, the power dynamic becomes clear. The audience is made to think that the pity and separation they feel toward the subject of the ad is justified, while the white man affirms the thought, and the subject is left virtually silent. This man also comes offering a solution of just 92 cents a day, providing the audience with a simple remedy to helping the “other,” and defining the relationship that the audience should have with this other.

The “Voice of the Child” ad also furthers the “otherization” of those in the ad by beginning with the placement of non-white children wearing worn-out clothing in a run-down and rural setting. This is an immediate attempt at making the children seem underdeveloped and in need of assistance. It also immediately creates distance between the audience watching the ad and the subject of the ad. According to Balaji, years of presenting conflicts and tragedies of non-white peoples as primitive, cruel and very much the usual has led those in Western nations to view these situations with pity (Balaji p.57).

The rural setting of the ad is particularly important. As Balaji suggests, non-white cultures are often depicted as being uncivilized (Balaji p.56). This ad too places the subjects of this ad in a rural setting, and places the audience immediately into the dichotomy created between civilized and uncivilized. This places the audience in a position of power over those in the ad. It can also be asserted that largely non-white cultures are framed as still developing and are “behind” first world countries technologically. This is easily translated to the subjects being framed as “behind” mentally, organizationally, and in overall ability. Sturgeon analyzes this portrayal of non-whites cultures. She explains: “This set of assumptions – that ‘primitive’ peoples are closer to nature, that there is a natural evolution from ‘primitive’ to ‘civilized.’ And that history inevitably involves ‘progress’ defined as a movement toward modernization and

industrialization” (p. 29). The ad illustrates this primitiveness through the lack of technology or industry present anywhere in the ad in an effort to make these populations seem closer to nature. The clothes that the children are wearing are also very simple and worn, as is the housing they are presented next to. Any eating utensils, like bowls, are well used and very simple, and any water presented is dirty. There is also a reference to sex trafficking in the ad, at which point a child is pictured sitting on a dirty mattress with no blankets. All of these references paint a picture of limited resources and desperate living situations.

Placing the ad in an underdeveloped setting also allows the organization to constitute the audience in their relationship to nature. Relating an ad to nature or the natural legitimizes the idea or definition of the ad. If a practice or definition is natural, it gives it a certain amount of authority (Sturgeon, p. 19). By placing the audience outside of this natural setting they are given a certain amount of control over the setting and those in it. The audience is constituted as the party responsible for fixing the issues in the ad, and the way to fix them is through consumption. The ad constitutes the audience as consumers of the natural, not just in setting but also in relationships. It is “natural” for the civilized audience to take care of the primitive society, and through the ad that meaning constitutes the audience. It becomes part of the audience’s meaning that they should be in control through acting out their role as a consumer over nature and those closest to it.

Using children in the ad also furthers the narrative that these non-white underdeveloped subjects are unable to take care of their children. This is an example of the ad using an emotional appeal, specifically pity, to constitute the audience. In an article on charity letters, Myers examines the development of theory surrounding pity and pathos through analyzing the scholarship of Aristotle, Cicero, St. Augustine and Kenneth Burke (p. 3). Aristotle explains

situations of pity as those in which audiences see things that they fear themselves happening to other people (Myers p.7). He adds that the way to have people feel pity is to make them feel that the issue is happening in close proximity to them, that they are seeing the wrong take place (Myers p. 8). It plays on the fear of the audience of being in a position where they would not be able to take care of their children. Myers asserts that this feeling of pity allows the emotion to have a direction and a purpose, moving the viewers to action (Myers p. 8). This is what the ad aims to have occur in order to have the audience buy in to the reality that it is creating.

The one adult woman in the ad is only shown crying, and has no lines. The children in the ad are often shown crying as well, and give such provocative lines as, “Will anybody help me?” which is translated to English by a sad child’s voice. Each child in the ad also brings up a difficult issue that they face, like getting sick and being afraid that they won’t get better, or having a sibling pass away. Hearing these difficulties spoken by a child, and translated into English by a child as well, makes them particularly difficult to bear. These are not issues that a first world audience would rarely hear of a child dealing with, and letting a child tell of these difficulties instead of an adult makes these realities all the more poignant.

Having the only adult pictured seem helpless leads the audience to assume that the adults in these communities need to be taken care of just as much as the children, and are incapable of helping themselves. The use of children is key because children are viewed as innocent and helpless. This vulnerability spreads to the woman in the ad. While she is crying on screen the narrator talks about the pain of losing “yet another child” to hunger, which influences the way that the audience views her. She is obviously heart-broken over her loss, but her reaction also makes her seem helpless, and the fact that it is “another child” also makes her seem incapable of her role as a parent. This limits the meaning making ability of the audience in order to constitute

them as consumers, and to constitute the way that they view those in poverty by providing donating as the only solution. In this situation ChildFund used pity to create a narrative that fits in with and shapes the meaning of the audience.

By creating no clear way in which the audience member can find a connection with the subject of the ad, the audience member is made to feel pity instead of empathy toward the subject of the ad (Balaji p.54). Race creates this distance, and the pity that the advertisement invokes only furthers it. Balaji also notes, “by responding with pity, we are tacitly acknowledging our privilege and power over a helpless Other” (p. 55). Pity is the only response option that the audience is given. The scene of the mother crying is a perfect example of where pity comes into play. Most people watching the ad are not going to understand the feeling of losing a child to hunger, especially when the possibility of “losing yet another child” is brought up by the narrator. Therefore, instead of empathizing with the mother, the audience is made to see her as helpless, crying over the children that she is incapable of taking care of without help. The subjects of the ad are fully “otherized” to the audience because there is no common ground on which to base empathy.

If the mother had been easier to empathize with through a presentation of her perspective, the situation would have created a much more complex meaning for the audience. The audience would be given the opportunity to think about the circumstances that put the woman in this position and through that process to become involved in meaning making. Viewing those in the ad as one group of needy and underdeveloped individuals that needs to be pitied makes the decision to donate seem like common sense altruism, a universal good. Having no critical thinking asked of the audience simplifies the meaning making process.

The ad furthers this meaning by not allowing the subjects of the ad the full freedom of

speech. The children presented in the ad are non-white and assumed not to speak English, based on the translations by children speaking English played over their voices, and so are unable to contradict the way they are presented. A spokesperson or voice over makes up the majority of the text of the ad, while the people in need simply provide the backdrop. Though the children in the ad are not all black, the argument could be made that since they are all non-white and do not speak English, they all play to the same meaning fostered in the audience, that non-whites in this setting are rural and underdeveloped, or essentially an Other. This furthers the presentation of Africa and other non-specific third-world countries on television. Media works to define Africa to its audience as an unknown and primitive land that is not developed enough to speak for itself (Balaji p.53). The lack of a voice for the subjects of the ad furthers the otherization process.

What is even more important in this ad is the use of the voiceovers. By choosing to use a voice over the ad fully takes away any real interaction that the child has with the environment or the audience, creating a layer between the audience and those in the ad. In the ChildFund ad, this is present every time a child speaks about their situation. While it is uncertain whether or not the children were speaking from scripts, or if the English matched what the children were saying in their native language, it is at least fair to assert that the children would need to be asked specific questions in order to elicit the responses used in the ads. Even if the children were speaking freely, ChildFund has absolute control over the final editing process and the framing of the ad. This gives ChildFund full control over the constitutive process. The child is unable to influence or change their surroundings, and the organization takes over the mediation process. This also takes away any opportunity for the audience to participate in the meaning making process because the organization maintains control of the presentation of the children through the text of the ad. The audience has nothing to interpret or internalize because the ad has defined

every meaning for them through its complete control over the text.

The agency of the audience comes into play at multiple points throughout the ad. Presenting those in the ad as others simplifies the meaning of the ad. It creates a reality in which the subjects of the ad should be pitied. This pity is achieved through the constant presentation of the subjects of the ad as completely dissimilar to the audience in their poverty and undeveloped environment. The chasm between the audience and the subject continues to grow through the use of children to create pity and further juxtaposition between the third world and the first world, as well as the presentation of one adult woman as helpless. There is also no specific ethnicity or country of origin given for the subjects in the ad, making the group seem more like others. Providing the text for those in the ad through translated voice-overs only furthers the otherization because the individuals in the ad are all grouped into one non-English speaking group.

All of these aspects contribute to the reality formed for the audience by the ad. This reality presents a very narrow view of the issue of poverty, and provides the audience with an even smaller role to play, that of the consumer. The ad acts in an attempt to constitute the audience as consumers through providing them with the sole solution of giving money. This takes away from the audience's agency, they are no longer given the ability to internalize the situation of those who need help, they are simply told to donate, knowing that the people in the ad fit into the generic category of impoverished and that they have been told their money is doing "good."

This presentation also constitutes the audience as a consumer by limiting their ability to internalize the issues affecting those presented in the ad. Whether the audience wants the role of consumer or not, they have no choice. The ad has constituted the audience in this specific way, and through this constitution the audience is no longer playing an active role in the rhetorical

process because the ad has defined their role for them. The audience is then unable to fully act their will on their environment, which is the result of a self-destructive formation of the audience's agency by the ad. The terms of their environment and the way that they should interact with it have been defined for them. The children in the ad become simply a subject to be presented and described in order to constitute the audience in a specific way, making the audience a body to be directed. The audience should be forced to critically think about these issues in order to participate in the meaning making process and prevent themselves from becoming defined as consumers of human need.

Issues surrounding agency and the constitutive nature of advertising are also present in the (RED) ad. Though the tactics of the ad may vary greatly, these tactics still result in a specific constitution of the audience as consumers.

Case Study 2: (RED) Organization: The Lazarus Effect

Rhetorical Context

(RED) was founded in 2006 by Bono, the internationally known music artist from the band U2, and Bobby Shriver. The organization was created to raise awareness about the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and to raise money for the Global Fund through partnerships with corporations as a branch of ONE. ONE is an advocacy organization working to eradicate poverty. (RED) works with corporations to create products using the (RED) brand. All of the funds are funneled through the Global Fund, and then 100 percent of the funds are given to HIV/AIDS programs in Africa. Since its creation, (RED) has contributed over \$250 million dollars to the Global Fund. This money has gone to programs in Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Rwanda, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania and Zambia. Some of the companies (RED) works with include Coca-Cola, Apple, and Starbucks.

The two major issues that (RED) focuses their campaigns around are the use of ARVs, or anti-retroviral medication, and preventing mother to child infection, with a goal of creating an AIDS-free generation by 2015. The Lazarus Effect Campaign was launched in 2010 in an effort to raise awareness about the life-saving effects of ARVs for those infected with HIV/AIDS. Susan Smith, the CEO of (RED) at the time of the campaign explained that its goal was to illustrate the way that money was working in aiding those effected by the disease. The name of the campaign was meant to reference the story of Lazarus, a man who is resurrected by Jesus in the Bible. The campaign culminated in a documentary that was aired on HBO that focused on “a series of true-life resurrections on screen” ((RED) Launches the Lazarus Effect Campaign) meant to illustrate the effect that ARVs can have on those infected after just 40 days of use.

Description of Ad

The (RED) organization “The Lazarus Effect” ad is made up of short shots of different celebrities giving a statement to the camera about what they were able to get for 40 cents. The objects include things like gum, half a song, helium, extra mayonnaise, a mustache and sprinkles. The celebrities are all figures who would be recognizable on sight to at least part of the audience. Some of the participants include Bono, Penelope Cruz, Hugh Jackman, Gwen Stefani, Orlando Bloom, Lucy Liu and Dakota Fanning. The celebrities are of varying ages, genders, and international backgrounds.

After the celebrities have each stated their 40-cent item, the ad cuts to the text “40 cents buys more than you think.” Bono, a founder of the (RED) organization, then comes on the screen explaining “two pills a day is what it takes to stay alive if you are HIV positive, those pills cost about 40 cents a day.” The words “The Lazarus Effect” accompanied by the organization’s website then come on the screen, followed by one last celebrity, stating that she got a paper bag,

and then popping the bag to make a loud noise and end the ad.

Analysis

“The Lazarus Effect” ad by the (RED) organization can be analyzed at multiple levels, with the ideological meaning being most important in this thesis. Though the aspects of the ideological meaning of this ad differ from the ChildFund ad, it still results in a loss of agency for the audience. The surface meaning of this ad surrounds the idea of ARVs being inexpensive, and that an individual can benefit those with HIV/AIDS very easily because of this low cost. In addition, the surface meaning of the ad also engages the frivolous and silly items that the population spends 40 cents on all the time, and attempts to make a juxtaposition between ARVs and these items. The intended meaning could encompass the surface meaning, but includes the organization’s desire for the audience to identify with the celebrities in the ad and emulate them in their support of (RED). The strategy of using celebrities along with the humorous technique of incongruity creates the ideological meaning of the ad.

The setting of the ad is very simple in comparison to that of the ChildFund ad. Individual celebrities sit speaking against a white background while holding very commercialized and processed items such as a fake mustache or a kazoo. White also is a color often associated in the United States with being clean. Cleanliness is a sign of modernity in the United States. If a country is making progress through industrialization its people should be clean. This modernity is also present in the items that the celebrities hold, specifically the parking ticket. The fact that the celebrity has a parking ticket signifies that he has a car, and thus is modern. This together with the setting of the ad makes the population feel a level of comfort and familiarity. Most humanitarian ads would be set in a jungle or underdeveloped area to create a sense of power in the audience. Setting the ad in a white studio creates a sense of normalcy, creating the idea that

this is just another consumer transaction, nothing out of the ordinary. By excluding nature in the ad the organization keeps the audience from making any connection regarding nature and primitiveness and those “primitive” people usually associated with countries with high rates of HIV/AIDS infection (Sturgeon p.29).

Celebrities also add to the meaning of an ad and the reality that it creates. McCracken writes that a celebrity’s meaning can lie in age, social class, gender, and lifestyle, among other things. These meanings can be transferred to a brand. McCracken describes the process as “symbolic properties... reside in the celebrity and (to) move from celebrity to consumer good and from good to consumer” (p. 310). The meanings that the celebrity or endorser brings are then very important in the selection of which celebrity to use in the ad. The celebrity also serves as a collector of meanings for the brand of the organization.

The case of “The Lazarus Effect” ad is unique in its use of multiple celebrity endorsers. With multiple endorsers, all of the traits of all of each celebrity will not link to the brand of the ad. This is because each celebrity is not introduced and developed, and is only going to be linked for this individual circumstance. Thus the group of celebrities and the meaning that their presence as a whole creates must be analyzed instead of the meaning of each individual celebrity. The fact that the celebrities in the ad are very diverse creates a specific meaning. The message intended by including a group of celebrities could be that HIV/AIDS can affect anyone, regardless of their demographics. On the reverse side, the use of diverse celebrities could be used to indicate that it is everyone’s responsibility to help those with HIV/AIDS. Both of these meanings influence the constitution of the audience by the ad.

Concluding the ad with Bono allows (RED) to use the other celebrities in the ad to make this statement, while still maintaining the key brand messages through their main spokesperson.

In the case of (RED), Bono would be the celebrity endorser that carries specific meanings with him to all of the ads for the organization, including “The Lazarus Effect.” In an article on the formation of (RED), Richey and Ponte describe Bono as “the guarantor of cool,” explaining how his rock star status and previous involvement in issues of human rights and poverty provide a level of legitimacy to (RED) as a whole, and too the “Lazarus Effect” ad (p. 717). He brings a “coolness” factor to the brand that makes purchasing (RED) products seem trendy and his humanitarian reputation makes the cause appear current and relevant. These are all meanings that (RED) wants the audience to take on themselves when interacting with the brand.

Incongruity is also present in the (RED) ad. Incongruity in advertising is the practice of presenting two things that would not usually go together in order to create a humorous situation in an advertisement (Alden et. al p. 2). The use of incongruity in an ad usually results in a resolution or explanation for the audience as to why these two unrelated things are together in the ad. In “The Lazarus Effect” ad incongruity is present through the use of unrelated and odd items, and their juxtaposition with well-know celebrities. Since these celebrities are not usually seen together this also ads to the incongruity. In order for this incongruity to be effective, there are specific characteristics that need to be present.

In an article on the effects of incongruity, Alden, Mukherjee and Hoyer examine the characteristics of surprise, playfulness, warmth, and ease of resolution, and how these characteristics play a role in the success of incongruity in creating humor in advertisements (Alden et. al. p. 1-15). The success of this ad strategy also allows the ad to constitute the meaning of the audience. By making the ad entertaining and humorous the organization makes the issue a commodity that should be consumed, therefore constituting the audience as consumers.

Alden et al (2000) categorize surprise as a feeling that is neither negative nor positive, but creates an arousal in the brain. They argue that surprise could be related to humor in ads through this arousal, but whether its outcome is positive or negative is dependent on the success of the warmth, playfulness, and ease of resolution (Alden et al, p.4). If any of these characteristics are absent it could take away from the humor of the ad and have the opposite effect of irritating the audience. This ineffectiveness would also hinder the ads ability to constitute the audience.

Surprise is utilized in the (RED) ad in two ways: 1) the use of multiple different and seemingly unrelated celebrities; and 2) the connection of multiple random, inexpensive and frivolous items with these celebrities. The element of surprise continued at some level throughout the entire ad because of the inability to know which celebrity or object is coming next. This surprise contains the incongruity of the ad as well, the connection between two unrelated topics, celebrities and random everyday items, as well as the final connection to HIV/AIDS. The effectiveness of this surprise and incongruity then comes from the use of playfulness, warmth, and ease of resolution.

Playfulness is a connected to the intended response to surprise, the ideal result in a humorous ad. The use of playfulness makes the ad seem friendly, and illustrates that the incongruity is meant positively (Alden et al, p.4). The silliness seen in the (RED) ad, especially with objects like the stick-on mustache, or the fifteen minutes of parking and a ticket, act as cues to the viewer that the ad is meant to be humorous. These cues are clear through the way that the celebrities are handling the items. One celebrity wears a fake mustache while she tells the audience that she received the mustache for 40 cents. Another celebrity takes a breath of helium before saying the word "helium" in a high-pitched voice in order to signify that she bought a

balloon full of helium for 40 cents. The use of warmth can also be seen through these humorous cues. Warmth is a feeling that is evoked by positive meanings and kindness in the ad (Alden et al p.4). It provides a sense of security in the viewer regarding the eventual resolution of the incongruity, and also benefits the likability of the ad (Alden et al, p.4). Similar to playfulness, warmth is present in the tone of the actors, as well as the objects. Childlike or relatable objects like sprinkles, a noisemaker, or helium could create positive feelings and warmth surrounding the humor of the ad.

Ease of resolution is the most important characteristic in the success of incongruity in the (RED) ad. The audience needs a resolution to feel that the incongruity was necessary to create humor. Resolution also allows the audience to feel that they are a part of the humor of the ad, and that they understand the reasoning for it (Alden et al p.5). When ease of resolution is successful, it allows the audience to be molded by the ad. The resolution can help constitute the role the audience is meant to play.

The easier that the resolution of incongruity is, the more likely the audience is to keep the positive feelings from the other aspects of the advertisement and apply them to the intended message or brand. In the case of the (RED) ad the explanation and connection of the resolution need to be very well developed because of the final incongruity involving HIV/AIDS. The ad makes this connection through the constant dialogue referencing “forty cents”. Because the viewer has heard “For forty cents, I got...” at multiple points in the ad, when Bono says, “... those pills cost about forty cents a day” the connection between the items and the ARV medication used by those with HIV/AIDS becomes very clear. The text on the screen that reads “40 Cents A Day Buys A Lot More Than You Think” also prepares the viewer for the resolution of the ad and supports the connection between the everyday items and the life-saving ARV

medication. This resolution allows for a successful constitution of the audience by the ad.

The audience is constituted by the (RED) ad through the choice of culturally constructed narratives that the organization chooses to attach to the product through advertising and the celebrity (McCracken, p. 314). Through the narrative of the ad (RED) constitutes the audience as consumers. As previously stated, (RED) is based off of the tenet of the audience consuming products in order to benefit others. This constitutes the audience as consumers before the ad even gets started.

This constitution is furthered because those that (RED) is aiming to help are not able to present their situation or give an explanation of the disease, and are excluded from the privilege of participating in the rhetoric (Cooper, 2011). By choosing not to present someone affected by the disease in the ad, (RED) is implicitly supporting the cultural ideology that HIV/AIDS is a disease that only affects Africans, specifically black Africans who are unable to support themselves, and (RED) is forcing this meaning onto the audience. Those affected by the disease also become objects to be pitied instead of individuals capable of making decisions and acting to help themselves. The use of celebrity and humor can both be positive advertising tactics, but in the situation of non-profit organizations like (RED) these tactics turn the issue in the ad into a commodity and constitutes the audience as a consumer.

This exclusion also happens because a person with HIV/AIDS is not as consumable as a celebrity, and because the organization doesn't want the audience to consume the issue of HIV/AIDS, they want the audience to consume products. Society knows how a celebrity in an advertisement should be handled, but HIV/AIDS is often considered taboo and is not something that the audience would be used to handling on a day-to-day basis. In addition, constituting the audience as consumers of products is more important because that is how the organization raises

money. By inundating the ad with something that the audience is used to consuming, celebrities, the mention of HIV/AIDS at the end of the ad becomes secondary, and the celebrities act as the offset to the issue. The (RED) ad is no different than any other ad with a spokesperson; it is providing the audience with a familiar trigger to illustrate that this humanitarian cause can be consumed just like anything else.

The problem of agency here lies in that the audience is not given a choice as to whether or not they want to be consumers, and because of this they are not involved in the constitutive process. The organization has decided that the audience is most beneficial as a consumer, and formed the audience and their agency in regards to how they are to view the issue. This is problematic in the case of non-profit organizations because the cause then becomes centered on those endorsing instead of those being helped. Only showing celebrities and omitting any person infected or affected by HIV/AIDS in the ad turns the issue into a commodity, constituting the relationship between the audience and the issue of HIV/AIDS.

ARV medication is placed into the realm of commodity as well through its juxtaposition with the everyday items in the ad. Because the medication is taken out of the context of HIV/AIDS, it becomes another commodity that needs to be paid for. This also works to simplify the constitution of the audience. If all of the frivolous items can be consumed for 40 cents, then why should ARVs be any different? The entire ad revolves around consumption instead of the actual issue at hand, HIV/AIDS. While the ChildFund ad constitutes the audience as controlling the primitive through their consumption, the (RED) ad constitutes the audience as an everyday consumer.

Implications

Non-profit organizations are rarely examined critically because of the organization's

altruistic purpose. The reality that the ads create then frequently goes unchecked. Audience members are constituted as a consumer by the ad and their reality is formed to fit with what the ad views as “normal” or “natural.” Sturgeon asserts, “Arguing that something is natural tends to prevent an examination of whether the situation is just or right or desirable” (p. 20). Non-profit ads are given the license to form humanitarian issues for the audience, and through this formation the issue the audience is also formed. It is through the formation of the audience as a consumer that the audience’s agency is formed in a self destructive way. Constituting the audience as consumers places them in a role that they are comfortable playing. The audience has then been constituted in a way in which it is unable to interpret or form meanings on its own, it cannot participate in the rhetorical process and is left to simply be a consumer (Cooper, p. 438). If advertisers solely complete and present the interpretation and meaning of the issues in the ad to the audience, the audience’s role in creating meaning is narrowed even further. No one is then left to consider if “the situation is just or right or desirable” (Sturgeon, p.20).

There are also larger implications to be considered in regards to the constitution of the audience as consumers. Consumption is a systematic process with no clear finishing point. Generally a company would prefer that there wasn’t a finishing point and that a consumer would continue to purchase and use their product. This mindset becomes problematic when applied to humanitarian causes because the focus then becomes consumption instead of finding a solution. If there is an attainable solution then there is no reason for the consumption process to continue. It would be more beneficial to constitute the audience in a way in which they are an active participant in the solving of an issue, rather than simply a provider of money in an ongoing process. A solution would come better into focus as the purpose of the organization in this way. This would also provide a non-profit organization with an opportunity to explain why their

organization provides the best possible solution, and therefore why the audience should choose to participate in the furthering of that particular solution.

Constituting the audience as a consumer also isolates the audience members.

Consumption is an individualistic process—an individual provides money and in return they are given an item, completing the transaction—this individual process takes away from any communal element of problem solving that would be necessary for humanitarian issues.

Humanitarian issues are often systemic, resulting from political or governmental issues, war, or poor infrastructure. These are all aspects of a humanitarian cause that need to be taken into consideration in order to successfully aid those affected. No single individual is going to have the ability to take these issues into consideration and come up with the best solution possible, this requires a group of people brainstorming and asking questions to try and find the best solution. If non-profit ads were to constitute the audience as active participants in the process of humanitarian aid, the audience would potentially take more ownership of their role in the group and the influence they could have on the problem. This would create a mindset that humanitarian causes should be further analyzed before an organization starts asking for money.

The lack of scholarship on non-profit advertisements as constitutive forms of rhetoric needs to be remedied in order to return this agency to the audience. While research has been done on the effectiveness of these ads, scholarship could be increased in multiple areas regarding the effect that non-profit advertisements have on the formation of reality and the agency of audience. Further research could be conducted in the areas of consumerism and the donating culture. This would unearth other issues that could come from the donating culture so closely mirroring the consumer culture. It would also be beneficial to further analyze the reality that non-profit advertisements create regarding race and other cultures. These ads could have negative

effects resulting in a culture of even more extreme ethnocentrism. Exploring these areas, as well as areas in which these advertisements could improve in constituting a more realistic picture of the world in the audience, could result in advertising techniques that allow a non-profit to gain support for a cause without turning those viewing it into mindless consumers.

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