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Text, context, affect and effect: Fairy tales in the UNICEF advertising campaign against paedophilia

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Abstract:
By conveying traditions and moral values fairy tales constitute an important part of our lives and cultural identities. Fairy tale motifs and allusions have been repeatedly employed for commercial and non-commercial purposes by advertisers around the world. This paper looks at the UNICEF anti-sexting advertising campaign that features two classic fairy tales, Hansel and Gretel *and* Little Red Riding Hood. *Sexting is a growing problem among young people these days. According to the recent EU Kids Online 2020 survey carried out in 19 European countries, 22 percent of children aged 12-16, on average, have had some experience with receiving sexual messages or pictures. Through an analysis of the visual and verbal content of selected advertisements, the*

present study investigates how the advertisers creatively make use of the famous fairy tales to raise public awareness of the issue.

Introduction

Advertising is one of the most pervasive and all-encompassing forms of communication in the modern world. We encounter various advertisements almost on a daily basis. Newspapers, magazines, television, radio and the Internet all convey advertising messages. In the modern digital era, people are overwhelmed by the amount of often irrelevant information, so the essential function of advertisements is to capture the attention of the target audiences. Defined very broadly, advertising is perceived as a marketing or persuasion process, but most importantly as an act of communication. According to Arens et al (2008), "advertising is the structured and composed nonpersonal communication of information, usually paid for and usually persuasive in nature, about products (goods, services and ideas) by identified sponsors throughout various media" (Arens et al, 2008, p. 7). Depending on the purpose, we recognize two types of advertising: commercial and non-commercial. Commercial advertising is mostly concerned with selling and making a profit. By contrast, non-commercial advertising, as Arens et al (2008) explain, "is used around the world by governments and non-profit organizations to seek donations, volunteer support, or changes in consumer behaviour" (Arens, 2008, p. 24). Such kinds of advertising can be sponsored by a political organization or a charity institution. The main objective is to inform, i.e. to increase the target audience's awareness of some important social issues, such as blood donation, health protection, consumer rights, the freedom of being different, and ultimately influence the addressees' behaviour. Both types of advertising employ specific strategies to achieve their goals. In this paper, we are going to deal with non-commercial advertising. The main focus of our analysis is the verbal text and accompanying images used in two UNICEF advertisements against sexting and paedophilic behaviour in the online environment. In order to reach the intended purpose, the advertising campaign was built on two widely known European fairy tales: *Hansel and Gretel* and *Little Red Riding Hood*. An in-depth analysis of the advertisements will reveal how the advertisers by means of fairy tale elements, words, images and colours draw public attention to the problem of online sexual child abuse.

Fairy tales and advertising

Numerous studies show that different fairy tale motifs have been an integral part of advertising production for many years now (for example, Odber De Baubeta, 1997; Berger, 1997; Järv, 2013; Wittwer, 2016; Schwabe, 2016), just to cite a few. So, what is the reason for it? The answer to this question is hidden in the deep labyrinths of our minds. Von Franz maintains that fairy tales are "the purest and simplest expression of collective unconscious psychic processes" (Von Franz, 1996, p. 1). She supposes that it is quite easy to get to the basic psyche of a person through the overlay of cultural content included in myths and legends. Fairy tales reflect the main patterns of the psyche more vividly and comprise much less conscious material. Dégh believes that the common knowledge of fairy tales is so subtle and so deep-rooted in our conscience that even an indirect reference or a clue is enough to interpret the communicative message of a tale (Dégh, 1979, p. 102). It is obvious that advertisements based on fairy tales create a special connection with readers or viewers because their constituent elements are instantly recognizable. Fairy tales can be easily decoded because they allude to common everyday experience. Moreover, Freud supported the idea that "folklore in general takes advantage of symbols with universal validity…[] The symbols of folkloric art are highly accessible to the public imagination, in large part because they are shaped, if not created, by a collective body" (Tatar, 2019, pp. 80-81).

Many neurologists (Gerrig, 1993; Mar – Oatley – Peterson, 2009; Zack, 2015) believe that storytelling plays a crucial role in human development. Stories enthral emotions and have a lasting effect on our cognition. Burke and Troscianko (2013) suggest that language and storytelling are inherent to human cognition and culture, and literary studies is the oldest discipline devoted to their study. They state that "it has at its disposal millennia of rich textual instantiations of human cognition, and nearly as long a history of scholarly inquiry into such texts*"* (Burke – Troscianko, 2013, p. 145). While reading a fairy tale, a person escapes to a "second life", a concept mentioned by Bakhtin (1984), in the carnivalistic sense, which means that the hero tries to escape social interaction (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 6). In fairy tales, the story reflects the beliefs, traditions and norms of humanity. Real life is mirrored in the world of fairies, kingdoms and wicked villains. People perceive the struggles of protagonists as very similar to their own struggles in everyday life. Through shaping a universal opinion on the difference between "good" and "evil", fairy tales may have a strong psychological influence on recipients. Additionally, fairy tales reveal information about their creators and about those who transmit the stories to future generations.

Many years ago, fairy tales were stories shared by people of various ages and from different social classes. The moral of a fairy tale was frequently presented in two variants; one for children and the other for adults. Bedtime stories taught children a lesson about values and appropriate norms of conduct. For adults bedtime stories served as a reminder of the challenges and struggles they faced in everyday life. Fairy tales created a special magical world between the listener and the teller. It is assumed that stories were mostly spread among servants and peasants. Later many of these traditional stories were gathered by the Brothers Grimm and published in 1812. The Grimms themselves changed some of the fairy tales. They wanted their stories to appeal to a broader audience, to people of various ages, including children. Kronborg (2009) observes that the Grimms took out sexual elements, violent scenes, added Christian references and emphasized existing social models. These changes were made not only to make the stories more suitable for children, but also to fit the values of Protestant society. In succeeding editions of their collections, the Grimms included illustrations to captivate children and engage them in reading. Tatar notes that "a single tale could offer a sobering lesson for children even as it served as a source of light-hearted entertainment for adults" (Tatar, 2019, p. 22). Fairy tales served as an important educational tool for children and this function of fairy tales has been preserved through generations.

Nowadays, fairy tales play an indispensable role in marketing. For marketing developers, it is vital to find effective ways to manipulate and influence consumers' thinking. They try to create catchy, quickly understandable advertisements which can evoke feelings and stay in our minds for a long time. In Jung's theory, feelings and emotional factors are always connected with an archetypical image. Jung believes that an archetypical image is not only a thought pattern interrelated with other thought patterns existing in human consciousness but it is also the emotional experience of an individual. The more emotional the experience is, the more it sticks in the memory (Von Franz, 1997, p. 16). This emotional experience helps life to gain its meaning. Odber de Baubeta in her article *Fairy Tale Motifs in Advertising* points out that "the most important characteristic of fairy tale advertisements is the "feel-good" factor" (Odber de Baubeta, 1997, p. 37). Fairy tales typically evoke very pleasant feelings, such as happiness, joy and well-being. They usually have happy endings. That feeling of happiness induced by fairy tales makes us feel comfortable and safe because we naturally strive for pleasure and joy. The psychological comfort provided by fairy tales is the decisive factor as to why for decades various fairy tale motifs have been favoured so much by advertisers.

The real world is intertwined with the magical in many contemporary advertisements. It is more exciting to live in the world where Hansel and Gretel use 3G networks to find their way back home (a commercial advertisement for AT&T), Little Red Riding Hood runs away from the wolf in Adidas shoes and steals Chanel No 5 perfume from the bank, and Cinderella looks for a guy who fits into Levis Jeans. In a commercial advertisement for Zovirax, Sleeping Beauty advertises a cream to treat herpes. In other advertisements, Rapunzel advises using GHD hair straighteners and the Frog Prince uses Dentyne to kiss the princess. All these images evoke various emotions which vary depending on the specific features of the character. Zipes believes that the magical world of fairy tales "appears to have become 'in', consuming the reality of our everyday life and invading the inner sanctum of our subjective world" (Zipes, 2002a, p. 2).

One of the main effects that fairy tales create is the effect of wonder. This effect plays a crucial role in stimulating addressees' interest and curiosity. In the words of Warner: "wonder has no opposite; it springs already doubled in itself, compounded of dread and desire at once, attraction and recoil, producing a thrill, the shudder of pleasure and of fear" (Warner, 2004, p.3). Wonder pulls consumers into the stories. They desire to participate in the story at least as observers in order to experience some of the magic spell. Through stories we can cross the barriers of time. We can emerge in the past, then travel to the future and return to the present.

The UNICEF advertisements against paedophilia in context

Sexting and sexual exploitation of children via the Internet are relatively new social phenomena. The findings of the most recent EU Kids Online 2020 survey have become cause for great concern. Twenty-two percent of surveyed children between 12-16 in 19 European countries confirmed that they had received some type of sexual message in the past year (EU Kids Online 2020, p. 83). Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram are full of materials with inappropriate content. As long as children have access to the Internet, they can be easily manipulated and are at risk of being sexually abused by people with paedophilic inclinations. In 2016 ECPAT International in partnership with UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) published a special guide to action entitled "Protecting Children from Online Sexual Exploitation". The document warns that child sexual exploitation has increased lately because of the amount of production and distribution of child sexual abuse materials due to the development of technological

devices and the accessibility to the Internet. This also reflects the escalation of "sexting" (the self-production and sharing of sexual messages or images) which is very dangerous for children (Mitchell – Finkelhor – Jones – Wolak 2012). In 2017 UNICEF, a non-profit organization, launched a campaign against paedophilia that was represented by two advertisements created by David The Agency: Advertisement 1 Hansel and Gretel and Advertisement 2 Little Red Riding Hood. Both advertisements that are the object of our analysis draw on motifs from the traditional fairy tales *Hansel and Gretel* and *Little Red Riding Hood*, respectively (Brothers Grimm 2013).

Analysis of the UNICEF advertisements

At first glance, the viewer easily recognizes explicit visual allusions to two well-known fairy tales because fairy tale concepts are hidden deep in our minds (see Advertisement 1 and Advertisement 2). As Zipes in his book writes: "The classical fairy tale makes it appear that we are all part of a universal community with shared values and norms, that we all striving for the same happiness, that there are certain dreams and wishes which are irrefutable, that a particular type of behaviour will produce guaranteed results…" (Zipes, 2002b, p. 5). The advertisements contain pictorial elements which help viewers quickly evoke associations with the fairy tale characters. Advertisement 1 features a girl and a boy dressed up in traditional German costumes. The girl is wearing a white blouse and the boy a white shirt, brown braces and a hat. They represent the main characters of the fairy tale *Hansel and Gretel*. In Advertisement 2, we recognize Little Red Riding Hood portrayed as a girl lying on a bed, dressed in red pyjamas with a hood on her head. In the background, we can see other images reminiscent of the above-mentioned fairy tales. There is a picture of the haunted house (see Advertisement 1) and the portraits of the grandmother and the hunter on the walls (see Advertisement 2).

Fairy tales have always been built on binary oppositions because then it is easy to understand and recognize the created story. The characters usually represent stereotypical images of ordinary people. Kronborg claims that "there are one-dimensional flat characters described shortly as the young boy, the princess, the old wicked witch, the wise woman and so on. Their description is very simple because their purpose is to represent one piece that fits in the whole picture. These flat characters often display a battle between contrasting themes such as good vs evil" (Kronborg, 2009, p. 15). It means that in each story there has to be a hero and a villain. In the

analysed advertisements, the heroes are represented by Hansel and Gretel and Little Red Riding Hood. But what about villains? As we will show later, it is not so easy to identify the true ones. Visual features in both advertisements clearly point to the presence of several pictorial metaphors. The pictorial metaphor, a term introduced by Forceville (1994), is conveyed by the images of the computer disguised as a witch and as a wolf. The fairy tale characters can be metonymically accessed through the depicted parts (the witch's clothes – her hat and cloak and the wolf skin). Following Forceville, these crucial questions have further guided our analysis of the nonverbal and verbal aspects of the ads: which is the literal A-term (the primary subject) and the figurative B-term (the secondary subject?); what can be said about the transfer of properties from B to A? (Forceville, 1994, pp. 2-3). According to Forceville (1994), the primary subject (PS) always refers to the advertised product. The primary subject (PS) is represented by the computer, and the secondary subjects (SS) are the partially depicted witch and wolf. A closer look at the advertisements reveals that the PS is only suggested by the pictorial context. The children's happy faces are lit up as they stare at the computer screen in the dark. The viewer can still recognize the shape of a computer in disguise and its technical parts: the monitor, the mouse and the keyboard. In Forceville's terminology, Advertisement 1 and Advertisement 2 contain metaphors with two pictorially present terms (MP2). The metaphors established by the images can be verbalized as: THE COMPUTER IS A WITCH, THE COMPUTER IS A WOLF. The mapping, i.e. the transfer of properties, always goes from the SS to the PS. In both advertisements, we know the order of the terms of the metaphors, their (PS) and (SS), from the verbal context. The short message says explicitly what the ads are for: "1 OUT OF 2 CASES OF PEDOPHILIA STARTS WITH A DECEIVED CHILD ON THE INTERNET". The anchoring text mentions the key word – the Internet. Presumably, the general public understands that computers are used to connect to the Internet.

The identified pictorial metaphors consist of hybrid pictorially conflating elements of the target domain (the computer) and the source domains (the witch and the wolf). But the computer itself does not connote danger; only the verbal context creates this connotation. This is the case of the verbo-pictorial metaphor. We are not dealing here only with a purely pictorial metaphor, but rather with a multi-media one. Verbo-pictorial metaphors represent one term visually and the other verbally (Forceville, 2000, p. 33). Consequently, the word and image interplay conveys the idea that the witch and the wolf represent sexual predators.

To attract the attention of viewers and achieve a warning effect, the creators of the advertisements draw a few parallels between the fairy tales and reality. The images of the witch and the wolf symbolize hidden danger for children in the modern world. The fairy tale heroes, naïve innocent children, were deceived by the evil characters. They were completely unaware of the danger. When they realized the threat, it was too late. Hansel and Gretel were captured by the cannibalistic witch and Little Red Riding Hood was swallowed up by the wolf disguised as her grandmother. Similar to the original stories in which the children walked alone through the forest (Hansel and Gretel being abandoned by their father and Little Red Riding Hood sent to bring food to her grandmother), the advertisements show children left on their own in dark rooms. Judging from their smiling faces, the children are having a good time on the Internet. We can assume that paedophiles, as the fairy tale villains, initially appear to be nice and friendly in order to lure children.

Interestingly, in the earlier version of *Little Red Riding Hood*, published by Charles Perrault in 1697, long before the Brothers Grimm, this moral lesson appears in the epilogue to the tale:

Young children, as this tale will show,
And mainly pretty girls with charm,
Do wrong and often come to harm
In letting those they do not know
Stay talking to them when they meet.
And if they don't do as they ought,
It's no surprise that some are caught
By wolves who take them off to eat.
I call them wolves, but you will find
That some are not the savage kind,
Not howling, ravening or raging;
Their manners seem, instead, engaging,

They're softly-spoken and discreet.

Young ladies whom they talk to on the street

They follow to their homes and through the hall,

And upstairs to their rooms; when they're there

They're not as friendly as they might appear:

These are the most dangerous wolves of all.

(Perrault, 2009, p. 103)

In Perrault's version, Little Red Riding Hood comes to join the wolf in bed while assuming him to be her grandmother (Perrault, 2009, p. 101). Via the metaphorical conceptualization (MEN ARE WOLVES) Perrault describes manipulative, seemingly pleasant men that prey on girls. The wolves are charming, but dangerous men whom inexperienced girls are strongly advised to avoid.[1] In real life, there is no fair play between immature children and cunning sexual predators. The witch and the wolf worked craftily to catch their victims just as today's paedophiles on the Internet do.

The visual sense plays a vital role in the perception of advertisements. The selection of specific colours attracts the audience's attention, communicates a symbolic meaning and enhances the overall impact of the advertising message. One of the most essential characteristics of colour is its capacity to produce various emotions, and if applied effectively, the colour choice can evoke a certain kind of reaction to the product that is being advertised (Seonsu – Barnes 1989). Advertisers can elicit different emotional responses from the addressees through colours and their associated meanings (Schindler 1986). The superior importance of non-linguistic content over the linguistic part is evident in the analysed advertisements. There are three dominant colours: black, white and red. These colours have great symbolic power.

In European cultures, black typically carries negative connotations, such as evil, mourning or sadness. It was the colour of death in Greek and Egyptian mythology. Black is considered to be visually heavy because it absorbs every colour wavelength in the light spectrum (Kittmer 2018). In stories of good versus evil, black and darkness is always symbolic of a villain. The witch and the wolf in the advertisements are depicted in black and dark grey. Darkness also prevails in the

scenery. In fairy tales, dark colours relate to mysterious creatures and settings. Black is also associated with fear and the unknown. It is the colour of the night, when all mystical creatures, scary ghosts and spirits are awake.

By contrast, white is considered to be a colour of safety and purity, innocence and virginity. While black often symbolizes something negative, white expresses goodness and peace. The witch's black clothes and the white colour of the children's clothes in the advertisement referring to *Hansel and Gretel* emphasize the opposition between good and evil, i.e. the pure souls of the children and the vile intentions of paedophiles.

Another colour employed in the advertising campaign is red. Red is frequently used to bring pictorial or textual features to the foreground (Blake, 2009, p. 23). Red is a colour with multiple meanings. It can represent joy, power, love, passion, sexuality and sensitivity. Umberto Eco compares the colour red to blood (1985;1986). Red, having been traditionally associated with blood, can symbolize energy, sex, love and life. Meneses in her article "Red, green and yellow: Everything was once upon a time" comments on the choice of red in the fairy tale *Little Red Riding Hood* as follows:

> Why red? The symbolism of colors is sometimes unequivocal: universally, red is a dramatic color: associated first and foremost with blood, with fire (and from there to passion, to revolution). And as in almost every symbolism, with the exception of mathematical symbols, the base is analogy. In fact, red refers to sexuality – especially female sexuality: the menstrual blood, the sign of a woman's organic maturity; and to the blood of defloration, marking the beginning of sexual life. (Meneses, 2010, p. 269)

In contrast to the joyful, childish faces of the boy and the girl representing Hansel and Gretel, the advertisers portray Little Red Riding Hood as an adolescent girl with an enigmatic, flirtatious smile on her face glued to the computer screen. In the original story, the girl wore a red a cap on her head, while in the advertisement the girl's whole body is covered in hooded red pyjamas and her feet in red socks. The extensive use of red may be symbolic of her biological maturation and developing sexuality.

Visual aspects of advertisements are usually accompanied by words. According to Freitas, verbal language is often responsible for establishing "the factual part of the message" (2014, p. 431). In the case of our advertisements, verbal components correlate with nonverbal to make the advertising campaign more compelling. The identical verbal text placed in the upper-right corner reads:

YOU'RE NOT THE ONLY ONE TELLING STORIES TO TAKE THEM TO BED.

1 OUT OF 2 CASES OF PEDOPHILIA STARTS WITH A DECEIVED CHILD ON THE INTERNET.

PROTECT YOUR CHILDREN FROM ABUSE.

unicef

The personal pronoun *them* refers to children. From a pragmatic point of view, a possibly neutral phrase *to take them to bed* gains a different meaning in this particular context. It could be interpreted as a euphemism for having sexual intercourse. The typography also contributes to processing the advertising message. The sentences are capitalized to draw readers' attention. In addition, the letters in the first line appear in bold and bigger. The different font highlights the key point of the advertising campaign, which is the existence of child abuse.

The advertisers talk to the general public using the pronouns "you" and "your". These broad address forms indicate that every parent can feel addressed by the advertisements. Paedophilia is not confined by borders and the choice of pronouns emphasizes the global character of the problem. The pronoun "your" occurs in the imperative sentence: "PROTECT YOUR CHILDREN FROM ABUSE." The combination of the possessive pronoun and the command intensifies the message intended for all parents who care for their children and requests them to act (in a certain way). The advertisements do not say what specific action the parents should take, but the action is clearly related to Internet access. This generation of children is among the most active in terms of internet use and spends considerable amounts of time in front of a computer. The short message reminds parents that the Internet is a source of potential danger. Young children especially are very vulnerable because while chatting to strangers they can be easily abused. In order to make their argument more convincing, the advertisers add some statistics: "1 OUT OF 2 CASES OF PEDOPHILIA STARTS WITH A DECEIVED CHILD ON THE INTERNET." Here advertisers appeal to the logic of the readers by spelling out the frequency of paedophilic activities facilitated

by the Internet. The whole verbal message is designed to warn parents and motivate them to eliminate the existing threat to their children.

Conclusion

To conclude, the presented analysis of the UNICEF advertisements has shed more light on the innovative ways of incorporating fairy tale motifs in modern advertising. An effective combination of pictorial metaphors and verbal text in both the advertisements sends an important message about paedophilia to the target audience. Paedophilia is a hidden threat and the Internet poses a danger to children, as sex offenders often take advantage of online tools to initiate contact with juvenile victims. The advertisers rely on universal folkloric symbols to warn parents about a major social problem. Through striking pictorial elements, paedophiles are conceptualized as famous fairy tale villains. The images of the witch and the wolf suggest the transfer of particular qualities, behaviours and feelings from the secondary subject (fairy tales) to the primary one (paedophiles on the Internet) and guide the viewers' interpretation of the implicit meanings conveyed by the advertisements. Fear is one of the most intense persuasion techniques. Emotions triggered mainly by the pictures depicting widely known fairy tale characters help to activate an important protection mechanism leading parents to take action to keep their children safe from sexual abusers on the Internet.

Endnotes:

[1] In English the word *wolf* also has a metaphorical meaning. Figuratively, it refers to a seducer, womanizer.

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