

Paul White (Student ID 0720790)

Getting attention, keeping attention and measuring attention in the age of information overload: billboard and poster advertising in the 21st century.

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School of Communication Studies, Advertising Creativity
Faculty of Design & Creative Technologies

Primary Supervisor: Dr. Sigrid Norris

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ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed:

Paul White

Date: 20 September 2012

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how advertising posters and billboards continue to communicate successfully in the 21st century despite, and in conjunction with, the emergence of a plethora of new communications technologies that make increasing demands on people's time and attention. The thesis first establishes how billboards and posters gained attention and mediated messages prior to this present age of information overload by analysing the famous Lord Kitchener British army recruitment poster, created in 1914. The thesis then compares marketing communications mediated by conventional posters and billboards with those employing a convergence of old and new technologies; namely, three NZ Army interactive recruitment posters created in 2007, a billboard for Deadline Couriers also created in 2007 and a road safety billboard for Rodney District Council created in 2008. Where most studies approach the analysis of advertising and marketing communications texts from either a semiotic standpoint or social discourse perspective, this thesis combines both semiotics (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996) and mediated and multimodal discourse analysis (Scollon, 1998, Norris 2004, Jones, 2005, Jewitt, 2010). This approach reveals a demonstrable link between the semiotic structure of posters and billboards and the quality of attention a person must employ in order to successfully receive the messages they mediate.

The thesis challenges conventional marketing theory (Arens, 2004, Drewniarny and Jewler, 2011) with regard to poster and billboard design and reception. It also confronts the growing belief that, in the wake of an unprecedented growth in new communications technologies, society may be in danger of developing some kind of attention deficit disorder (Sacharin, 2001).

The thesis finds that new communications technologies can and do transform posters and billboards as mediational means in significant ways. The thesis also finds that new communications technologies affect the communicative roles played by people interacting with messages mediated by posters and billboards. The thesis concludes that mediating poster and billboard marketing messages over as short a time space as possible is not

prescriptive to the successful reception of that message even in an age of information overload. Further, the thesis advances multimodal discourse methodology by introducing a new methodological concept - the *communicative space*. Finally, implications for both pedagogy and commercial practice are identified and suggestions for future research are outlined.

1 - INTRODUCTION

1.1. Purpose and importance of this thesis

The purpose of this thesis is to discover how advertising posters and billboards can successfully command more than three or four seconds of a person's attention in an age of information overload¹. The research presented is twofold; it analyses examples of how advertisers go about getting attention using posters and billboards as a means to successfully mediate their messages and it examines the quality of attention required of an individual to successfully receive those messages.

Finding out whether and how posters and billboards can successfully command attention in an age of information overload is important for two reasons. First, posters and billboards have traditionally been expected by those who design them to demand very little attention from their intended audience. Conventional marketing theory, for example, maintains that a billboard must communicate its message in mere seconds (Jewler and Drewniarny, 1998). This, in turn, has led to the establishment of the principle that a billboard or a poster should contain no more than seven words (Arens, 2004) and/or an arresting picture. This study, therefore, explores whether this theory and this principle are still relevant in an age of information overload. Second, billboards and posters, like all unsolicited advertising and marketing messages, are competing with more messages than ever before to gain people's attention. Even before the invention of the iPhone, the iPad, TiVo, MySKY, Facebook or Twitter, Sacharin (2001) noted, "The problem of getting attention is no longer a simple matter. We're overwhelmed with the explosive growth in new media forms ... the rise of complex technologies... the demand that we always be in touch, always on, always connected" (p. ix). Sacharin (2001) has also noted that society is in danger of developing a form of attention deficit disorder because of this bombardment of both solicited and unsolicited messages. The examples explored in this study shed some light on whether such fears are warranted or not.

To achieve its purpose this thesis first offers a framework within which to assess the quality of attention a consumer needs to employ in order to receive marketing messages mediated via a poster or billboard. The term ‘attention’ in this study refers specifically to those moments in time when an individual is engaged in ‘focused interaction’ of some kind (Norris, 2004). Crucially, analysing the composition and reception of a message on a billboard in reality must take into account all of a person’s actions which can affect the successful reception of the message. These might include driving by, walking past or even holding a conversation with someone else. Mediated discourse analysis (Scollon 1998; Norris and Jones, 2005) allows us to describe both the production and consumption of media texts as social interactions; it includes the analysis of any text as well as considering questions about the actions people take while involved with texts. Most importantly, mediated discourse analysis provides a framework to explore the quality of attention paid by people engaged in any social interaction with a poster or a billboard message. The point being that no-one *receives* any message at all if they are not paying *attention* to it (White, 2012, p. 138).

In applying multimodal and mediated discourse analysis in this study a description of the various spaces in which communication takes place is necessary and informative. The methodology to date, however, does not go far enough to allow a full consideration of what is actually happening when people interact with some of the posters and billboards examined. The thesis therefore introduces the notion of the *communicative space* as a new concept in multimodal and mediated discourse analysis. The *communicative space* is a collective term that I define as comprising all spaces that constitute an essential part of the site of engagement within which the message is mediated. My definition of a *communicative space* is a further development of Scollon’s (2005) assessment of spatial entrainments. Scollon describes spatial entrainments as occurring when actions are performed within a confined space. The purpose of the concept of spatial entrainment is to allow an examination of the full range of spaces within which an action is integrated. Scollon describes three spatial entrainments: bounded spaces, such as rooms and garden fences; permeable spaces, such as those afforded by opening doors and windows; and unbounded spaces, such as the street on which a newspaper seller stands. When we

consider that people interact with posters and billboards on a road or street, from within a car or on foot and, as my data shows, via the internet or television, then the entrainments Scollon identifies become equally applicable to the social action of receiving messages mediated by posters and billboards. Further, I go on to show that where a space like a road may be physically unbounded, it can be bounded by its ability to mediate an essential part of a particular message and thus a particular stretch of road becomes part of a recognisable *communicative space*. In essence, I argue that the *communicative space* determines the times, places and actions essential to successful mediation of any particular message.

The importance of this thesis, then, is that it is concerned with understanding what actions *must* take place in order for a message to be received successfully as well as with analysing the composition of individual examples of advertising involving posters and billboards.

1.2. Design of the study

For the purposes of this study I examined only posters and billboards aimed at English language speakers. The majority were created in New Zealand, the UK and the USA, with one example from Oman in the Middle East.

I first examined 23 examples based on the design of the famous Lord Kitchener army recruitment poster ‘Your country needs you.’ These examples were created between 1914 and 2008 in the UK, USA and Oman and are representative of conventional two-dimensional poster design. The range of subject matter dealt with by these examples included army recruitment, cheese, mustard, naval recruitment, popular music, government propaganda, banks, dental hygiene, breast feeding, anti-smoking, anti-government propaganda and presidential campaign canvassing (see Appendix 3).

I then looked at a further seven billboard campaigns created between 2007 and 2009. Three of these campaigns integrated conventional poster design with a range of new communication technologies and media (e.g. Bluetooth, internet, SMS texting). Two used

conventional two-dimensional poster design in an unusual way – a sequential series of billboards in close proximity to each other communicating a single message. Four were examples of individual billboards that made unique use of one single site for a specific duration of time. The range of messages mediated via these campaigns concerned army recruitment, road safety, a courier company, a TV programme and a well-known confectionery brand (see Appendix 4).

This thesis focuses on five of the conventional two-dimensional posters. It presents an in-depth analysis of the famous 1914 Lord Kitchener First World War British Army recruitment poster and four concepts created between 1916 and 2008 which each exhibit a modal structure based upon the same design concept and incorporating staring eyes, a pointing finger and text that echoes the words ‘Your country needs you.’ These examples come from the USA, UK and Oman. From those billboards created between 2007 and 2009 in New Zealand, this thesis presents as data for analysis three billboard campaigns. These were created for the NZ Army, Deadline Couriers in Auckland, New Zealand and for road safety in what was then the Rodney District², north of Auckland.

The Lord Kitchener army recruitment poster was selected as the starting point for the thesis for three major reasons. First, the 1914 Kitchener poster became the inspiration for many subsequent communications and as such it has also become seminal as an archetype in visual communication. Second, a number of recent studies (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996; Van Leeuwen, 2004, 2005) have analysed the Kitchener poster from semiotic and multimodal perspectives and they indicate how the poster successfully mediates its message and engages the viewer. This thesis in part builds on and extends the findings of those studies. Third, the Kitchener poster was created long before any notion of the age of information overload existed so it is an example of how a successful conventional two-dimensional poster as a stand-alone medium gains audience attention.

The other two-dimensional posters selected as data for this thesis were chosen for a variety of reasons. The 1916 Uncle Sam recruitment poster is presented because it imitates parts of the Kitchener poster but differs from it in significant ways. A 1930s Winston Churchill

poster, on the other hand is presented here precisely because it deliberately develops the template of the Kitchener poster and refines it. The Barak Obama web banner is presented because it demonstrates that the Kitchener template continues to influence advertising designers working in new communication media as well as its relevance in a ‘patriotic’ context. The Bank of Oman poster was chosen as a piece of data for this study for two reasons: it is an example of the influence of the original Kitchener and Uncle Sam designs beyond strictly western cultures and because it is an example of commercial advertising, rather than political or government communication.

In selecting the data from that created between 2007-2009, I chose to concentrate only on posters and billboards that integrated conventional poster formats with new communication technologies and media, rather than including purely conventional two-dimensional poster or billboard designs used in an unusual way. The NZ Army interactive posters were chosen for two reasons. First, because the subject matter directly relates to that of the original Kitchener poster and second, because it was at the time one of the first to make use of Bluetooth and SMS texting technology. The Deadline Courier billboard was chosen as data to present primarily because it demonstrates an increase in the number of sites of engagement associated with a single message over an extended period of time. The Rodney District road safety billboard was chosen because it is dramatically different from the Deadline billboard in both location and execution. The billboard created for the well-known confectionery brand, on the other hand, was excluded from the analysis because it exhibited too many similar features to the Deadline Courier billboard (e.g. urban location, exploding device, internet live-streaming)³.

The data examined for this study comprises both the specific advertising texts and, in the case of those created between 2007 and 2009, an explanatory video made by the advertising agency that created the individual campaign. This material is freely available from a variety of sources - advertising awards websites, the agencies themselves and often from the video sharing website YouTube. While the accompanying videos occasionally make claims about the success of the advertisements, such claims are not pertinent to this study and do not form any part of the analysis in this thesis. Each video makes available an observational

snap shot of people interacting with a specific billboard and provides a clear description of the sequence of social actions involved in order for an individual to interact with and receive the message that it mediates.

1.3. Design of the thesis

Following this introduction, the thesis continues with a literature review in Chapter 2. This provides an overview of the following material: conventional marketing theory as outlined in current text books, marketing perspectives on audience attention in the age of information overload, the semiotic, modal analysis of visual texts and relevant multimodal and mediated discourse methodology.

Chapter 3 begins the main argument of the thesis and comprises my peer-reviewed journal article, published in *Visual Communication* in November, 2010 (Grabbing attention: the importance of modal density in advertising.) This article establishes how billboards and posters gained attention and mediated their messages prior to the age of information overload. The article then compares a campaign of recently created (2007) interactive posters with the key two-dimensional poster analysed and illustrates how new technologies affect the depth and richness of attention a social actor employs when interacting with the communication. Most importantly, this article also introduces the framework within which we can assess the quality or depth of attention required to successfully receive a message mediated by a poster or billboard. It concludes by suggesting ways in which multimodal discourse analysis can contribute to the study and design of advertising and marketing communications.

Chapter 4 draws together the conclusions of the previous chapter and further develops the notion that billboards and posters can involve interactions that extend beyond the immediate vicinity in which they are sited. This, in turn, leads to consideration of time and space as important elements in any multimodal interaction where a variety of media converge around a single communication. The chapter concludes by highlighting the need

to challenge conventional marketing theory when examining how posters and billboards go about gaining and keeping attention.

Chapter 5 takes up the issues raised in the previous chapter and presents two examples of recent (2007 and 2008) billboard campaigns in which time and space play vital roles in transforming the way in which people interact with messages mediated by billboards in the age of information overload. This chapter comprises my peer-reviewed chapter 'Reception as social action: the case of marketing' published in the book *Multimodality in Practice: Investigating Theory-in-practice-through-methodology* in February 2012. The chapter challenges conventional marketing theory. It questions the idea that society is developing a form of attention deficit disorder. It also introduces the notion of *priming to receive* a message and concludes that the messages a social actor receives from a single billboard communication can vary in both content and number. Most importantly, this chapter presents my idea of the *communicative space* as a new concept in multimodal and mediated discourse analysis. This new concept builds on Scollon's (2005) delineation of spatial entrainments. Although Scollon (2005) suggests that his consideration of spatial entrainments provides an examination of the full range of spaces within which an action is integrated, my research highlights the limitations of his original description and the new concept of the *communicative space* adds a necessary further tool to multimodal and mediated discourse methodology.

This new tool is necessary because the convergence of new communication technologies is transforming communicative actions (Wersch, 1998). For example, the convergence of the billboard medium with online communications means that it can no longer simply be described as 'outdoor advertising' (Arens, 2004). Examining the *communicative space* associated with mediating a particular billboard's message shows that physical distance from a billboard plays a specific role within a certain *communicative space* and that the *communicative space* can affect the quality of attention paid to the message. For example, the distance a social actor can be positioned from the physical location of a billboard can expand to many thousands of kilometres (via viewing the billboard online), yet the *communicative space* afforded by the convergence of billboard and online technologies

contracts to a few centimetres. The notion of the *communicative space*, therefore, identifies a previous gap in the scope of multimodal and mediated discourse analysis and provides a solution that extends the methodology. A full discussion of the concept is presented on pages 90-93 of this thesis.

Finally, Chapter 6 restates the objectives of the study and the methodologies employed before summarising the key findings of this research. It goes on to discuss the significance of the study to the fields of marketing theory and mediated and multimodal discourse analysis. Implications for both pedagogical and commercial practice are also outlined. The chapter concludes with suggestions for subsequent further research.

NOTES

1. The age of information overload I refer to throughout this thesis is ‘the overload of information ... associated with the digital revolution.’ (Lanham, 1993 as cited in Jones, 2005, p 151.)
2. In 2010, nine local authorities (Auckland, Rodney, Waitakere, Franklin, North Shore, Manukau, Papakura, Auckland Regional Council) were combined to form the new Auckland City under the Local Government Act 2002 Amendment Act, November 2010 (http://www.parliament.nz/en-NZ/PB/Legislation/Bills/f/8/3/00DBHOH_BILL9872_1-Local-Government-Act-2002-Amendment-Bill.htm).
3. In the course of my teaching practice I study hundreds of billboards and posters. Thus, it is not possible to list all material that came under consideration as potential data for this thesis. The posters and billboards chosen as data for analysis are representative samples of different kinds of billboards as outlined above.

2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter comprises a review of the literature cited in both my published journal article and my published book chapter, which constitute respectively Chapters 3 and 5 of this thesis. The literature underpinning those published works examines five key areas of study: traditional marketing theory concerning advertising billboards; the importance of attention in advertising; the concept of attention economics; the analysis of visual communications; and multimodal and mediated discourse analysis. I review each of these fields separately.

2.1. Marketing theory: background

Although ‘marketing thought’ can be traced as far back as the Greek philosophers Aristotle, Plato and Homer (Tamilia, 2009), as an academic discipline it emerged as a branch of applied economics, when the first marketing courses were taught in American universities in 1902 (Shaw and Jones, 2005). While the field of marketing theory encompasses packaging, distribution, wholesale, retailing, pricing, merchandising, branding and marketing communications, this thesis is concerned exclusively with marketing communications; and in particular with marketing theory with regard to advertising communications.

There has been, and still is, a long-standing tension between the formalisation of knowledge (theory) about advertising and marketing and the practice of advertising and marketing as it emerges. Thus many of the acknowledged ‘scholars’ in the field were and are practitioners. Three theories in particular emerged from advertising agency practice and still form the basis of most university advertising and marketing textbooks (Hackley, 2010). The AIDA model of communication (Kennedy, 1924), the concept of the Unique Selling Proposition (Reeves, 1961) and the notion of brand personality (Ogilvy, 1963).

The AIDA model of communication has most bearing on this thesis since it proposes that a four-step sequence of communication needs to take place: Attention, Interest, Desire, Action. Despite questions over the academic and pedagogical value of the AIDA model, it remains an influential theory. Indeed “today, typical advertising and marketing textbooks are a highly reduced composite of these [Kennedy, Reeves, Ogilvy] theories” (Hackley, 2009, p. 93). How much longer this will remain the case is debatable though, as the AIDA model especially assumes a concept of passive reception, whereas with the advent of interactive media the idea of an active consumer is becoming important to both practitioners and academics (Stewart and Pavlou, 2002).

Nevertheless, current academic marketing and advertising scholars echo the first principle of Kennedy’s model when they declare that the first goal of advertising is to gain attention (Faber, Brittany and Nan, 2012, p. 27). The two textbooks referred to specifically in this thesis to establish the accepted guidelines of billboard design (see 2.1.1 below) are therefore both highly regarded examples of this current approach to fundamental marketing communications pedagogy.

2.1.1 Marketing theory and billboard design

Among the plethora of textbooks on advertising and marketing, two titles are widely in use in New Zealand universities: *Creative Strategy in Advertising*, by Bonnie L. Drewniarny and A. Jerome Jewler (2011) and *Contemporary Advertising*, by William F. Arens (2004). Both are written by American scholars and published in the USA.

A new edition of *Contemporary Advertising* has been published on average every three years since 1982. Arens gives a comprehensive up to date overview of every aspect of modern advertising, with examples and case studies, under five main headings: ‘Advertising Perspectives’ (exploring the evolution of advertising in free market economies, regulations, codes of ethics and both the local and international scope of advertising in society); ‘Crafting Marketing and Advertising Strategies’ (examining

consumer behaviour, market segmentation and market research); ‘Integrating Advertising with Other Elements’ (describing how direct marketing, PR, sponsorship and corporate communications work together and separately to convey companies’ and brands’ messages to various audiences); ‘Creating Advertisements and Commercials’ (covering everything from formulating an advertising brief to production processes across all media); and finally, ‘Using Advertising Media’ (presenting the theory of how to apply advertising across print, TV, radio, digital and out-of-home media).

‘Using Advertising Media’ is the section that deals with the theory of billboard design and its application as the most prolific form of outdoor advertising. Arens (2004) traces back ‘bill posting’ as far as the Middle Ages when he says it was used throughout Europe. He concludes that outdoor advertising is an ideal medium for mediating “a short, simple, and dogmatic message” especially if it is of local interest (p. 584). He goes on to state that “the recommended maximum for outdoor copy is seven words” (p. 585). He also recommends using large illustrations, bold colours, and simple backgrounds. Arens maintains that billboards, like all forms of outdoor advertising, are most often viewed from a distance that varies between 100 and 500 feet (30 to 150 metres) by people who are passing by.

Arens’ ground rules for billboard advertising have relevance to this study in three particular ways. First, he establishes the norms of physical composition for posters and billboards. Second, he suggests a pattern of behaviour adopted by the majority of those who interact with the messages those posters and billboards mediate. Indeed, Arens’ rules begin to describe some of the actions that comprise a response to any one of those messages (passing by the site of a poster or billboard). Third, Arens’ rules specify that most billboards are viewed from a particular distance and this highlights the importance of the space around any single billboard; it also leads eventually to my definition of the *communicative space* as a new and important theoretical concept in multimodal and mediated discourse analysis. This thesis, also explores whether or not the physical composition of billboards is changing in an age of information overload and it challenges the theory that those interacting with a message mediated by a billboard must be predominantly passers-by.

Creative Strategy in Advertising is now in its tenth edition and offers an overview of the process of creating and producing advertising across all media. The authors break down the process into seven steps: solving the problem; capturing your creative potential; targeting a diverse marketplace; fact-finding; strategy; designing to communicate; convincing the client. They then set out the fundamental principles of working in print, writing for radio, working in television, using direct marketing and creating retail advertising.

The revised 2011 edition includes sections on interactive marketing and designing for the internet. Billboards and posters, though, are dealt with separately and considered under the heading of 'Designing to Communicate'. Drewniarny and Jewler (2011) reiterate similar principles to Arens (2004) when they say, "...you need to communicate your entire selling message in an instant" (2011, p.183). They concur with Arens and specify that when designing billboards and posters you should, "Make the type bold and big," and "Keep the word count to no more than eight words, fewer if possible" (Drewniarny and Jewler, 2011, p.183). They remind us that the type must be read quickly and they establish that a standard outdoor poster and billboard is constructed in a proportion of one to two and a quarter or one to three and a half¹.

The relevance of Drewniarny and Jewler's precise principles of billboard composition to this study are threefold. First, the billboards examined in this thesis conform to the conventional physical proportions of billboards outlined here. Second, the data examined in this thesis challenges the strict notion that people can only spend a few seconds interacting with the messages mediated by a billboard. Third, Drewniarny and Jewler highlight the importance of time spent with a billboard message, which is the genesis of this thesis' conclusion that there needs to be a redefinition of the time associated with mediating and receiving such marketing messages.

2.2 Importance of attention in advertising

Audience attention to advertising is most often commercially examined by marketers when they engage in monitoring unprompted and prompted recall of individual advertisements and campaigns. This usually involves quantitative research that seeks to gauge the memorability of a particular advertisement or campaign (Slater, 1998). Such quantitative research seeks to measure whether attention has been paid to an advertisement after it has appeared. In contrast, this thesis is concerned with the attention a person must pay to an advertisement in order to successfully receive its message. Thus, the literature informing this thesis centres on two things: one, an aspect of consumer behaviour theory and two, an approach which marketers and advertisers might adopt in order to gain attention for their advertising in an age of information overload.

Olshavsky (1994) challenges what he describes as the accepted marketer's and advertising practitioner's view that getting attention is "one of the most important communication objectives" of any advertisement (p. 97). He argues that attention cannot be separated out from the cognitive operation of processing information. Because attention occurs with and results from information processing in the brain, Olshavsky establishes that attention conforms to Webster's New World Dictionary (1959) definition of an epiphenomenon: "it is a phenomenon which cannot exist on its own and therefore cannot be an objective in its own right" (as cited in Olshavsky, 1994, p. 98). More importantly, Olshavsky (1994) shows that attention is an integral part of the way that people process information, rather than a separate process that must take place before anything else can occur. Olshavsky's contention that information processing simply cannot happen without attention is based on information processing theory as outlined by psychologists, Ericsson and Simon (1980) and earlier by Newell and Simon (1972). He then applies this information processing theory to theories of consumer behaviour and suggests some implications for advertising.

While Olshavsky's (1994) recommendations relate specifically to the potential of an advertisement to influence brand choice, the importance of his findings in this thesis are threefold. First, the notion that no-one *receives* any message at all if they are not paying

attention is corroborated by his contention that attention is a vital element of information processing. Second, that attention cannot be separated from information processing points towards Van Leeuwen's (2005) assertion that there is no demonstrable sequence of individual semiotic modes involved when we *read* a text like a poster: the semiotic sequence can be identified but all modes 'fuse' to achieve a single, multimodal communicative action. Third, Olshavsky's description of attention as being integral in the process of information processing from a cognitive psychology perspective mirrors Norris' later (2004) concept of modal density as being an essential element of any social interaction from a multimodal discourse perspective. Only through the notion of modal density (Norris, 2004) can we make any assessment of the quality of attention a person pays when interacting with a message mediated by a poster or billboard.

Sacharin (2001, p. ix) argues that advertisers and marketers need "a new set of methods for gaining attention" in an age of information overload. He proposes an approach that he calls attention mechanics. In order to outline attention mechanics, Sacharin uses the analogy of someone entering a crowded room and describes his methods for gaining attention under headings like enter, interrupt politely, yell occasionally, be brief, whisper, be different, touch, tell a story, mingle, and network. These methods range from suggesting the tone and manner that advertisers might adopt in their communications to thinking about new ways to link advertisements together (network) across different types of media. He concludes that the media planner's primary focus on ratings (claimed audience figures) will change to a consideration of how much attention is paid to individual marketing communications (Sacharin, 2001).

While his outline of attention mechanics is largely focused on changing marketing's approach to media selection, buying and use, his consideration of two things in particular are of specific importance to this thesis. First, Sacharin (2001) spends part one of his book describing what he calls "the information blizzard" (p. 14) and its effect on marketing and advertising. He argues that, from a marketing perspective, there is a pre-internet world and a post-internet world. In the pre-internet world he states that 'information density' was far less. For example, he states that the average news sound bite in the 1960s lasted 42

seconds, whereas in 2001 it had been reduced to eight seconds (2001, p. 15). Significantly, Sacharin comments that society may be developing a form of attention deficit disorder; something that this thesis argues against. Second, Sacharin acknowledges the difficulty of measuring attention. He points out that while neurological and biological science can accurately measure specific brain activity, “it’s not feasible to keep everyone hooked up to brain scanning equipment all the time... [so we need to rely on]... reasonable surrogate measures” (2001, p. 182). Sacharin offers the idea of a *footprint of attention* as one of these measures. His version of the *footprint of attention* is the tracking of the different types of media that can be sequentially used to disseminate individual elements of a total marketing message. He talks about messages mediated via traditional media (TV, radio, print and billboard) leading people to messages online where ‘traffic at the page’ and resulting action (inquiries and sales) can be monitored. He summarises this approach by saying that, “every ad should lead somewhere” (2001, p. 182). For the purposes of this thesis, though, Norris’ (2004) notion of modal density answers this need for a surrogate method of assessment of the attention where brain scanning is impracticable, and it is in this context a more useful and accurate way to assess attention paid to individual marketing messages.

2.3 The concept of attention economics

While Sacharin (2001) sees the ‘information blizzard’ as a barrier to gaining people’s attention, Goldhaber (1997a and b) envisages a world in which individual attention becomes both a commercially valuable ‘commodity’ and the basis for a new kind of economy. Indeed, Goldhaber points out that information itself can be seen as less valuable than the attention we need to pay to it. His explanation of this theory begins with a reminder that economics is generally defined as “the study of how a society uses its scarce resources” (1997b). It continues by highlighting the fact that since the advent of the internet, “we are drowning in information” (1997b). It is far from being a scarce resource. Attention, though, is a scarce resource in societies where people have easy access to new communication technologies. Moreover, attention will always be in short supply in such

societies because the amount of available attention per person cannot be increased in any way.

Goldhaber (1997a) also explains how in the new economy attention can have a direct effect on the flow of money and gain a dollar value in its own right. He cites (1997a) the potential value of Facebook as a company were it to be floated on the stock exchange³ and points out that, unlike traditional media, the value of which was calculated on the size of its audience, it is not the figure of 825 million people who use Facebook that matters most, it is how long each person spends on Facebook every day that makes the site so valuable. Equally, Goldhaber points out that money will never be able to buy attention. I can pay you to listen to me reading the telephone directory, but I cannot ensure that you won't drift off and daydream while I'm boring you.

Jones (2005) contends that 'sites of engagement' outlined by Scollon (1998) are more accurately described as 'sites of attention'. He acknowledges that this assertion is founded on Goldhaber (1997a and b) and that "in an age of information overload, what gives value to information is the amount of attention it can attract" (Jones, 2005, p. 152). This thesis builds on and expands Jones' view, when it explores not the dollar value of attention in any single communicative action, but the level and quality of attention a person needs to employ in order to successfully receive an unsolicited marketing message.

2.4 The analysis of visual communications

Methodology for the analysis of visual communications is grounded in the theory of semiotics. Below I outline the development of semiotic thought to date and highlight the significance of *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996) for this study.

2.4.1 Semiotics: background

While the term semiotics can be traced back as far as Locke's 1690 *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, it began to emerge as a discipline in the first decade of the twentieth century (Chandler, 2002). The Swiss linguist, Saussure (1857 - 1913) and the American philosopher, Peirce (1839 - 1914) are both acknowledged as the co-founders of 'the study of signs' (Chandler, 2002). Saussure's concept of a sign was based on language, which he described as the most important system of signs. Saussure defines each sign in terms of a signifier (the actual sound/word or image) and a signified (the concept the signifier represents).

Peirce is more concerned with what he calls the science of visual signs. He divides signs into three categories: iconic, symbolic and indexical. An iconic sign is a representation of something tangible, like a drawing of a cat. A symbolic sign represents something we have learned to associate it with, like the national flag of a particular country. An indexical sign is capable of indicating something other than itself; for example, a circle containing an image of a cigarette with a line through it represents a no smoking area.

Essentially, though, semiotics since Saussure has largely taken linguistics as its model and has applied linguistic concepts to diverse areas of study, not just to language itself. Barthes (1977) especially, focusing on photography and advertisements, laid the foundations of visual semiotic analysis in his attempts to demystify society (Chandler, 2002). Barthes' (1977) key idea is that there are two layers of meaning in any image: the denoted meaning (who or what is being depicted) and the connoted meaning (what ideas or values are being expressed).

Barthes' work on the meaning of images remained seminal for some 30 or more years and was only seriously challenged by Kress and Van Leeuwen in 1996 with the publication of *The Grammar of Visual Design*. Where Barthes saw images as essentially dependent on the words that accompany them (whether written or spoken) to either illustrate or elaborate linguistic meaning, Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) treat the visual component of a 'text' as

“an independently organized and structured message – connected with the verbal text, but in no way dependent on it” (p. 17). What is most important in this approach is that it recognises that the printed word itself, if present, forms part of the overall visual design and affects the meaning of the text.

A new school of ‘social semiotics’ emerged in the mid 1990s and Kress & Van Leeuwen’s work, which comprises a social semiotic theory of visual semiotics, is part of this later development. Social semiotics has since turned its attention to the ever growing number of forms of the visual in society: movies, television, art, advertisements, fashion, architecture and the internet. This school of thought is where my own particular interest lies and it is a direct antecedent of multimodal discourse analysis (see 2.5.1 below). Of particular importance to my work is that of Jewitt (2006, 2010, 2012) which focuses on the way meaning is remade by a reader or viewer around the affordances of digital texts. This mirrors my own interest in the how people interact with advertising where both digital and traditional media converge. Equally Iedema’s (2003) work focuses on how people and texts are re-contextualised or as he puts it ‘resemiotized’ from one meaning to another. With regard to advertising and marketing messages, we are beginning to see how people become part of the message itself and thus can be said to have a semiotic value in that message (see Chapter 5 of this thesis).

I have chosen to look particularly at *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996) for two reasons. First, as mentioned above, the book successfully challenges Barthes’ (1977) analysis of images as being now outdated and simplistic. Second, as outlined in 2.5.1 below, multimodal discourse analysis has an antecedent in semiotics (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996).

2.4.2 The grammar of visual design

Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design, by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) applies the theory of semiotics to visual texts. Kress and Van Leeuwen’s method for analysing the composition of an image establishes the notion of *salience*. This is crucial to

an understanding of how an image attracts a viewer's attention. Saliency is a value applied to those elements of an image that "are made to attract the viewer's attention to different degrees, as realised by such factors as placement in the foreground or the background, relative size, contrast in tonal value (or colour), differences in sharpness, etc." (p. 183). Saliency is in fact the term Kress and Van Leeuwen use to describe the visual 'weight' of an element of composition so that elements with most weight in any image acquire higher saliency. Saliency is not an objective measurement. Rather, it is an assessment resulting from the interaction of various factors. Thus, for example, elements located towards the top of a composition/image carry more saliency than elements located lower down towards the foot of the composition/image. Similarly, objects in the foreground are more salient than objects in the background and elements overlapping other elements are judged to be more salient than the elements they overlap. Most relevant to this study is Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) assertion that "visual weight creates a hierarchy of importance among the elements of spatially integrated texts, causing some to draw more attention to themselves than others" (p. 213).

Saliency is also one of three interrelated systems that convey the representational and interactive meanings of an image to form its composition. The other two are *informational value* (denoted by where elements are placed in the image – left and right, top and bottom, centre and margin) and *framing* (accomplished by elements that form dividing lines to disconnect or connect elements of the image and signifying that they belong or do not belong together). Composition itself is seen as an 'integration code' which produces text, "places meaningful elements in the whole" and provides "coherence and ordering among them" (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 212).

Central to understanding how a reader or viewer makes use of composition is the concept of the 'reading path': "...composition sets up particular hierarchies of movement of the hypothetical reader within and across the elements of the text. Such reading paths begin with the most salient element, from there move on to the next most salient element, and so on" (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 218). While the reading path of printed language in western cultures is linear and strictly coded - left to right and top to bottom, the trajectories

of the reading path in a composition that contains pictures and text or pictures alone are not necessarily similar to that of the printed page. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) note that the reading paths of anything other than densely printed pages can be circular, diagonal, spiralling and much more besides. When we apply the concept of a reading path to a poster or billboard, we discover a combination of linear and non-linear trajectories. Identifying how easily these can be followed provides one of the bases for considering how individuals must interact with an advertising message in order to receive the message it sets out to mediate. This thesis specifically compares the reading paths of five posters and shows how each path affects the quality of attention entailed in processing the message.

The grammar of visual design also spells out rules about gaze, perspective and angle that are applicable to the interpretation of the Kitchener billboard and its four 'descendants'. Thus, an image depicting a person gazing at the viewer, as Kitchener does in the 1914 recruitment poster examined in this thesis, is interpreted as making a demand on the viewer. Likewise, the pointing fingers of Kitchener, Uncle Sam, Churchill, Obama and the Omani woman examined in this thesis, connote an intimate or personal appeal. Images like Kitchener, Uncle Sam and Churchill that are shown from a frontal angle invite involvement, whereas those shown from a more oblique angle, like Obama and the Omani woman, suggest a degree of detachment. Finally, with regard to the two kinds of participants involved in most images, Kress & Van Leeuwen (1996) put forward the notion that images can require a viewer to enter into some kind of imaginary relationship with the person or object depicted. This notion is especially pertinent in the analysis of both the original Kitchener billboard and the NZ Army campaign.

2.5 Mediated and multimodal discourse analysis

Mediated and multimodal discourse analysis as a field of academic study is less than 20 years old. A short history of its development, identifying primary figures in the field and their work follows and provides a useful background to one of the key methodologies employed in this study.

2.5.1 Mediated and multimodal discourse analysis: background

Mediated discourse analysis emerged as a methodology in 1998, when Scollon outlined its principles in the book, *Mediated Discourse as Social Interaction*. The antecedents to mediated discourse analysis are interactional sociolinguistics (Goffman, 1959, 1963, 1974; Lave 1988; Lave and Wenger 1991), critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1989, 1992, 1995), and mediated action theory (Wersch, 1991, 1998).

Three things underpin mediated discourse analysis: Fairclough's (1989, 1992) focus on social practice around text, Wersch's (1991) notion of mediated action as the moment when social practice becomes actual practice because someone is actually doing something and Lave's (1988) concept of a social group as a community of practice. In combining these three perspectives, mediated discourse analysis takes a mediational view of action so that texts are always seen as and described as mediational means or cultural tools (Wersch, 1991).

Mediated discourse analysis is a primary antecedent of multimodal discourse analysis (Norris, 2004) and thus multimodal discourse analysis shares the same antecedent influences from interactional sociolinguists, as well being influenced by other work in the fields of discourse (Gumperz, 1982) and conversation analysis (Tannen, 1984). Multimodal discourse analysis also has an antecedent in semiotics (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996; Van Leeuwen, 1999).

Both mediated discourse analysis and multimodal discourse analysis, then, take an action as the base unit of analysis. An action is defined as occurring when a social actor acts with and/or through a mediational means or a cultural tool. In multimodal discourse analysis the terms mediational means and cultural tool are often regarded as synonymous and are thus used interchangeably (Norris, 2004). An action always occurs within a site of engagement (Scollon, 1998, 2001). Scollon defines a site of engagement as being opened up by the social actor(s) and the mediational means when an action is being performed (see 2.5.2 below). All actions are linked to practices. Scollon (2001) argues that a practice is an action with a history made up of repeated actions.

Multimodal discourse analysis further refines these concepts and regards all actions as interactions, either between social actors, or between social actors and objects, or between social actors and the environment. Thus, multimodal discourse analysis takes a mediated action as its specific unit of analysis. From this comes the concept of a mode, which is defined as a system of mediated action (Norris, 2012). Modes can be concrete (e.g. walking) or abstract (e.g. language). Modes can include a class of object (e.g. cutlery) that social actors use. The individual pieces of cutlery used in a mediated action, however, operate as mediational means (Norris, 2012).

Among the many scholars working in the field of multimodality, the work of Jewitt, Jones, Norris and Van Leeuwen is particularly important, especially for this thesis.

Norris (2004) takes Scollon's (1998) concept of mediated action and further classifies it into three types: lower-level action, higher-level action and frozen action. Norris (2004) conceives a lower-level action as comprising a mode's smallest meaningful unit; for example, one step taken in the mode of walking. A higher-level action is made up of multiple chained lower-level actions. We can describe the higher-level action of having a meeting, for example, as being made up of the chained lower-level actions of utterances, gaze shifts, object handling, etc. The concept of a frozen action describes when a lower-level and/or a higher-level action is frozen in material objects in the environment (see 2.5.2). Norris further points out that because multimodal discourse analysis focuses on

social actors and their actions, then understanding attention or awareness is crucial in any study of mediated action. From this Norris develops the notion of modal density; this concept allows us to analyse the amount of attention a social actor pays to any action (see Chapter 3 of this thesis).

Jones' work (2005, 2009) refines and updates Scollon's (1998) original concept of a site of engagement. His studies involving social interactions via internet chat rooms and websites establish that a site of engagement is more accurately described as a site of attention (see Chapter 3 of this thesis) and can often also be described as a site of display (see Chapter 5 of this thesis).

The term site of display was originally coined by Jewitt (2006, 2010, 2012), whose work in primary and secondary school classrooms focuses on how new technologies re-mediate processes of reception. Like Scollon, Norris and Jones, Jewitt clearly establishes that understanding interaction as multimodal mediation highlights the need to rethink discourse beyond language.

Similarly, Van Leeuwen's (2008) work in multimodal discourse analysis focuses on the need to understand all texts as representations of social practice. The importance of this approach is that it leads to a clearer understanding of message reception as not being passive. Specifically, when we view people who interact with messages mediated by posters and billboards as participants in a social practice we must also see them as social actors activated by being drivers, passengers, passers-by, web surfers, blog writers, blog readers, and so on (see Chapter 5 of this thesis). This is important because as Van Leeuwen (2008) states, "How a social actor is represented has an impact on how they receive the message" (p. 11).

2.5.2 Mediated and multimodal discourse analysis: methodology

Like the theory of semiotics, discourse analysis began as a study of linguistics and has since developed beyond the analysis of text to consider questions about the actions people take with them (Norris and Jones, 2005). In his study of news as a discourse Scollon's (1998) specific aim is to reconstruct the language used to describe the production of the news and to define a more comprehensive description of its actual, real time reception by readers and viewers than linguistic analysis alone affords. In doing so, Scollon defines a methodology that provides a vital basis for analysing both the production and consumption of media texts as social interactions. Essentially Scollon (1998) summarises three key ways in which the term 'mediated discourse' can be understood. Firstly, it is applied to media communications (e.g. newspaper, magazines, radio, TV and film). Secondly, Scollon (1998) identifies computer-mediated discourse as "rapidly" increasing at the time and suggests that the focus should be on "communications in which the computer – most often in the form of email or internet communications – is the primary medium of communication between two or more participants," (p. 6). We might argue today that either this should not be regarded as a separate category from media communications or that it should be considerably expanded to include cell phones, mp3 players, laptop computers, tablets and other personal communication devices that may not yet exist. Thirdly, Scollon applies the term to any mediation involved in common everyday exchanges, no matter what mode of communication is employed (written, spoken or by means of signs). Thus any instance of communication is seen as a social interaction with both the producers and the consumers of mediated messages designated as social actors. Among the specific terms used when applying mediated discourse analysis three are of particular interest and significance in this thesis: mediated action, sites of engagement, and mediational means or texts.

Norris and Jones (2005) define the term *mediated action* as "the real time moment when mediational means, social actors and the sociocultural environment intersect" (p. 5).

This definition is of specific relevance to this thesis because it takes our focus beyond the presence of each billboard text at any particular location to include a detailed examination of the individual actions that combine to construct the higher-level action (Norris, 2004) of reading, or responding to, any message(s) mediated by a billboard. A higher-level action is made up of chains of lower-level actions and it is bracketed by a distinct opening and closing (Norris, 2004, Norris and Jones, 2005). For example, the higher-level action of reading may begin by a person picking up a magazine, then opening the page before actually focusing on the text. Equally, the higher-level action of reading might end by closing the magazine, but this may be preceded by someone entering the room and causing the reader to look up.

The concept of “the site of engagement is useful to the study of mediated discourse to focus our attention on just those moments when texts are actually in use, not just present in the environment,” (Scollon, 1998, p. 12). From this definition it is clear that a site of engagement designates far more than the place at which a message is displayed or the technological hardware that delivers the message. Indeed, Scollon initially defined a site of engagement as “the window opened through the intersection of social practices in which participants may appropriate a text for mediated action,” (Scollon, 1998, p. 11). Most importantly, he developed the concept further so that the notion of a site of engagement concentrates our focus on the specific points which the active participants are paying attention to (Scollon, 2001). In this way, the notion of a site of engagement goes beyond traditional concepts of time and space and in doing so becomes more useful as an analytical tool. Scollon concludes that rather than seeing actions as occurring in or at sites of engagement, it is more correct to say that actions occur “as sites of engagement,” (2001, p. 159).

Crucially, then, analysing the composition and reception of a message on a poster or billboard in reality is thus understood to go beyond applying a simplistic sender-receiver model; it entails a mediated action involving a poster or billboard as a mediational means between social actors within a site of engagement.

The age of information overload itself has given rise to an even more recent refinement of the notion of a site of engagement. Jones' study of people interacting via internet chat rooms led to a redefinition of sites of engagement as also being sites of attention. "Sites of engagement are, then," he says, "made up not just of the physical spaces we inhabit, and the timescales and trajectories that flow into them, but also, and more to the point those aspects of space and time that we are inclined to pay attention to. We construct sites of engagement through our attention" (Jones, 2005, p. 152).

Multimodal discourse analysis (Norris, 2004) developed out of the recognition that all interactions involve more than one communicative channel or mode. For example, in this thesis multimodal discourse analysis applied to examining the reception of the message(s) mediated by the NZ Army interactive posters reveals that the higher-level action of receiving the message(s) involves the social actor employing the modes of listening (to a cell phone ringtone), gaze (at the cell phone screen and towards the site of the poster), object handling (the cell phone) and proxemics (moving towards the site of the poster and then scrutinising it close-up). This study shows that without any one of these modes, receiving a meaningful message successfully is not possible.

Of specific relevance to this thesis is the concept of modal density (Norris, 2004). As Norris states, "The concept of modal density is the key for the study of multimodal interaction" (p. 80). Modal density concerns the particular communicative modes a social actor employs within a particular site of engagement in order to construct a particular higher-level action. Thus each mode is assigned a higher or lower density depending on how crucial each mode is to the construction of that higher-level action. A mode that completely changes the nature of a higher-level action if it is discontinued is said to have high modal density. Whereas, a mode that slightly alters the nature of a higher-level action if it discontinued is said to comprise medium modal intensity. Essentially then, modal density indicates the level of attention or awareness a social actor places on any particular mode. Modal density therefore also indicates the level of attention or awareness a social actor places on any particular higher-level action, such as receiving a message mediated by a poster or billboard (see Chapter 3). Norris makes it clear that modal density is not a

scientific measurement but it is a useful tool because “the level of attention/awareness that a social actor *perceivably* places on a specific higher-level action is analysable by analyzing the modal density that social actor employs to construct the high-level action’ (Norris, 2004, p.150).

In reality, social actors are capable of and often do participate in several higher-level actions simultaneously. Hence Norris’ has developed the heuristic model of the modal density foreground-background continuum (2004). The ‘modal density foreground-background continuum is a methodological tool to represent simultaneous higher-level actions that one individual constructs in a particular moment of interaction’ (Norris, 2004, p. 98). It indicates the social actor’s focus of attention and suggests three levels of discernible attention or awareness: foreground, mid-ground and background. I use this model in chapter 5 of this thesis to describe interactions with billboards engaged in by a variety of passers-by: drivers, passengers in a car, pedestrians, etc. It is particularly pertinent, for example, when analysing an interaction between a driver of a car and a billboard placed on the road the car is travelling along. The modal density foreground-background continuum allows us to visually represent all the higher-level actions that a driver may be simultaneously engaged in, such as driving, holding a conversation, listening to music. While driving and conversation can be seen to employ equally high modal density, the continuum indicates that driving is foregrounded and conversation recedes towards the mid-ground of the social actor’s attention/awareness. “Once we have identified the higher-level actions constructed, we can follow the shifts of attention/awareness and also see how one higher-level action impacts another” (Norris, 2004, p 152).

NOTES

1. In New Zealand the standard billboard ratio is one to two or three to six.
2. Facebook floated on the US stock exchange with an IPO of \$16 billion on Friday 18 May 2012. Shares were trading at US\$18.96 on Friday 6 September 2012.

3 – GRABBING ATTENTION: THE IMPORTANCE OF MODAL DENSITY IN ADVERTISING

White, P. (2010). 'Grabbing attention: the importance of modal density in advertising.'
Visual Communication, Vol. 9(4), Nov, 2010.

Introduction

This article investigates the modal composition (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996) of several posters that build on the semiotic template modeled in the Kitchener poster, and the resulting modal density (Norris, 2004) experienced by the viewer. Modal composition is the hierarchical structure that communicative modes occupy in any given mediated action or message. Modal density is defined as “the modal intensity and/or modal complexity through which a higher-level action is constructed” (Norris, 2004, p. 79). Jones (2005) defines a higher-level action as having a clear opening and closing and it is “made up of a multiplicity of chained lower-level actions” (p. 11). This article argues that various modal compositions result in a different modal density for the viewer, thereby compelling the viewer to pay greater or lesser attention to the poster. This argument is developed by incorporating Jones’ (2005) notion of sites of engagement as sites of attention. After the discussion of modal composition and the resulting modal density for the viewer, the article investigates the NZ (New Zealand) Army interactive posters created by Saatchi & Saatchi in 2007, comparing their modal composition and the resulting modal density to the Kitchener poster. Here, the article illustrates that new technologies greatly affect the depth and richness of attention a social actor employs when interacting with the communication. I conclude by suggesting that the concept of modal density is particularly valuable when used specifically to assess the level of attention that a social actor employs in responding to unsolicited marketing communications.

Data

In 1914 artist Alfred Leete created what has arguably become one of the most famous posters in the world. It features a portrait of Lord Kitchener above the words, “*YOUR COUNTRY NEEDS YOU*” and was used by the British Army to recruit soldiers in the First World War (figure 1).



Figure 1. Alfred Leete’s British Army First World War recruitment poster. Reprinted with permission.

The American adaptation of Leete's successful design appeared in 1918, featuring the mythical figure of Uncle Sam above the words, *I WANT YOU FOR THE US ARMY* (figure 2).



Figure 2. James Montgomery Flagg's U.S. Army First World War recruitment poster
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Britain built on the fame of the original Kitchener poster in the Second World War and issued a version with a portrait of finger-pointing Winston Churchill above the words, *DESERVE VICTORY!* (figure 3).



Figure 3. British Army Second World War poster. Copyright Imperial War Museum.
Reprinted with permission.

In 2008, a finger-pointing Barack Obama presents himself as the new ‘face of America’ on a web banner urging young people to sign up to become Obama Precinct Captains (figure 4).



Figure 4. Web banner of Obama recruiting for Precinct Captains.

Retrieved from <http://groups.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=groups.groupProfile&groupID=106987623&Mytoken=8DF644EE-F7AE-46C1-BB73C6C30F4EC7B0242994429>
(consulted 31 March 2008) Reprinted with permission.

From the many imitations of the Kitchener poster that have been used in advertisements, I examine a 2005 magazine advertisement for the Oman International Bank. It presents a finger-pointing woman and the headline, *'It could be you'* (figure 5).

The advertisement is set against a red background. On the left, a woman wearing a white headscarf with colorful floral patterns points her right index finger directly at the viewer. In the top left corner, the text 'save & win' is written in white. In the top right corner, there is a logo for 'WINDOOR 2005'. The main headline 'It could be you.' is written in large, white, sans-serif font across the top. Below the headline, the text 'Prizes worth RO 500,000. Over 450 winners in 3 months. You could be the next winner.' is displayed. Further down, it says 'GRAND PRIZE DRAW - 1st Quarter' followed by 'RO 170,000' in large yellow font. Below this, there are two columns of prize details in yellow boxes. The first column lists: 'RO 10,000' (1 Winner every 3 months), 'RO 2000 each' (7 Winners every 12 days), and 'RO 100 each' (21 Winners every month). The second column lists: 'RO 1000' (1 Winner every month), 'RO 500 each' (7 Winners every month), and 'RO 100 each' (21 Winners every month). At the bottom, a yellow box states '21 Winners* every month'. Small text at the bottom provides terms and conditions.

Figure 5. Advertisement for the Oman International Bank (2005).

URL <http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print> (consulted 31 March 2008)

Reprinted with permission.

In 2007, advertising agency, Saatchi & Saatchi (New Zealand) created what they call a series of ‘interactive posters’ which are gaining a worldwide reputation.¹ They deliver the challenge, ‘*Have you got what it takes to join the New Zealand Army?*’ (figure 6).

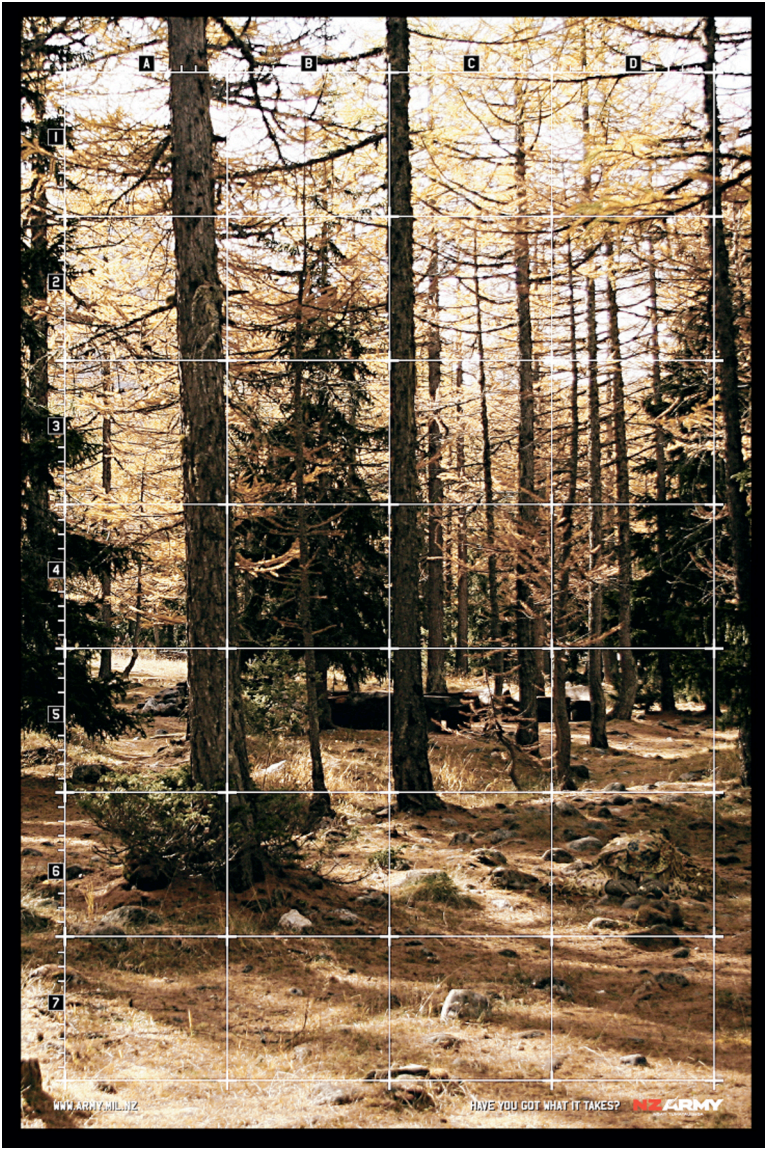


Figure 6. NZ Army campaign created by Saatchi & Saatchi (New Zealand)
Reprinted with permission.

Kitchener and his legacy

The Kitchener poster (fig.1) is seminal as an icon of visual communication. The poster mediates a highly personal appeal to potential army recruits and seeks to elicit more than an intellectual response – its purpose is to cause people to go and sign up. Three pertinent and quite recent studies (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996; Van Leeuwen, 2004, 2005) analysing it from semiotic and multimodal perspectives show how the poster successfully mediates its message and engages the viewer. The three salient semiotic features of the Kitchener poster are the gaze, the pointing finger and the text ‘YOU’. While Van Leeuwen (2005) has most recently argued that these three coalesce to form a kind of chemical reaction, his point is that these modes do not act as a chain reaction but, rather, visual and verbal modes work together to mediate the message. The direct address to the viewer is mediated by the eyes, which look directly at the viewer, and the pointing finger which ‘elaborates’ that look (Van Leeuwen, 2005). The modes of gaze and gesture act together to make contact with the viewer and demand something of them (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996). The image as a whole realises a demand that “the viewer enter into some kind of imaginary relationship with” the producer of the poster (p. 122). In this case, the imaginary role the social actor is required to adopt is the pseudo identity of a soldier. The role that is demanded of the viewer is itself signified by other visual features in the poster, specifically Kitchener’s uniform and Prussian style moustache combine with his authoritative gaze to create a military tone. We might expect the text in this context to make some kind of demand, or even give an order, but that is not what is mediated. The function of the text is to issue a request rather than an order. “YOUR COUNTRY NEEDS...” expresses this request for assistance. “YOU” not only extends the message of the visual and confirms the personalisation of the appeal, it also completes the declaration of the poster.

While it is clear that the Kitchener poster directs the reader’s eye from the most salient feature (the pointing finger) to the next most salient feature (the staring eyes) and so on in a demonstrable reading path (fig. 7) which accords with the grammatical norms of conventional visual design (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996), Van Leeuwen (2005) has argued that there is no linear chain of communication stages involved in the way the

Kitchener poster mediates its message. The semiotic sequence can be identified but all modes ‘fuse’ in the realisation of appeal, demand and personalisation to achieve a single multimodal communicative action (Van Leeuwen, 2005). The message that is mediated using the combination of visual and verbal mediational means can be summed up as the declaration, “You are the man for the job.” Or in modern terms, “You are the person for the job.”



Figure 7. Salient features in Alfred Leete's British Army First World War recruitment poster.

I would go further and suggest that, because all modes ‘fuse’ to achieve the single multimodal communicative action, the modal density employed by a viewer that interacts with the Kitchener poster is high. This assertion is based on Norris’ (2004) notion of modal density, which allows us to examine the depth or quality of attention a social actor must engage in to respond to any mediated communication. In the case of the Kitchener poster, the easy flowing, circular, clockwise reading path and the employment of very few communicative modes (gaze, gesture, language) to mediate the message mean that a viewer’s construction of the higher-level action of ‘reading’ the poster is condensed or, to use Norris’ term, ‘intense’. When an action takes on high intensity, it indicates high modal density. High modal density in turn indicates that the viewer employs a high level of attention in order to respond to the poster. Thus, I suggest that the fusion of semiotic features and its simple reading path are at the core of the Kitchener poster’s success in mediating its message powerfully.

A formula for success

Since 1914 there have been many imitations of the Kitchener semiotic formula that demonstrate its influence over the last century. To illustrate that influence, I look at two other posters in the same genre – official wartime/government communication – and then two examples which are visual parodies used as marketing communications.

Four years after the appearance of Alfred Leete’s original Kitchener poster, the United States of America not only entered the First World War as Britain’s ally but also appropriated Britain’s concept of recruitment poster advertising. In 1918 James Montgomery Flagg created the Uncle Sam version of the Kitchener poster (fig. 2), which went on to become famous in its own right. While the similarities between the Kitchener and the Uncle Sam posters are apparent, the differences when explored from multimodal discourse perspective are significant (figure. 8).



Figure 8. Differences between the British Army and U.S. Army First World War recruitment posters

The Uncle Sam poster is similar to the Kitchener poster in employing the modes of gesture, gaze and language to mediate its message. What is immediately obvious on seeing the Uncle Sam poster is the influence of colour on all three modes. As with the Kitchener poster, the most salient semiotic features in the Uncle Sam poster are the pointing finger (the mode of gesture), the staring eyes (gaze mode) and the text (the mode of language). Unlike the Kitchener poster, the most salient feature in the Uncle Sam poster is the staring

eyes, rather than the pointing finger. The eyes' superior salience here is a result of three things. First, the pointing finger is seen at the end of an arm which is far less foreshortened in perspective than Kitchener's; it does not seem to emerge so dramatically from the background. Second, the text is clearly positioned in front of the figure of Uncle Sam and the arm reaches just over the top of the type. In the Kitchener poster, the text and the 'suggested body' of the Kitchener figure are almost on the same visual plane. Certainly Kitchener's pointing finger extends much further into the visual foreground than Uncle Sam's. Third, the use of colour in the image, particularly in Uncle Sam's red cheeks gives the mode of gaze dominance over that of gesture.

The salience of the text in the Uncle Sam poster also differs dramatically from that in the Kitchener poster. The Uncle Sam poster employs colour to dramatise the text 'YOU', as well as increasing the size and salience of the lexicalised statement in relation to the image. If we compare the realisations of mediated message in the two posters this becomes even more apparent (see Table 1). In the Uncle Sam poster the mode of language operates in all three realisations, whereas in the Kitchener poster the lexicalised 'YOU' is not what initially makes the demand on the viewer's attention.

Table 1. Realisations and mediational means (1), (White, 2010).

Realisation	'Kitchener' – mediated by:	'Uncle Sam' – mediated by:
Demand	Finger pointed at viewer Direct gaze Unsmiling expression Military uniform Military moustache	Direct gaze Unsmiling expression Finger pointed at viewer Symbolic hat Lexicalised 1 st and 2 nd person Typography - YOU
Involvement	Frontal angle Finger pointed at viewer Direct gaze Typography - YOU	Frontal angle Finger pointed at viewer Direct gaze Lexicalised 1 st and 2 nd person Typography – YOU
Appeal	Finger pointed at viewer Direct gaze Lexicalised 2 nd and 3 rd person Lexicalised request 'need' Authoritative subject 'country' Typography - YOU	Finger pointed at viewer Direct gaze Lexicalised 1 st and 2 nd person Lexicalised demand 'want' Authoritative subject 'U.S. Army' Typography – YOU Authoritative colour – red, white and blue

The extent to which text (lexicalisation and typography) is employed as a mediational means to mediate the message in the Uncle Sam poster differs from its use in the Kitchener poster. Moreover, the reading path seen in the Uncle Sam poster (fig. 8) is quite irregular when compared with the simple elegance of that designed into the original Kitchener poster. Thus, the semiotic modes do not 'fuse' as seamlessly here as in the original and the

modal density employed by a viewer interacting with the Uncle Sam poster is less intense because of this. This finding is significant when we look at other imitations of the Kitchener poster. Rather than imitate the fusion of modes that the Kitchener poster employs so successfully, most imitations favour either the visual or the language mode as dominant mediational means and the reading paths they display help to intensify or dilute the modal density employed by viewers.

I look first at a Second World War poster produced in Britain and featuring a portrait of Winston Churchill (see fig. 3). There can be no doubt that it takes its inspiration from the Kitchener poster.

The foreshortening of the pointing finger is almost identical to that employed in the Kitchener poster. Only Churchill's head, pointing arm and bow tie produce the powerful image. Similarly, Kitchener's presence is constructed as a disembodied head and pointing arm. The similarity is so close to the original that the pointing finger and the direct stare are the most salient features of the poster. The word 'YOU' is implied by Churchill's pointing finger. The mediated message of this poster is YOU DESERVE VICTORY. In purely semiotic terms (Table 2), the Churchill poster employs even fewer elements than the original, but its message is mediated with perfect clarity. Finally, the most significant visual difference between the Kitchener poster and the Churchill poster is the use of colour. The Churchill poster employs colour that references a notion of 'true blue British' to mediate the patriotic appeal of the communication, whereas the Kitchener poster mediated its patriotic appeal using the language mode COUNTRY (see Table 2).

Table 2. Realisations and mediational means (2) (White, 2010).

Realisation	'Kitchener' – mediated by:	'Churchill' – mediated by:
Demand	Finger pointed at viewer Direct gaze Unsmiling expression Military uniform Military moustache	Finger pointed at viewer Direct gaze Unsmiling expression
Involvement	Frontal angle Finger pointed at viewer Direct gaze Typography - YOU	Frontal angle Finger pointed at viewer Direct gaze Lexicalised 2 nd person
Appeal	Finger pointed at viewer Direct gaze Lexicalised 2 nd and 3 rd person Lexicalised request 'need' Authoritative subject 'country' Typography - YOU	Finger pointed at viewer Direct gaze Lexicalised 2 nd person Lexicalised promise 'deserve' Authoritative subject 'Victory' Authoritative colour – blue

Once again, the reading path described by the Churchill poster (fig. 9) is simple and moves in a clockwise direction using fewer semiotic modes than the Kitchener poster, which creates an even more seamless fusion. Thus any social actor who engages with the message employs a high modal density. This, in turn, indicates that the viewer employs a high level of attention when responding to the poster.



Figure 9. Reading path of the British Army Second World War recruitment poster

Turning now to more recent times, the Kitchener poster seems to have lost none of its resonance. Advertisers and governments have long recognised the potency of the Kitchener poster ‘formula’. That formula is still very much in use in 21st century communications.

The Democratic Presidential campaign of 2008 features an online expression that can be seen in figure 4. This web banner draws its inspiration from the Uncle Sam version of the poster and the similarities between the two are deliberately overt. The banner projects Barak Obama as the new and first ever black ‘face of America’. He appears inside a semicircle of stars that references Uncle Sam’s top hat and similarly signifies the states of the Union. Red, white and blue colour realises the patriotic appeal. The three most salient

semiotic features and modes (pointing finger/gesture; staring eyes/gaze; YOU typography/language) are clearly characteristic of the Kitchener/Uncle Sam formula. The pointing finger here is shown at the end of a fully extended arm in a foreshortened view that gives Obama's stare greater semiotic weight than the pointing finger itself. Note also that Obama's head, unlike Uncle Sam's and Kitchener's, is turned to the left. The effect of this is to emphasise that, while the image is iconographic, the individual portrayed is radically different from the original icon.



Figure 10. Reading path of Obama's web banner recruiting for Precinct Captains

The mode of language is employed in the Obama banner to mediate more than the explicit message. As in the Kitchener and Uncle Sam posters, it also asks the reader to enter into an imaginary relationship. Noticeably, Obama is not a military figure and the appeal is not for soldiers, but the carefully chosen text injects a military tone nevertheless, with the word ‘CAPTAIN’ in the directive. Even the lexical phrase ‘sign up’ adds to that effect. Although it is commonly found on many websites, here the text ‘sign up’ also serves to reinforce the military tone of the message and reference the original Uncle Sam poster. The overall effect of the text is to subtly suggest that if you become an Obama captain, you are serving your country.

How seamlessly this communication is constructed though is the key question we need to consider. The reading path described in the Obama banner (fig.10) is neither simple nor circular. It moves in more than one direction: from left to right to left again. Moreover there are six semiotic features for the eye to take in (eyes, finger, YOU, APPLY NOW, ‘BECOME...’, ‘CLICK HERE...’) and once again, compared with the original Kitchener poster, the modal density employed by a viewer varies in intensity. The viewer constructs the higher-level action of reading the words ‘I WANT YOU’ and ‘APPLY NOW’ easily. These two semiotic features ‘fuse’. After that, there is a noticeable break in the modal density employed. Readers have to make a conscious effort to seek out the rest of the text. They have to re-engage their attention at the same level as they employed it when taking in the most salient five words above. Modal density, therefore, is lower than in the previous example.

It may not be surprising to find a ‘legacy’ of the Kitchener poster in communications that occur in European and western societies, but there is also evidence that the Kitchener semiotic formula influences communications across the globe. The 2005 advertisement for the Oman International Bank illustrates the point (fig. 5). The foreshortened perspective pointing finger is the most salient semiotic feature here (mode of gesture), the staring eyes (mode of gaze) connect with the viewer and the use of ‘you’ (mode of language) in the text are the elements that link this advertisement with the Kitchener poster. There the similarities end. The eye-catching visual formula and modal composition of the original is

being used to gain the viewer's attention. Again the modes of gesture, gaze and language mediate the message, but there is no seamless fusion of modes mediating the complete message. Rather, gesture, gaze and language fuse to gain attention, but then the viewer must refocus attention to the text on the right hand side of the image (fig.11).



Figure 11. Similarities and differences between the advertisement for the Oman International Bank (2005) and the British Army First World War recruitment poster (1914).

A reader of the Oman International Bank advertisement must attend to the text on the right of the picture in order for the full message to be mediated successfully. The viewer must engage in the action of reading to get the full message. That higher-level action of reading involves the mode of language (in this case paying close attention to text), which now assumes the highest modal density in any social actor's interaction with the advertisement.

Gaining and keeping attention has always been at the heart of every social action (Jones, 2005) and is crucial to every information processing activity (Olshavsky, 1994). Whether a social actor refocuses from the pointing finger to pay close attention to the text on the right in a real life response to the advertisement or whether a viewer's attention is lost before or at some point mid way through it, we cannot say. What can be said is that the Kitchener semiotic formula has been used to gain the reader's attention. Yet because this advertisement does not mediate its message in the seamless way suggested by Van Leeuwen (2005) in his analysis of the original Kitchener poster, the modal density employed by the reader is diluted or less intense. Thus it is reasonable to doubt whether this change in focus by the reader actually occurs.

Sacharin (2001) has said that gaining attention and keeping attention in the age of information overload is vital. I therefore now turn to a close examination of the 2007 NZ Army posters as an example of unsolicited marketing communications which have been carefully designed to successfully gain and keep high levels of attention in an age of information overload.

Pointing the finger versus texting the cell phone

The NZ Army campaign has a number of elements that work in the following way: Bluetooth transmitters are fitted to outdoor poster sites. When a person walks past the poster, their cell phone rings and they receive an SMS text message. The SMS text message reads: *'This is a training exercise for the NZ Army. You must rendezvous with a field engineer in your immediate area. You have 30 secs to locate him and text back the co-ordinates'* (fig. 12). If the person accepts the challenge, they then have to look around for a

location in which they might find the ‘field engineer’; the NZ Army poster is located nearby. The NZ Army poster itself (figs. 6, 13, 14) is subtly divided into a numbered and lettered grid. When the person looks closely at the poster they might discover the grid location of a camouflaged soldier and then be able to send back an SMS text reply with the correct co-ordinates locating the ‘field engineer’, so completing the mission. If the correct co-ordinates are texted back within 30 seconds, the respondent receives the following SMS text message in reply: *‘Congratulations. You’ve transferred vital information for terrain analysis to the hq. You’ve got what it takes. Go to army.mil.nz/careers to achieve your full potential’* (fig. 15). If incorrect co-ordinates are texted back or the ‘mission’ takes longer than 30 seconds, the respondent receives the following SMS text message in reply: *‘Sorry, you need a little more practice. Go to Force9.co.nz for further training, more missions and to achieve your full potential.’* (The URL army.mil.nz/careers is the regular NZ Army website, which allows visitors to explore all aspects of a career with the NZ Army and then make an application to join the armed forces online. The URL Force9.co.nz is a website specially designed to engage visitors in ‘missions’. These missions are in the form of online games which mirror various army exercises, from basic training to tank driving. There is a link to army.mil.nz/careers, where an online application can be made.)

I will show how, in the 2007 NZ Army recruitment drive, new technologies converge in a multimodal communication that mediates an even more overt and specifically personal appeal to the potential recruit than the Kitchener poster does. It also extends the idea of the social actor entering into an imaginary relationship with the producer of the communication. The NZ Army campaign has to establish contact in an age of information overload; something that was not the case in 1914. Thus the NZ Army does not rely on either the visual or the mode of language to gain the attention of potential recruits. In fact, the social actor can completely ignore the NZ Army poster. Instead, contact is established directly, via an aural mode, when their cell phone tone indicates that an SMS text message has been received. Responding to the cell phone tone is the equivalent action to meeting the gaze of Lord Kitchener. The difference, of course, is that the social actor is in no doubt whatsoever that the message about to be mediated via cell phone is directed explicitly at them. Whereas Kitchener may be pointing in your direction and you may feel that he is

addressing you, but that cannot be tangibly confirmed - Kitchener could be looking past you to someone behind.

As with the Kitchener poster, the NZ Army communication demands that the social actor enter in to an imaginary relationship. In this case, the demand is mediated using the modes of gesture and gaze. It is even more overtly asserted in the modes of language and text via the SMS text message itself (fig 12).



Figure 12. SMS recruitment text message used by the NZ Army. Reprinted with permission.

The social actor is cast in the role of active soldier immediately, not just potential soldier. Hence, the text of the NZ Army communication does not make an appeal, like the Kitchener poster, it issues a direct order. In 1914 the action was internalised as an appeal to patriotism. In 2007, the action is externalised as an invitation to ‘play’ soldiers. Where the Kitchener poster successfully mediates an *impression* of military service, the NZ Army

poster is one of a number of mediational means that together mediate an *experience* of military service.

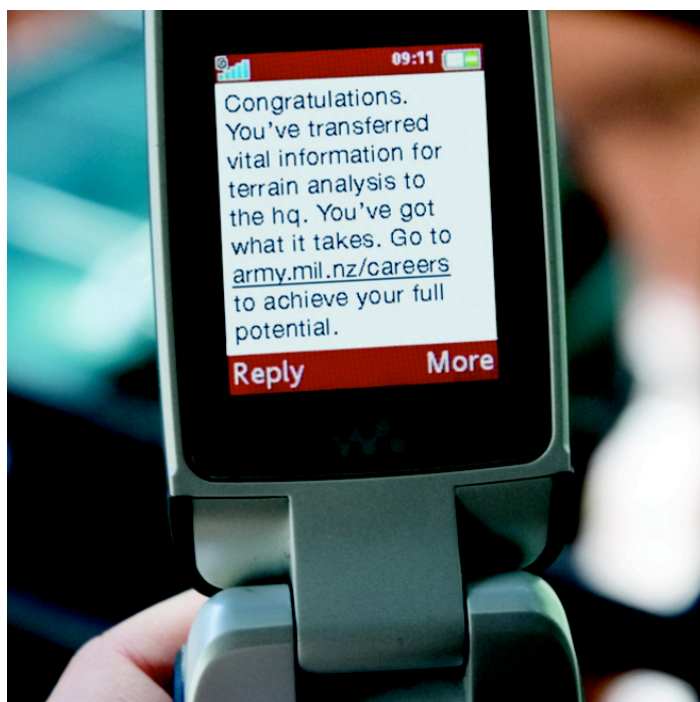
Where the Kitchener poster mediates its military properties through the visual mode simultaneously using the mediational means of uniform, Prussian style moustache and authoritative gaze, the NZ Army relies on language mode cues: *training exercise*, *rendezvous*, *field engineer* and *co-ordinates*. Now the social actor is involved in a search for the field engineer and, in this stage of the multimodal communication, visual and language modes operate. While the social actor is required to pay close attention to the NZ Army poster, the poster itself does not conform to any hierarchies of composition usually adopted by posters as mediational means.



Figures 13 and 14. NZ Army recruiting posters divided into numbered and lettered grids.

Reprinted with permission.

The Kitchener poster, for example, directs the reader's eye from the most salient feature in a demonstrable reading path (fig 7), whereas the NZ Army posters offer readers no dominant salient feature to attract their eye, demonstrate no reading path structure and do not signal themselves clearly as army posters. The logo is conventionally placed in the bottom right hand corner, but it is relatively discreet in the overall design of the posters (figs 6, 13, 14). There is very little to attract the social actor to them as the location for the 'field engineer'. Even the text, *'Have you got what it takes?'* neither links directly to the first SMS text message nor acts as an attention-getting feature with high semiotic salience. It is in the actions of finding the poster and then discovering the location of the camouflaged soldier that this 2007 multimodal communication realises fully its demand that the viewer enter into an imaginary relationship with the NZ Army. Finally, there is an overt completion to the communicative action in the NZ Army campaign that the Kitchener poster's integrated mediational means do not mediate. The NZ Army's answering SMS text message takes the social actor a step closer to transforming their pseudo identity as soldier into reality (see fig 15).



Figures 15. NZ Army SMS reply when potential recruit finds 'camouflaged soldier'.

Reprinted with permission.

Referring to the original analysis of the Kitchener poster (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996) helps to show how similar the realisations in the NZ Army interactive posters are.

A comparison of the mediational means that achieve these realisations reveals the depth of engagement a social actor exhibits when responding to the NZ Army campaign (Table 3). It also illustrates my contention that both campaigns can be defined as a 'single multimodal communicative action' (Van Leeuwen, 2004). While the specific modal composition of each campaign differs significantly, the essential communicative structure - demand, involvement, appeal - remains the same. Furthermore, while the modes employed in the Kitchener poster do not act independently but 'fuse' (Van Leeuwen, 2005), the modes employed in the NZ Army campaign are certainly interdependent but operate in a clearly demonstrable and prescribed sequence to create the single multimodal communicative action.

Table 3. Realisations and mediational means (3) (White, 2010).

Realisation	'Kitchener' – mediated by:	NZ Army – mediated by:
Demand	<p>Finger pointed at viewer Direct gaze Unsmiling expression Military uniform Military moustache</p>	<p>Ring tone Incoming SMS text message I Lexicalised statement, <i>'This is a New Army exercise'</i></p>
Involvement	<p>Frontal angle Finger pointed at viewer Direct gaze Typography - YOU</p>	<p>Ring tone Incoming SMS text message I 1st lexicalised order, <i>'You must rendezvous'</i> 2nd lexicalised order, <i>'You have 30 sec to locate... and text back'</i> Physical location Poster: grid, camouflage Outgoing SMS text message Incoming SMS text message II Lexicalised acknowledgement of involvement, <i>'You've transferred vital information to the hq'</i></p>
Appeal	<p>Finger pointed at viewer Direct gaze Lexicalised 2nd and 3rd person Lexicalised request 'need' Authoritative subject 'country' Typography - YOU</p>	<p>Ring tone Incoming SMS text message I Incoming SMS text message II Lexicalised reward <i>'You've got what it takes'</i></p>

Attention in the age of information overload

No matter how we look at interactive communication - from a mediated discourse perspective or a marketing communications stance - studies acknowledge that attention plays a crucial role in successful communication in the 21st century:

“The problem of getting attention is no longer a simple matter. We’re overwhelmed with the explosive growth in new media forms. We’re confused by the rise of complex technologies... We can’t keep up with the demand that we always be in touch, always on, always connected” (Sacharin, 2001, p. ix).

“The real currency of the information age is not information but attention... attention has always been an important principle in the micro-economics of social action” (Jones, 2005, p.152).

Analysing the 2007 NZ Army campaign as a multimodal higher-level action and taking note of the modal densities employed by any social actor responding to it sheds important light on the successful mediation of the communication. I begin by looking at the mediational means employed in the campaign and the social actions involved for anyone responding to the message.

The mediational means to an end

The NZ Army posters use four mediational means to deliver one message:

1. Street posters
2. Bluetooth transmitters
3. SMS texting
4. Internet websites

For the purposes of this article, I look exclusively at the actions mediated by the SMS texting (enabled by Bluetooth transmitters) and street posters as prime mediational means.

(These lead respondents to the appropriate website but how social actors interact once there is beyond the scope of this study.)

According to Wersch (1998), new technologies not only alter mediational means but vitally transform the actions they mediate. Using the example of pole vaulting as a social action that altered dramatically as the mediational means of the pole developed, Wertsch makes the case that the actions required to pole vault (technique of launching and rising) changed fundamentally because the mediational means altered (a pole made from bamboo, then aluminium, then fibre glass). The results of the social action were also transformed by the new mediational means - world records were broken, new standards were set.

Similarly, I argue that the mediational means of Bluetooth and SMS texting used in the NZ Army campaign to invite a response to more traditional mediational means – a poster – fundamentally transform the social action of responding to outdoor advertising. Equally important, I suggest that these 21st century mediational means have an influence on how much attention is being paid in the social action of responding to the mediated message.

A series of actions and a measurement of attention

According to Norris (2004), a mode acquires high intensity “when the higher-level action that is being performed ... would not be possible ... if that mode had not been intensified” (p. 83). Modal complexity occurs “when the modes that the participant draws upon ... are intricately entwined” (p. 87).

In this study, modal density is primarily defined in terms of modal intensity. In only one action (texting back the soldier’s location) does modal complexity define the modal density being employed. Overall, I assess the quality of attention required to interact with the posters. A social actor constructs their response to the NZ Army campaign through a series of social actions which result in an interpersonal communication between the social actor and an unidentified army personality. The first action involves a social actor walking past the poster. From the video supplied by Saatchi & Saatchi it is reasonable to interpret

‘walking past’ to mean even less specifically ‘walking nearby’ the poster. The poster itself is not the focus of attention for the social actor, nor is it overtly designed to entice attention (see figs 6, 13, 14 and discussion above), yet it is a fundamental mediational means in the NZ Army communication.

Focus is another important concept in the assessment of attention. Norris (2004) states: “A participant in interaction focuses on a higher-level action by employing high modal density” (p. 95). Thus, where an action demands a social actor to employ high modal density in order to construct the action (or interact with the mediated message), I conclude that the individual must be engaged in focused action and is therefore paying a high level of attention.

The social actor’s prior focus, for example, is interrupted by their cell phone tone, indicating an SMS text message has been received. Now, and for only a few seconds, the mode of listening will have a higher modal density in the social actor’s constructed response. Then the mode of object handling gains modal intensity as attention focuses on the cell phone.

The next action occurs when the social actor accepts the incoming SMS text and constructs the higher-level action of reading it. The social actor constructs the higher-level action of reading by employing the modes of gaze (at the cell phone screen), language (the text on the cell phone screen), and object handling (the cell phone). These three modes can be said to have high modal density in the action but language (the message) has the highest modal density because reading would not be possible if nothing appeared on the screen. Thus the SMS text is now the focus of the social actor’s attention, not the phone itself. The only way to be sure that a social actor’s attention is focused on the SMS text message is when their reply is received. The actions which now follow allow an assessment of the quality of attention the recipient pays throughout the action of responding to the NZ Army communication. The final action of texting the co-ordinates in reply provides confirmation of the assessment of the levels of attention paid.

The SMS text message mediates a message intended to shift the social actor's focus of attention to the poster (fig.6, 13 or 14), possibly for the first time. This initiates a further higher-level action – locating the NZ Army poster. I have already established that this action will not occur unless the social actor has paid close attention to the SMS text message. The higher-level action of locating the NZ Army poster is itself constructed by the social actor employing the modes of gaze (towards the poster) and proxemics (to the poster). Both these modes construct an action with high modal density, since locating the NZ Army poster could not be accomplished if the social actor did not look for and move closer to the NZ Army poster. Again, the social actor is paying close attention to locating the NZ Army poster. The social actor is now involved (paying attention) in a 'game' which comprises challenge, reward and the creation of an identity as a potential soldier. In order to play this game, the social actor must engage in three more higher-level actions: first, finding the field engineer in the poster; second identifying the specific co-ordinates of the field engineer's location; and third, texting the co-ordinates back.

Norris' (2004) methodology allows the assessment of levels of attention to be further refined by utilising her concept of foreground, mid-ground and background. This concept distinguishes, in a heuristic sense, three levels of attention/awareness. For my purposes I need only refer to her definition of an action being in the foreground of a social actor's attention because I am assessing what actions must occur for an individual to respond to the NZ Army message. Thus, for example, the action of finding the field engineer in the poster must be constructed through the modes of gaze (at the poster) and proxemics (to the poster). Unless these modes are employed with high modal density the social actor will not be able to locate the camouflaged soldier. In other words, the social actor has to closely scrutinise the NZ Army poster to find the camouflaged soldier hidden in it. In terms of mediated discourse analysis and using Norris' methodological framework, the communicative modes of gaze and proxemics take on high intensity. This high intensity is a sign of the high modal density employed. The high modal density in turn signals that the social actor is foregrounding the action of finding the field engineer, no matter what else is going on around them.

Identifying the specific co-ordinates of the field engineer's location is an action that also employs the modes of gaze (at the poster) and proxemics (to the poster) with high modal density. Once again, the social actor is foregrounding the action of identifying the specific co-ordinates of the field engineer's location; in other words, devoting the highest level of their attention to this task, no matter what else is going on around them. The social action of SMS texting back the co-ordinates of the soldier is constructed by employing the communicative modes of object handling (the cell phone), gaze (at the cell phone screen), print (the text that is generated onto the cell phone screen) and language (the actual co-ordinates being texted in the reply). These modes are intertwined. As Norris (2004) points out: "... the employment of one mode is not possible without at least [one] of the others; and a change in one of these modes would result in a change of the higher-level action" (p. 103). Thus, here is an example of high modal density constructed by employing both high modal complexity and high modal intensity. More importantly, for my purposes, it is clear that the social actor's attention is of a very high level.

All these actions must be completed within 30 seconds of the social actor receiving the initial SMS text message. Thus, what is critical is that Norris' (2004) methodological framework for analysing multimodal interaction provides the tools to verify that the level of the attention being paid by the social actor in order to solve the problem can be shown to be extremely high. A high level of attention, however, does not necessarily equate to a long period of time being spent on the action. SMS texting the characters 'D6' almost certainly takes less time than locating the NZ Army poster or discovering the position of the camouflaged soldier within it. It is the intensity or level of attention/awareness employed in any action that is most important to assess. This becomes especially so in the age of media fragmentation and the continued rapid development of new information technologies.

The tangible response elicited by both the Kitchener poster and the NZ Army interactive posters is the same – to apply to join up (see Table 4). In the case of the Kitchener poster though, that eventual response by the social actor cannot be tracked reliably back to the message mediated by the poster for each individual recruit. Whereas, each recruit who responds to the NZ Army message by applying online is clearly responding to the mediated

message of the interactive posters. (The documented commercial success of the campaign¹ strongly suggests that social actors did interact with the campaign in significant numbers and therefore a high level of attention was evident in their interactions.)

Table 4. Measurable responses (White, 2010).

'Kitchener' two-dimensional poster	NZ Army interactive poster
<p>Internalised response feeling of patriotism imaginary relationship - soldier</p>	<p>Internalised response feeling of adventure imaginary relationship - soldier</p>
<p>Externalised response Join up</p>	<p>Externalised response read SMS text message search for poster scrutinise poster locate field engineer text back co-ordinates read reply visit website apply online</p>

Conclusions

We live in an age of information overload and if unsolicited messages are to be mediated successfully, then getting attention and paying attention is fundamental to any successful communicative action (Jones, 2005). Despite proven ‘formulas’ like that of the Kitchener poster’s semiotic template, new technologies can fundamentally transform conventional mediational means (e.g. street posters) and the social actions involved in responding to them, creating much more involving sites of engagement for the respondent. Further, I suggest this is necessary for conventional mediational means to remain effective when mediating unsolicited messages in this age of information overload. In support of this assertion I point to the richness of attention that is generated by the NZ Army posters compared with the attention that can be verified as being paid to the Kitchener poster or any of its subsequent imitations. Maybe Kitchener’s pointing finger and his staring eyes stop social actors in their tracks. That is certainly what they are designed to do. But how do we know that happens in any individual case? Yet any respondent to the NZ Army campaign tangibly demonstrates that they are paying attention to a series of instructions. Whereas a respondent to the Kitchener poster does not demonstrate their ‘paying attention’ until they turn up at the recruitment office. Whether they turn up at the recruiting office as a result of seeing the Kitchener poster is also less certain than whether a person signs up in response to the NZ Army posters. Put more simply, the Kitchener poster does not itself mediate the complex actions that comprise actually signing up (locating a recruitment office, getting there and filling out forms). The NZ Army posters, though, demonstrably involve a social actor in a series of actions that actually propel him or her towards signing up. Each action directs the viewer from one text to another (from SMS message to poster to website to online games to online application). This is what Scollon (2001b) calls a ‘funnel of commitment’ when describing a chain of mediated actions where, once engaged in, no action in the chain can be undone. In other words, each action reinforces the social actor’s commitment towards a specific objective.

Scollon (2001a) has also argued that sites of engagement are not just *where* actions occur but that actions can actually be seen *as* sites of engagement in themselves. Similarly, the

SMS text tone and the social actor's action in responding to it create the site of engagement; from then on, each subsequent social action engaged in extends and redefines that site of engagement.

Jones' (2005) contention that sites of engagement are more properly seen as sites of attention is founded on the theory of *attention economies* (Goldhaber, 1997a and b). The idea of attention economies specifically is that "... in an age of information overload, what gives value to information is the amount of attention it can attract" (Jones 2005, p. 152).

As I have demonstrated, the NZ Army posters successfully gain the social actor's attention, hold the social actor's attention (through a series of actions) and the attention a social actor pays during the interaction is intense (has high modal density). Moreover, while the NZ Army street posters remain crucial elements in the site of attention, the information they mediate is arguably more valuable to and valued by both the social actor receiving the message and the advertiser disseminating the message than when a conventional street poster alone (such as 'Kitchener') creates the site of attention in which a message is mediated.

Goldhaber (1997b) states: "The currency of the new economy won't be money, but attention" (p. 1). Sacharin (2001) asserts that in this age of information overload "marketers who are more adept at gaining and holding the consumer's attention will have the advantage" (p. 41). In this scenario I contend that multimodal discourse analysis can have an important and as yet unrealised role to play in refining the study of advertising and marketing communications effectiveness. I am not alone in recognising the role that multimodal discourse can usefully take up in this field. As Van Dijk (1997) has already pointed out: "...the *visual* aspect of discourse was (and still is) often ignored in discourse studies... Studies of advertising, textbooks or television programs obviously need such cross-media or *multi-modal* analysis" (p. 6. original emphases). I suggest, however, that with regard to advertising and marketing communications, multimodal discourse analysis can contribute in two specifically important ways: first, measuring levels of attention that

can be said to have occurred when social actors engage with such messages gives verifiable value to those communications; and second, being able to assess whether marketing communications are likely to elicit a high level of attention in order to mediate their messages could help refine their design and influence the form which those communications eventually take. To paraphrase Sacharin (2001): in the 20th century we expected *ads to do things to people*; in the 21st century it may prove more effective to invite *people to do things with ads*.

Notes:

1. The NZ Army campaign created by Saatchi & Saatchi (New Zealand) has been recognised as an outstanding example of advertising creativity and effectiveness. It has won a number of prestigious advertising awards: AWARD, Gold (Australia) 2007; Cannes, Silver Lion 2008; USA One Show, Gold, 2008; D&AD, Award (UK) 2008; Effie, Gold, (NZ advertising effectiveness), 2008.

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4 – MESSAGE RECEPTION AND FOCUSED ATTENTION

The conclusions outlined in the previous chapter raise a number of questions that led me to further study and analysis of new data created soon after the NZ Army posters were deployed. The results of that further study and the analysis of the new data became the basis for a chapter in the book ‘Multimodality in Practice: Investigating Theory-in-Practice-through-Methodology’ (Norris, 2012), which is presented as Chapter 5 of this thesis. Here, I outline the questions that arose for me from some of the conclusions I came to and present some of the thinking that led eventually to the development of my methodological concept, the *communicative space*.

4.1 – Four questions seeking answers

1. If, as I have shown, new technologies fundamentally transform both conventional mediational means used to communicate marketing messages and the social actions involved in responding to them, what other transformations may be occurring in the age of information overload?

In considering this question, I chose to look beyond developments like the erection of giant ‘TV screens’ placed where billboards had traditionally been sited (this has occurred in cities like Singapore, London, New York, Tokyo and others since the early 1990s). Instead, I looked for more examples where new technologies do not replace conventional mediational means but work with them to create a single communicative action (Van Leeuwen, 2005).

2. If transformed mediational means create more involving sites of engagement, do the social actors involved themselves undergo any kind of semiotic transformation?

The consideration of this question led me to Iedema's work (2003), which in turn led to the discovery that social actors could simultaneously be both viewers/receivers of a mediated message and participant mediators of the same core message.

3. If more involving sites of engagement are associated with posters and billboards that successfully mediate messages in an age of information overload, how else other than through a chain of actions forming a demonstrable funnel of commitment (Scollon, 2001a) might such communications involve a social actor in a series of actions that lead inevitably to receiving the full message being mediated?

The new data that I analysed revealed a phenomenon that I call *priming to receive* the mediated message. Like the SMS text message in the NZ Army campaign its first effect is that the social actor refocuses their attention from whatever activity they are engaged in. Unlike with the SMS text message, though, I found that social actors were primed to receive a message over periods of time that ranged from 20 minutes to eight days.

4. If social actions can define, extend and redefine a single site of engagement around a single communicative action, do new technologies enable multiple sites of engagement to be constructed around the same communicative action?

If we look back at the NZ Army campaign, it was technologically possible for more than one person to receive an SMS text message generated by the same poster at one location at roughly the same time. Thus two or more social actors would create similar but individually unique sites of engagement around the same mediational means comprising similar social actions. I subsequently found evidence, though, of new technologies offering people a variety of differently constructed sites of engagement at which to receive a particular message.

4.2 – Re-describing space, time and location

What first drew my interest in the NZ Army campaign was the use of Bluetooth technology to attract people's attention and the fact that an SMS text message shifts the social actor's focus of attention to the NZ Army poster, even though that social actor is not necessarily in the immediate vicinity of the poster itself. This, at the very least, begins to challenge the conventional marketing belief that "outdoor advertising is generally viewed from 100 to 500 feet away by people in motion" (Arens, 2004, p. 585). More importantly, it suggests that space is an important factor in defining the sites of engagement around any single communicative action. Space, then, takes on a social semiotic function when it encapsulates "an intersection of social practices and mediational means that make that action the focal point of attention of the relevant participants" (Norris and Jones, 2005, p. 139).

When we examine the particular social actions that combine to create a higher-level action (reading, listening, locating, etc.) that becomes an instance of discourse in real time and results in someone paying attention or receiving a mediated message, we can identify the series of social actions. Yet, while we might identify the space each action occurs in, there is no term that describes the various spaces that are collectively essential to that message being received by the social actor. Thus, while Van Leeuwen (2005) has described modes 'fusing' to create a single communicative action, my concept of a *communicative space* grew out of a need to describe all the spaces that 'fuse' in the mediation of any single communicative action.

The other aspect of the NZ Army campaign that originally stood out for me is the social actor's engagement with the mediated message over an extended period of time. Moreover, my analysis shows that the interactive posters successfully gain the social actor's attention, hold the social actor's attention (through a series of actions) and the attention a social actor pays during the interaction is intense (has high modal density) for what we can be sure is definitely more than 30 seconds (the time given to find and text back the location of the camouflaged soldier). Again, at the very least, this begins to challenge the conventional marketing notion that a billboard should be designed to mediate its message in two or three

seconds (Jewler and Drewniany, 1998; Arens 2004). Examining the social actions that combine to create the higher-level action of receiving a message, then, shows there is potential for a poster or billboard to engage its audience beyond the time it takes to simply comprehend its text.

In considering the amount of time spent with unsolicited marketing messages we need also to take into account the idea that people are either unwilling or unable to engage with such messages. Writers like Sacharin (2001) believe we spend our lives battling through an information blizzard and warn us about the threat of society developing a type of attention deficit disorder. The CEO of Google adds credence to such notions when he announces, “There were five exobytes of information created in the entire world between the dawn of civilization and 2003. Now that same amount is created every two days. No wonder we’re sort of overloaded” (Schmidt, 2010). In this context, Jones’ (2005) contention that sites of engagement are more accurately described as sites of attention becomes crucial for two reasons. First, it acknowledges the increasing claims on every individual’s attention and second, it opens a door to understanding whether the blizzard is really as overwhelming as it may seem. This is particularly true when we trace the antecedents of Jones’ concept. The name is inspired by Golhaber’s *attention economies* (1997) but the theoretical basis is in Scollon’s work. Scollon (1998) draws the distinction between looking at texts when they are actually in use and looking at them merely as being “present in the environment” (p. 135). I would argue that conventional marketing theory tends to look exclusively at texts as being present in the environment when it sets out its rules for design and time taken to communicate. Such an approach acknowledges an audience’s busyness in a general way only. In order to examine the process of gaining attention, holding attention and assessing attention levels in more depth, an understanding of posters and billboards as mediational means enabling the mediated action of communicating one or more messages is far more revealing.

From a marketing perspective, individual billboard sites, for example, are attributed value dependent on their geographical location and, most often, on the amount of vehicle traffic that is estimated to pass the site on a daily basis (Adscape, 2012; APN, 2012; i-Site, 2012).

Looked at from a mediated discourse perspective, though, a billboard site is defined as a site of engagement which operates to make a mediated action “the focus of attention of the relevant participants” (Scollon, 2001a, p. 4). It is important to note here that the relevant participants are not just the viewers, but might also include those who commission the billboard as well as those who design it. An advertising agency, for example, that designs a billboard for a client is overtly mediating a message which the client has asked them to communicate but, in doing so, the agency may also be mediating a message about its own ability to create successful communications. Most importantly, however, in considering whether an audience is unwilling or unable to engage with such messages, Jones’ refinement of the concept of the site of engagement as a site of attention proves useful, especially when he states that “we construct sites of engagement through our attention” (Jones, 2005, p. 152). Thus, it can be argued that any single billboard and its geographical site cannot have a truly communicative value unless and until it becomes a site of engagement. Equally, if one of the primary functions of advertising and marketing communications is to influence people’s behaviour (Arens, 2004; Jewler and Drewniary, 1998), then, Jones’ concept of the site of attention becomes even more helpful because, as his studies make clear, “attention is organised around behaviour and behaviour is organised around attention” (Jones, 2005, p. 152).

The relationship between behaviour and attention is itself axiomatic in the concept of modal density (Norris, 2004) that provides the framework within which we can assess the level and quality of attention paid at any site of engagement. In Chapter 3, we saw how high modal density and the act of *foregrounding* an action (like locating co-ordinates) helps us understand that a person is focusing on something no matter what else is going on around them. In considering the question of whether people are willing or able to engage with messages, the *modal density foreground-background continuum* (Norris, 2004) gives an indication of modal density and the levels of attention entailed in the construction of a number of simultaneous higher-level actions at any particular moment in an interaction. In Chapter 5, for example, I use the tool to show that when someone is driving down a road on which a billboard is located they are certainly focused on driving but they may also be engaged in listening to the radio and talking to a passenger. Rather than this being an

example of a small information blizzard which prevents other information from getting through, an analysis of the actions using the tool of the foreground-background continuum reveals that the higher-level actions of driving and having a conversation occur in the mid-ground of attention; thus, diluting the level or intensity of modal density employed and so allowing another interaction to simultaneously take place (e.g. with the billboard on the road).

Before any of the analysis mentioned above, though, and before any of the questions began to be answered, what first attracted my interest in the data presented in the next chapter was the unusual manner in which each piece “hails” the viewer (Sturken and Cartwright, 2001) and attracts initial attention. Where the NZ Army posters use an SMS text message, in the two examples I examine next, one billboard makes use of a clock and the other makes use of calamity.

5 – RECEPTION AS SOCIAL ACTION: THE CASE OF MARKETING

White, P. (2012). 'Reception as social action: The case of marketing'. In Norris, S. (ed.) *Multimodality and Practice: Investigating Theory-in-Practice-through-Methodology*, 138 -151. New York: Routledge.

Introduction

Advertisers and marketers today, like the journalists Scollon studied (1998, p. 156), “are broadcasting and writing into a highly interdiscursive, contested, and social space in many cases and in others they are being pasted up as wallpaper or used to wrap fish.” In the 21st century there are more marketing messages being mediated via more mediational means than ever before. According to *Art & Copy* (Pray, 2009), a documentary film about advertising in the US, the average consumer ‘receives’ 3,500 marketing messages per day. All of this highlights the difficulty marketers encounter if they want people to pay more attention to their messages than they do to the wallpaper in the room or the wrapping fast food comes in. The point being that no-one *receives* any message at all if they are not paying *attention*. Gaining and keeping attention has always been at the heart of every social action (Jones, 2005) and it is vital to every information-processing activity (Olshavsky, 1994). Moreover, no matter how we look at communication “...from a mediated discourse perspective or a marketing communications stance - studies acknowledge that attention plays a crucial role in successful communication in the 21st century” (White, 2010). Yet, “it’s tougher than ever for new messages to break through our perceptual barriers” (Sacharin, 2001, p. ix). Sacharin (2001) even suggests this is because, “the constant noise is leading to an entire society with a form of attention deficit disorder” (p. ix). The ‘noise’ Sacharin is talking about comes not just from the number of messages being mediated by marketers but also from the plethora of *sites of engagement* (Scollon, 1998) where communication takes place, due to the continuing explosion of communications technologies and their applications. My use of Scollon’s term *sites of engagement* here

should not be confused, though, with the marketing term *media*. To say there has been an explosion of media due to the rapid rise of new technologies is true, but what is equally true is that, in social interaction terms, new technologies have both multiplied the number of sites of engagement where social actors engage and they have fundamentally changed the nature of communicative actions (Jones, 2005, 2009). Rather than media, such as TV, radio, billboards or the web, and their texts, merely denoting physical sites of engagement, we can also define them in Scollon's (1998) terms as being, "constructed through an interlocking set of social practices which produce a window within which a potential for mediated action becomes instantiated as discourse in real time" (p. 135), and the concept of "sites of engagement is useful to focus our attention on ... those moments when texts are actually in use – not just present in the environment" (p. 12).

Taking this definition of sites of engagement as a starting point, Jones (2005) argues that sites of engagement are more accurately seen as sites of attention. This idea is founded on the theory of *attention economies* (Goldhaber, 1997a and b). The theory of attention economies holds that "... in an age of information overload, what gives value to information is the amount of attention it can attract" (Jones, 2005, p. 152). Ensuring reception of any marketing message in an age of information overload, then, is intrinsically bound up with both gaining and keeping a person's attention at any single site of engagement and with creating multiple sites of engagement/sites of attention wherein a message is mediated. The aim of this chapter is to show how the convergence of media is being used to create new, interconnected or hybrid sites of engagement and spaces of communication. This chapter also demonstrates how, despite the threat of society developing a form of attention deficit disorder, marketing communications which require more attention rather than less are getting their messages through, particularly where old and new technologies converge to mediate that message. Moreover, it also illustrates how time and space are being redesigned through the use of convergent media in marketing contexts.

Bang goes the billboard

In 2007 New Zealand advertising agency, ColensoBBDO, created a billboard for its client, Deadline Couriers. That single billboard was displayed for only eight days at only one site on Nelson Street in Auckland. Yet that billboard was seen by over 1.3 million people and is still being viewed today.

Billboards have a long history in marketing communications. Traditionally they are two-dimensional mediational means that conform to a *grammar of visual design* (Kress, and Van Leeuwen, 1996). Marketing theory suggests that a billboard should be designed to mediate its message in “mere seconds” (Jewler and Drewniansy, 1998, p. 126). In order to do this, it should contain no more than seven words (Arens, 2004) and/or an arresting picture. It is essentially, then, a potential site of very little engagement, in terms of time spent by and the amount of attention required from any social actor to receive its message.

The Deadline billboard (fig.16) conforms to much of the grammar of visual design as seen in western visual culture; it has a ‘z’ shaped left to right reading path and a visual element that has greater semiotic salience than the others. This visual element, unusually, is a three-dimensional digital clock, which counts down the days. This feature acts as the *interpellation* (Sturken and Cartwright, 2001), which ‘hails’ the viewer and attracts their attention. The billboard mediates two messages. First, “This billboard will self destruct in (a reducing number of) days.” Second, “When Deadline Couriers give you a time, they mean it.” The billboard site was also live-streamed on the internet for eight days via a webcam set up across the street.



Figure 16. Deadline billboard before explosion. Reprinted with permission.

At 6pm on Sunday 30 July, 2007 the Deadline Couriers' billboard exploded (fig. 17). The explosion was watched by a crowd of spectators who gathered in Nelson Street to view the moment, as well as hundreds of thousands of people watching TVNZ's Channel ONE news programme and others who were watching via the internet live-stream. In the days leading up to the explosion, people went online to blog about the billboard. In the days following, tens of thousands went online either to blog, read online newspaper reports with

video footage or watch the explosion on youtube.com. People are still watching it explode on YouTube.



Figure 17. Deadline billboard after explosion. Reprinted with permission.

One billboard, eleven sites of engagement

Reception of a message mediated through means of a single billboard site usually involves one of two easily identifiable sites of engagement: either within a passing vehicle on the

street or on the pavement as a social actor walks towards or past the billboard. “Outdoor advertising is generally viewed from 100 to 500 feet away by people in motion” (Arens, 2004, p. 585). The Deadline billboard, though, not only mediates its messages within both these sites of engagement but there are also eight more opportunities for social actors to construct distinct sites of attention while receiving the messages mediated via the billboard. This is a list of 11 sites of engagement/attention with the Deadline billboard, each one defined by the social actors who constructed the interaction:

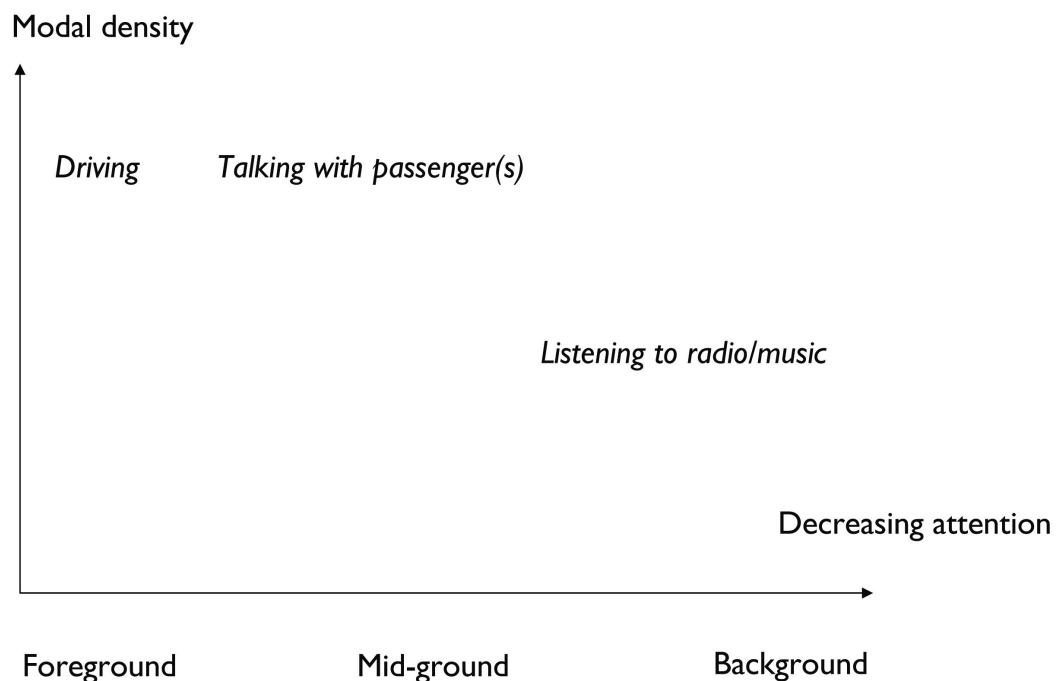
1. Vehicle passing by on the street (drivers)
2. Vehicle passing by on the street (passengers)
3. Pavement prior to the explosion (passers-by)
4. Pavement on the night of the explosion (gathered crowd)
5. TV screen - news programmes (viewers)
6. Computer screen/Web page leading up to explosion – live-streaming (viewers)
7. Computer screen/Web page after the explosion – YouTube (viewers)
8. Computer screen/Blog pages prior to explosion (bloggers/blog readers)
9. Computer screen/Blog pages after the explosion (bloggers/blog readers)
10. Newspaper (readers)
11. Computer screen/Online newspaper (viewers)

The social actions which construct each site of engagement allow us to define them as eleven distinct sites of attention. Further, the concept of modal density (Norris, 2004) provides us with a framework to analyse the differing levels of attention social actors pay at each different site. Modal density is defined as “the modal intensity and/or modal complexity through which a higher-level action is constructed” (Norris, 2004, p. 79). Modal density “indicates the level of attention/awareness that a social actor places on a certain higher-level action” (2004, p. 92). Norris (2004) suggests three levels of attention/awareness: foreground, mid-ground and background. This heuristic model helps us focus on relevant, simultaneously performed, higher-level actions.

Take, for example, the first site of engagement from our list. In theory a social actor driving past the Deadline billboard is foregrounding the higher-level action of driving: employing high modal density to carry out this action. In reality, we know that a driver may also be listening to the radio or CD, talking to a passenger or being distracted by passengers in the car. Thus the higher-level action of driving may well employ less than the highest level of modal density and may even be mid-grounded by a social actor (see Table 5).

Table 5. Deadline Couriers Modal Density graph, (White, 2012).

Foreground-background continuum



It is this decrease in or dilution of the level of modal density employed in the higher-level action of driving which allows another action to take place – interaction with the billboard. The model allows us to verify that, for those drivers who receive one or more messages mediated by means of the Deadline billboard, interacting with the billboard must entail a

higher modal density than listening to music, talking to passengers, etc. In other words, the driver is paying most attention to driving *and* reading the billboard; those higher-level actions are his or her primary focuses of attention. A similar analysis of each of the sites of engagement associated with the Deadline billboard would reveal different levels of attention employed at each site in order for a social actor to construct the higher-level action of receiving its mediated messages.

Turning now to those actions which involve the billboard's messages being mediated by means of a screen (TV or computer), we find that the site of engagement has been redefined by new technologies and that the social action of receiving messages mediated by the billboard has been fundamentally transformed. This corroborates and expands the view of Wersch (1998), who argues that new technologies do not only alter mediational means, they vitally transform the actions they mediate.

Receiving messages mediated by a billboard, then, need no longer entail a social actor ever being anywhere near the physical location of the billboard itself. In other words, the site at which a billboard is literally displayed may be only one of many sites of engagement with that particular billboard and it may not be the site of engagement within which most social actors receive its messages. Furthermore, for those social actors whose site of engagement includes either a television or computer screen (TV viewers, online newspaper readers, live-stream web cam watchers and YouTube surfers), the social actors who engaged with the Deadline Couriers' message at the site at which the billboard was literally displayed on the night of the explosion are semiotized (Iedema, 2003) as viewers/receivers *of* the message and resemiotized as participants *in* the message. This resemiotization of viewers, in turn, mediates a number of new messages to the TV viewers, online newspaper readers, live-stream web cam watchers and YouTube surfers. These new messages, although unwritten, communicate such things as: 'People don't usually gather in crowds to look at billboards'; 'Look how successful this advertising is'; 'This billboard is doing a great job'. These are quite different from the messages Deadline Couriers set out to mediate, but they are certainly messages ColensoBBDO set out to mediate.

These last two points in particular, concerning resemiotization and different kinds of messages mediated, corroborate Jones' (2009) recent discussion around *sites of display*. (Jones acknowledges that the concept of a *site of display* extends Scollon's (1998) original notion of a *site of engagement* and was originally coined by Jewitt (2006) while studying secondary school English classrooms where computers and video games were used to study literature.) After studying both a notice board where newspapers are displayed in a Chinese park and the website Fridae.com, Jones (2009) concludes: "First and foremost [sites of display] help construct relationships between those who have created the spectacle and those who consume it" (p. 116). In Jones' (2009) studies it was gay men who created the real 'spectacle' by actually putting themselves on 'display' when they turned up to read newspapers at that particular notice board, but his conclusion is equally borne out in the case of the Deadline billboard. Both the client, Deadline Couriers, and the agency, ColensoBBDO were constructing different relationships with those who 'consumed' the spectacle of the explosion. Equally, where Jones (2009, p. 119) found that male bodies displayed on Fridae.com are semiotized and resemiotized through interaction with new technologies, we see that a similar resemiotization occurs with respect to those who gathered in the street to watch the Deadline explosion.

Finally, with regard to the Deadline billboard, we should note that the length of time spent by a social actor paying attention at any of the sites of engagement/attention/display goes beyond the mere seconds ascribed to them in the traditional marketing model (Jewler and Drewniany, 1998). Some people watched the billboard counting down over a period of eight days. Indeed, the Deadline example provides evidence that billboards in the age of information overload can engage people's attention for longer than a few seconds and that mediating messages over as short a time as possible is not a pre-requisite for engaging people's attention, and therefore communicating with them.

Attention! Slow moving traffic

Speed is the major road safety issue in New Zealand (Land Transport NZ, 2006). “Between 2001 and 2005, there were 318 injury crashes where a driver lost control of their vehicle on a bend in Rodney District. These resulted in 17 fatalities and 118 serious injuries as well as 365 minor injuries. This type of crash accounted for 51 per cent of all crashes in Rodney District compared with 25 per cent for all of New Zealand” (p. 2). “Entering corners too fast was the biggest single issue in loss of control crashes” (p. 3).

In 2008 Rodney District council set Saatchi & Saatchi, New Zealand the task of devising a billboard campaign to help reduce speeding on the roads in Rodney. Saatchi & Saatchi responded by creating a single billboard (fig.18) that was erected on one site and remained in place for one day, just past a notoriously dangerous bend on the road from Warkworth to Matakana. Unlike the Deadline billboard, this one remained in exactly the same state, as well as the same place. In this case a live post-crash accident scene (complete with real police officers and vehicles, a real ambulance and paramedics, real fire attendants and fire engine, an overturned smashed car, a driver trapped in the car and a screaming, injured passenger – fig.19), was staged on a bend in the road about half a kilometre before the actual billboard site. Traffic slowed to a crawl as cars passed the staged accident with drivers and passengers alike ‘rubber necking’ to see what had happened. As soon as vehicles passed the ‘accident scene’ most drivers accelerated away only to encounter the billboard itself some 200 or 300 metres further down the road. The billboard read: “Is a crash the only thing that will make you slow down?” (fig.18)



Fig 18. Rodney billboard. Reprinted with permission.

Consequently, the site of engagement constructed by social actors engaging with the billboard extended throughout the day between one and two kilometres along the road and focused drivers' attention for periods of between five and fifteen minutes, without causing any accidents. Other sites of engagement also developed around TV and radio broadcasts, via news programmes and traffic updates.

This campaign mediates its message to 'slow down' with the billboard itself being neither the primary mediational means nor the primary focus of attention for any social actor receiving that message. Remarkably, in an age of potential attention deficit disorder towards unsolicited marketing communications, the billboard attempts to engage drivers and passengers in the mediation of its message for up to 20 minutes (depending on the duration of the traffic hold-up). Once again, Norris' (2004) modal density model allows us to reasonably hypothesise that, whereas a driver passing the Deadline billboard may 'mid-ground' the higher-level action of driving for a few seconds in order to interact with its message, a driver passing the staged accident would almost certainly 'foreground' his or her focus of attention first on the traffic jam and then on the 'accident scene'. Indeed, the higher-level action of driving is likely to be a relatively backgrounded action compared with the driver's interaction with the slow-down and the accident scene itself. I would also suggest it is reasonable to extrapolate that focusing on 'the accident' and its build up primes

drivers and passengers to foreground the billboard and therefore receive its message when they encounter it a few hundred metres further up the road. In much the same way, the count-down clock on the Deadline billboard primed social actors to foreground its message, even though they may have had to wait eight days to fully receive it.



Fig 19. Rodney staged accident. Reprinted with permission.

The Rodney billboard also exhibits an important similarity to the Deadline billboard when we apply the principles Jones ascribes to social interactions around sites of display: i.e. social actors are resemiotized when they interact with it. In the case of the Rodney billboard, drivers and passengers are first semiotized as participants *in* the message and then resemiotized as viewers/receivers *of* the message. Moreover, for those interacting with the billboard via television, radio or newspaper reports, drivers and passengers take on a communicative salience as participants *in* the message that dramatically affects reception *of* the message. In other words, drivers, passengers and the cars they are travelling in take on a role of *interpellation* not unlike the count-down clock in the Deadline billboard which first attracts attention to the message being mediated.

Driving past versus driving towards

It is also interesting to compare the quality of attention a social actor pays throughout the action of receiving the message mediated by the Rodney District billboard with the quality of attention paid by a similar social actor receiving the message mediated by the Deadline

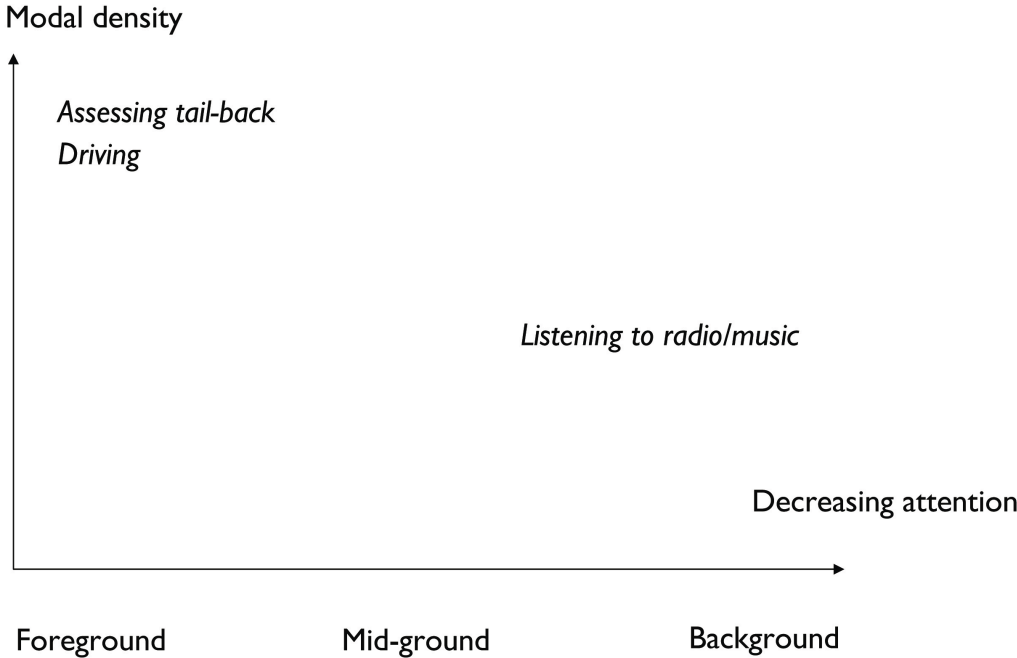
billboard. As an example, if we look at the actions of a driver (rather than any passengers) travelling along the road from Warkworth to Matakana in Rodney District on the day the billboard was in place and the accident scene was staged and then compare them with the actions already described of a driver travelling down Nelson Street in Auckland passed the Deadline billboard, we can, using Norris' modal density model assess that the driver in Rodney District pays a higher level of attention to the message it mediates than the driver in Nelson Street and that arguably the quality of the reception of the two messages differs in intensity.

We have already seen how a decrease in or dilution of the level of modal density employed in the higher-level action of driving can occur if a driver is also *mid-grounding* the action of listening to, say, music in the car. We have described how this dilution of focused attention may allow another action to take place – the interaction with the billboard.

When we look at the changing focuses of attentions paid by a driver travelling along the Road from Warkworth to Matakana, however, we can say that there is a different interaction occurring. The traffic tail-back does not just dilute the level of modal density employed in the higher-level action of driving, it dramatically reduces it, so that the social actor is employing similarly high levels of modal density to both the higher-level action of driving and the higher-level action of addressing the cause and extent of the tail-back. We might equally say the social actor is focusing on addressing the cause and extent of the tail-back as much as, or maybe even more than, he or she is focusing on driving (see Table 6). When we consider the action of receiving the message of the Rodney District billboard, it is evident that the driver's attention begins to be focused on the mediated message up to one kilometre before he or she encounters the billboard itself. Furthermore, it is reasonable to argue that such a driver foregrounds the billboard (and the reception of its message) as he or she moves closer to it as a result of having been semiotized in the tail-back as part of the message. Even though the driver is at first unaware even of the existence of the billboard or their own part in mediating the message to themselves and other drivers, that does not alter the construction of the actions described above.

Table 6. Rodney District Modal Density graph, (White, 2012).

Foreground-background continuum



Once again, we can say that the Rodney District example provides evidence that billboards in the age of information overload can and do engage people’s attention for far longer periods of time than a few seconds. I would also suggest that mediating messages over a much longer period of time than has traditionally been associated with marketing communications on billboards is proving an effective way to engage people’s attention, and therefore communicate with them in an age of information overload.

When is a billboard no longer a billboard?

It is important to note here that the term billboard itself is being redefined as media converges in an age of information overload. No longer is a billboard constrained in a two-dimensional static format. The Deadline billboard, for example, when it is viewed on the TV news or on YouTube could arguably be seen more as a moving image. Similarly, the dramatised accident that precedes the physical location of the Rodney billboard can be seen as a live-action moving image. The difference between the two is that the Rodney dramatisation is an essential part of the message mediated by the physical billboard, whereas the TV news and YouTube clips of the Deadline billboard extend and redefine the mediational means associated with the billboard's message. This connects with the discussion of how new technologies re-mediate processes of reception by Jewitt (2012) in her chapter on technology and reception. Jewitt (2012) uses a case study of high school students interacting with a digital novel in a classroom to show how new technologies extend the notion of reception so that the novel is 're-made' as a video, a musical or a comic strip, depending on how students choose to interact with the technology in order to receive the story.

Discussion

Although both the Deadline and the Rodney billboards are undoubtedly 'dramatic' it is the redefinition of the space and time associated with mediating and receiving their marketing messages in an age of information overload that produces the most dramatic transformation (Wersch, 1998) from the established norms of such communicative actions. In order to understand these transformations more clearly I will look at space and time separately.

Space

The physical space occupied by the billboards I have examined conforms to established parameters: each was physically displayed on a standard-sized billboard site measuring approximately 6 metres x 3 metres. Taking Arens' (2004) view that most people receive a message mediated by a billboard while they are 'on the move' and using his idea of their distance from the actual billboard, we can say that the *communicative space* of a typical billboard extends between 30 and 150 metres.

It is evident that the Deadline billboard makes use of a similarly conventional *communicative space* to mediate its message at four sites of engagement (vehicle passing by on the street [drivers]; vehicle passing by on the street [passengers]; pavement prior to the explosion [passers-by]; pavement on the night of the explosion [gathered crowd]). Yet, despite the unusual interpellation of the Deadline billboard (the digital count-down clock), it is only the convergence with new communication technologies which actually transforms the *communicative spaces* and actions associated with this billboard. The web camera across the street, which live-streamed the count-down, extended the *communicative space* and resulted in social actors creating four more sites of engagement (computer screen/web page leading up to explosion [live-streaming]; computer screen/web page after the explosion [YouTube]; computer screen/blog pages prior to explosion; computer screen/blog pages after the explosion). Similarly, the sites of engagement that were constructed around newspapers, computer screen/online newspaper and TV screens (news programmes) resulted from a convergence of communication technologies.

The *communicative spaces* thus created by these technological convergences are remarkably different from the 30 or 150 metres within which communication is said to be mediated by 'conventional' billboards. On the one hand, the billboard is transformed from being what Arens (2004) labels 'outdoor advertising' and can become, like TV, radio, newspaper and magazine communication, 'indoor advertising'. It is no longer constrained by its physical dimensions. On the other hand, the social actor receiving the messages will

be more or less focused on the higher-level action of reading the billboard depending in which *communicative space* they are located.

I have already shown how car drivers may foreground, mid-ground or even background receiving a billboard's messages. The cars' passengers and passers-by on foot construct the higher-level action of reading the Deadline billboard with similarly varying intensities of modal focus. Those social actors who receive the billboard's messages via a screen, though, occupy a *communicative space* in which I suggest they are much more likely to be foregrounding rather than mid-grounding or backgrounding the reception of the message. In such instances, physical distance from the billboard itself becomes irrelevant to the mediation of the billboard's messages. That is to say, the mode of proxemics takes on a different role in mediating the message. The social actor can literally get closer to the site of engagement/display (the screen) and can focus on the message being mediated with less distraction than is likely to occur on the street, whether in a car or on the pavement. Furthermore, whereas Scollon (1998) has shown that a TV is as likely to be peripheral to the social actions going on in a room as it is to be fundamental, I would argue that the social actor who clicks on a YouTube clip or who is engaged in actually blogging is more likely to be foregrounding the watching of the clip for the duration of that clip or foregrounding the writing or reading of the blog. As Jones' (2005) study of gay men and high school students logged on to chat rooms showed, it is not the screen itself which is the site of attention but the content displayed on the screen. Indeed, whereas the distance a social actor can be positioned from the physical location of the billboard and still successfully receive its messages can expand to thousands of miles, the *communicative space* afforded by the convergence of old and new technologies shrinks to mere centimetres.

My use of the term *communicative space* in this discussion grows out of Scollon's (2005) consideration of *spatial entrainments*, which arise when actions are performed within a confined space. Whereas Scollon's example was that of a room in which two men were nailing down floorboards, the entrainments he identified seem equally applicable to the social action of receiving messages mediated by billboards. Scollon describes three spatial

entrainments: *bounded spaces*, such as rooms and garden fences; *permeable spaces*, such as those afforded by opening doors and windows; *unbounded spaces*, such as the street on which a flower seller sets up a stall. The purpose of *spatial entrainment* is to examine the full range of spaces within which an action is integrated. *Bounded spaces* tend to constrain actions, affecting how they are carried out and how many people are involved. *Permeable spaces* may reduce constraints or even cause further restraints; e.g. an open window allowed tools to poke out in Scollon's room but also caused dust to blow through the house. *Unbounded spaces* allow actions to take place without undue consideration for boundaries.

A further examination of the Rodney billboard illustrates how these *spatial entrainments* create what I call the *communicative space*. Further, to describe the term in more detail, I define the *communicative space* as comprising all *spaces* constituting an essential part of the site of engagement within which the message is mediated.

The Rodney billboard was sited on a road in a rural district where the majority of passers-by would be travelling in a vehicle, rather than on foot, and so the *bounded space* within which most social actors interacted with the mediated message was the interior of a car. A *permeable space* was afforded by opening the car window and it is reasonable to assume that many of the social actors passing the dramatised accident opened a car window in order to get a closer look at the cause of the tail-back. The dramatised accident took place within an *unbounded space* by the side of the road and thus became part of the *communicative space* afforded by the message mediated by the billboard itself. Finally, the billboard sited some distance further up the road was located within a physically *unbounded space* but a communicatively *bounded space* because the successful mediation of its message depends entirely on where it is located. Furthermore, although the road might appear to be an *unbounded space*, in terms of the social action of receiving the billboard's message it should be viewed as *bounded space* that constitutes an essential element of the *communicative space*, which is part of the site of engagement within which the Rodney billboard's message is mediated. Thus I would argue that the physical *communicative space* within which the Rodney billboard mediates its message extends beyond the 30 and 150 metres normally associated with billboards to as much as a

kilometre, depending on the extent of the tail-back when a social actor enters the *communicative space* on the road. Using this definition of a *communicative space*, though, it is interesting to note that the road where the Deadline billboard is located should be classified as an *unbounded space* because the position on the road that it is located in is not an essential component of the message it is mediating.

Time

Both the Deadline and Rodney billboards are two-dimensional mediation means that largely conform to the *grammar of visual design* (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996), which marketing theory suggests will allow a billboard to mediate its message in “mere seconds” (Jewler and Drewniansy 1998, p.126): they both have a conventional ‘z’ shaped, left to right reading path across simple bold text. Yet, in both instances, any social actor who engages with the billboard for mere seconds would not actually *receive* the message that it is mediating.

Looking first at the Deadline billboard, when a social actor driving or walking past receives the message that the billboard will explode in eight days, the billboard has not actually mediated its primary intended message. It is only when a social actor actually witnesses the billboard exploding that the intended message is mediated successfully: ‘When Deadline Couriers give you a time, they mean it.’ In order, then, to successfully mediate its intended message the Deadline billboard *requires* a social actor to foreground the higher-level act of receiving the message for more than mere seconds. It’s possible that some people watched the billboard counting down over a period of eight days and stood in the street to witness the actual explosion. Though engagement with the billboard for a period of eight days by any single social actor cannot be verified, even those who did no more than stand in the street on the night of the explosion were foregrounding the higher-level act of receiving its mediated message for many more than mere seconds. The same can be said for any social actor who witnessed the billboard exploding by logging in to YouTube, commenting on the

spectacle (or reading that comment) via a blog or watching it as part of a bulletin on the Sunday evening news.

Turning now to the Rodney billboard, the words of the text simply pose a question: ‘Is a crash the only thing that will make you slow down?’ It’s a textual message that is indeed mediated in mere seconds, but when we define *reception* of the message as a social action rather than simple comprehension of text, it is clear that social interaction with the Rodney billboard extends for a much longer time span.

Those social actors who *received* the message as drivers and passengers on the road from Warkworth to Matakana were in fact interacting with the billboard for up to 20 minutes (depending on the duration of the traffic hold-up), even though they may not have been aware of the precise nature of that interaction throughout that time span. As I have noted earlier, when social actors foreground the tail-back and the staged accident they are *primed* to foreground any message which directly relates to the time they have spent engaged in that social action. Similarly, those social actors who *received* the message mediated by the Rodney billboard where only radio, TV or the internet afforded a site of engagement were also *primed* to foreground the reception of that message by foregrounding the reportage of the traffic hold-up. Thus, the mediation of the billboard’s message and its successful reception was never intended to be accomplished in mere seconds. Moreover, it is not just the convergence of traditional and new technologies that physically transforms the social actions of mediating and receiving the Rodney billboard’s message, I would argue that it is in response to the age of information overload that the Rodney billboard deliberately seeks to create a site of attention which engages the social actor for an extended period of time.

Conclusions

The examples we have looked at in this chapter suggest that the age of information overload is producing refinements, redefinitions and transformations of multimodal communicative actions involved in the reception of mediated messages.

We have seen that there is evidence of a dramatic increase in the number of sites of engagement/attention/display that can be associated with any single mediated marketing message. Not just in terms of how many different 'places' people can interact with that message, but more importantly in terms of how many different ways people can engage with and receive the same message. At the very least, within each site of engagement/attention/display the messages a social actor receives can vary in both content and number. Moreover, the convergence of traditional and new technologies is bringing about a redefinition of the contexts and the time spans associated with any single mediated marketing message. One key development in this regard is that the process of engagement and *priming to receive* as part of the mediation of the marketing message is, I would argue, a deliberate strategy to counteract the possible desensitisation to unsolicited marketing messages that may or may not be occurring in an age of information overload. In fact, despite the threat of society developing a form of attention deficit disorder, marketing communications which require more attention rather than less are getting their messages through, particularly where old and new technologies converge to mediate that message. Furthermore, mediating marketing messages over as short a time space as possible is not prescriptive to the successful reception of that message, even in an age of information overload.

6 – CONCLUSION

This chapter presents a summary of the key findings of the research, followed by an assessment of the importance of the study to the fields of multimodal and mediated discourse, marketing theory and marketing communications in the age of information overload. The chapter concludes with a consideration of some practical applications arising from the findings and suggestions for further research.

6.1 – Summary of study and methodology

The primary objective of this research was to find out how advertising posters and billboards can successfully command more than three or four seconds of a person's attention in an age of information overload. A secondary aim was to discern whether conventional marketing theory concerning the design and reception of posters and billboards is still relevant in an age of information overload.

In order to discover how posters and billboards successfully command attention in an age of information overload, it was first necessary to investigate how billboards and posters gained attention and mediated messages prior to the age of information overload. Three posters deliberately based on very similar semiotic compositions and created between 1914 and 1940 were first analysed in depth. An advertisement created in 2005 and a web banner created in 2008 were also analysed to illustrate the fact that the same semiotic template is still in use. While many studies are exclusively concerned with either the analysis of a particular text or the social actions constructed around it, it was necessary in this study to consider both aspects as they relate to each other. The approach involved the application of both the grammar of visual design (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996) and multimodal and mediated discourse methodologies (Scollon, 1998; Norris, 2004; Norris and Jones, 2005) to each text. This method of analysis revealed how semiotic composition affects the modal

density employed by anyone interacting with conventional posters and billboards. This in turn established the framework used for assessing levels of attention involved when social actors receive messages mediated by billboards and posters¹. The same methodology was then applied to analysing a campaign of posters created in 2007 and two separate billboards created in 2007 and 2008. In all three examples, new communications technology had an effect on either the mediation or the reception of the message or both.

6.2 – Summary of key findings

The first key finding of this research is that the semiotic composition of a conventional poster or billboard directly affects the level of modal density employed by the reader/viewer in receiving the message it mediates. Both the complexity of the reading path and the number of communicative modes involved (gaze, gesture, language, etc.) influence whether the elements ‘fuse’ to form a single communicative action or not (Van Leeuwen, 2005). Where the elements do fuse, high modal density indicates that the viewer employs a high level of focused attention in order to construct the action of reading. In other words, where the poster or billboard is the exclusive mediational means, the simpler its reading path and the fewer the communicative modes, the greater the level of attention employed in reading its message.

The second key finding is that new communications technologies associated with the age of information overload can and do transform posters and billboards as mediational means in a number of ways:

- i) New technologies can and do affect the depth and quality of attention employed by people interacting with messages mediated by posters and billboards. Analysis of the NZ Army data, for example, clearly showed that people interacting with the posters were engaged in focused action and therefore paying a high level of attention to the messages being mediated, no matter what else was going on around them.

- ii) New technologies can affect the design and semiotic composition of posters and billboards radically. In the case of the NZ Army posters, we saw how the conventional grammar of visual design regarding salience and reading paths was completely ignored because the method of appellation used to initially gain attention made use of SMS text messaging.
- iii) New technologies dramatically affect the amount of time people can and do engage with messages mediated via posters and billboards. Far from being restricted to an interaction which lasts mere seconds, people engaged with the NZ Army, Deadline and Rodney messages anywhere from just over half a minute to as much as eight days.
- iv) New technologies can dramatically increase the number of the sites of engagement associated with any single poster or billboard. In the analysis of the Deadline billboard, eleven separate sites of engagement were identified. Whereas, a conventional billboard might afford up to four sites of engagement – one or two in the street and two within a passing vehicle.
- v) New technologies can dramatically affect the nature of the sites of engagement associated with any single poster or billboard. The analysis of the Deadline billboard showed that sites of engagement were constructed not only by passers-by on the street and in cars, but also around a number of websites on computer screens and around news broadcasts on televisions. The Rodney billboard revealed evidence of sites of engagement constructed around websites on computer screens, around news broadcasts on televisions and around news broadcasts on radios.
- vi) New technologies can alter the physical spaces associated with the meditation of a message via a poster or billboard. No longer is an area extending from 30 to 150 meters in front of any single poster or billboard site either the only or even the most important space associated with mediating its message. New

technologies extended the space associated with the NZ Army posters to anywhere 'nearby'. New technologies extended the space in which the Deadline Couriers' communication took place to spaces located thousands of kilometres from the actual billboard site. Similarly, new technologies extended the space in which the Rodney billboard communication took place to spaces located across the whole of the North Island of New Zealand.

- vii) New technologies can re-make (Jewitt, 2012) posters and billboards so that they are remediated as moving images when a TV, computer or a cell phone screen is employed as a key mediational means.

The third key finding of this research is that those physical spaces that constitute an essential part of the site of engagement within which a message is mediated can usefully be described as forming a single semiotic unit. When the mediation of a message is seen as a single communicative action (Van Leeuwen, 2005) it becomes clear that such spaces do not operate as separate geographic sites but are more accurately described as a single *communicative space* associated with a particular social interaction.

The fourth key finding is that mediating messages via posters and billboards over as short a time as possible (e.g. three or four seconds) is not pre-requisite to successful communication in an age of information overload. Audiences can and do interact with such messages for much longer periods of time. Concomitant with this finding is the emergence of a communicative practice that I have described as *priming to receive*. The count-down clock used on the Deadline billboard and the staged traffic accident and consequent traffic jam prior to the Rodney billboard fulfil this function.

The research also revealed that new communications technologies can affect the roles played by people interacting with messages mediated by posters and billboards in a fundamental way: social actors can have a communicative salience as participants *in* a message as well as simultaneously being receivers *of* a message. This semiotization and

resemiotization (Iedema, 2003) is most likely to occur when people view billboard interactions via TV or via another screen when visiting YouTube or other websites. It is worth noting that resemiotization also occurs, though, in the case of those who were caught up in the Rodney accident traffic tail-back and who subsequently interacted with the billboard further along the road.

6.3 – Importance of study

Because this study analyses both how advertisers go about getting attention and it examines the quality of attention required of an individual to successfully receive a message, it differs significantly from other studies in the field. Most importantly, in establishing the framework to assess attention, this study reveals the direct link between semiotic composition (design) and social action (attention). Reading paths, for example, are often described as z-shaped, circular, irregular and so on, but this study argues that high modal density (focus of attention) is directly associated with refined modal composition.

In finding that the physical spaces which constitute an essential part of the site of engagement within which a message is mediated form a single semiotic unit and subsequently proposing the concept of the *communicative space*, this study adds to and extends the application and utility of mediated and multimodal discourse analysis. The concept of a *communicative space* also provides an alternative approach to understanding marketing communications in particular. As outlined further below, conventional marketing theory has the potential to be influenced by mediated and multimodal discourse.

This study challenges the relevance of conventional marketing theory regarding the design of posters and billboards and the reception of the messages they mediate in an age of information overload. Firstly, the findings argue against the still prevailing dogmatism of the statement that a poster or billboard must communicate its message in mere seconds (Jewler and Drewniarny, 1998). Secondly, the findings show that the convergence of traditional media (posters and billboards) with new communication technologies challenges

the notion that posters and billboards are still *most often* viewed from a distance that varies between 100 and 500 feet by people who are passing by (Arens, 2004). If the phrase ‘most often’ is employed on the basis that most people view a poster or billboard in this way, the study clearly shows that many more people can and are viewing some billboards and posters in a completely different context. More accurately, I have said that new technologies can and are increasing the number and nature of the sites of engagement associated with any single poster or billboard.

The limitations of conventional marketing theory are further highlighted in this study (Chapter 4) when compared to the consideration of gaining, keeping and assessing attention around a poster or billboard from a mediated and multimodal discourse perspective. The crucial difference is that one approach looks at posters and billboards only as they are present in the environment, while the other also looks at them when they are actually in use. Thus, conventional marketing theory tends to be primarily concerned with the potential for a poster or billboard to engage its audience only for as long as it might take to simply comprehend its text.

This study also goes some way to arguing against the notion that society in the age of information overload is in danger of developing a form of attention deficit disorder (Sacharin, 2001). This fear arises when considering the question of whether people are willing or able to engage with unsolicited marketing messages in an age of information overload. The *modal density foreground-background continuum* (Norris, 2004) and the concept of *a site of attention* (Jones, 2005) help shed light on whether we actually do spend our lives battling through an information blizzard (Sacharin, 2001). Understanding where attention is focused as part of any given social interaction gives a clearer view of how behaviour is organised than simply acknowledging people’s general busyness. This is critical because, as already noted, one of the primary functions of advertising and marketing communications is to influence people’s behaviour (Arens, 2004; Jewler and Drewniary, 1998) and as Jones (2005) states, “attention is organised around behaviour and behaviour is organised around attention” (p. 152).

6.4 – Implications for practice

In Chapter 3 I suggest that, with regard to advertising and marketing communications, multimodal discourse analysis could contribute in two specifically important ways. First, assessing levels of attention that can be said to have occurred when social actors engage with marketing messages gives verifiable value to those communications. Second, being able to assess whether marketing communications are likely to elicit a high level of attention in order to mediate their messages could help refine their design and influence the form which those communications eventually take. In terms of academic practice, these suggestions offer academics a new way to investigate advertising effectiveness beyond the commercial and executional concerns which have dominated the study to date. In terms of commercial practice, demonstrating how a funnel of commitment (Scollon, 2001a) reinforces a social actor's commitment towards a specific objective, for example, might well help advertising agencies convince their clients that certain communication concepts are more likely to achieve their stated communication objectives.

In Chapter 4 I suggest that it can be argued that any single billboard and its geographical site cannot have a truly communicative value unless and until it actually becomes a site of engagement. Again, this mediated and multimodal discourse perspective might shed new light on how to value (both commercially and strategically) each billboard site, as well as the billboard concept that is displayed upon it, in an alternative or additional way to simply ascribing a monetary value based on the traffic count of vehicles expected to pass by the geographic site of each billboard.

6.5 – Suggestions for further research

In proposing the concept of the *communicative space* as a new methodological tool to be included in mediated and multimodal discourse analysis this thesis demonstrates applications of the model limited to interactions with billboards. To establish the true value of the concept, further applications need to be investigated, involving other mediational means and interactions beyond those around marketing communications.

On another methodological note, in defining the *communicative space* as comprising all *spaces* constituting an essential part of the site of engagement within which the message is mediated, I am not only drawing on Scollon's (2005) original concept of spatial entrainment, the new term also has application in another area of social semiotics – that of geosemiotics as outlined by Scollon and Scollon (2003). Geosemiotics is defined as “the study of the social meaning of the material placement of signs in the world” (p. 110). Although beyond the scope of this study, geosemiotics is a useful methodology for examining posters and billboards and would indeed highlight other communicative aspects of the data examined in this thesis. For example, the Rodney road safety billboard displays geosemiotic indexicality because it makes its meaning because of “its placement together with another sign or object” (p. 113). In this case the dramatised accident would be identified as an indexable because it gives meaning to the actual billboard located further along the road. Thus, a further study might look at the significance of the geographic placement of billboards with reference to different types of marketing message.

This thesis also identifies a practice that I call *priming to receive* the mediated messages associated with the Deadline and Rodney billboards. In Chapter 5 I suggested that *priming to receive* might be a part of deliberate semiotic sequence in marketing communications created in an age of information overload. Further research is needed to establish whether this can be shown to be the case. Further research might also be undertaken in order to discover whether this practice is part of marketing communications that use mediational means other than billboards. Certainly the use of a ‘teaser’ campaign is a well-established marketing communications strategy, particularly around the launch of new products.

Further research might investigate whether *priming to receive*, though, plays any part in the structure of other successful communications beyond just the field of marketing communications.

Finally, returning to the subject of ‘outdoor’ advertising (Arens, 2004), this thesis notes (Chapter 5) that when billboards are viewed via web cam streaming or as YouTube clips, they are transformed into indoor advertising. Further research might be undertaken to discover if other traditional mediational means (media) are undergoing a similar transformation through convergence with new communications technology.

NOTES

1. As Sacharin (2001) points out, although it is possible to measure attention scientifically, having people hooked up to brain scanning equipment all the time is neither practicable nor does it replicate the way they interact with marketing messages in the real world.

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Appendix 2

Abstract from journal article as it appeared in *Visual Communication*, Vol. 9, No. 4, November 2010.

Abstract:

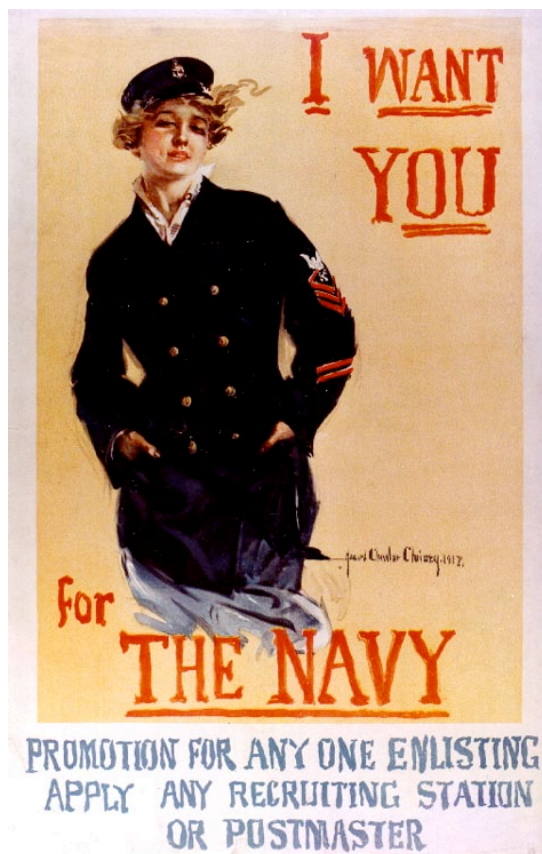
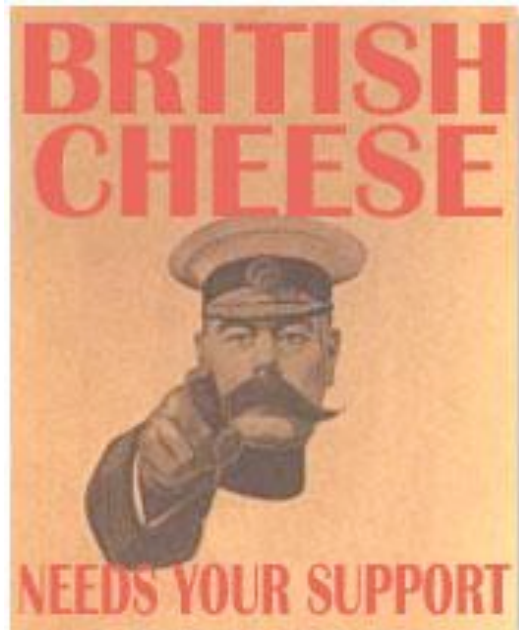
This article compares marketing communications mediated by conventional media (street posters) with those employing a convergence of old and new technologies (posters, SMS texting, Bluetooth transmitters). Firstly, it analyses in detail the famous Lord Kitchener poster, created in 1914 and shows that the semiotic and modal structure of the Kitchener poster became a template on which many subsequent communications have been and still are based. It then goes on to compare the semiotic and modal structure of the famous Kitchener poster with the NZ Army interactive recruitment posters created by Saatchi & Saatchi (New Zealand) in 2007. Building on Rodney Jones' (2005) notion of sites of engagement as sites of attention and using Sigrid Norris's (2004) concept of modal density the article analyses the NZ Army interactive posters and shows how communications in the age of information overload are more likely to be successful if they find new ways of getting attention and keeping attention. Furthermore, it suggests that multimodal discourse analysis can have an important and, as yet unrealised, role to play in refining the study of advertising and marketing communications effectiveness.

Key words:

Mediational means; salience; attention; multimodality; sites of engagement; modal density.

Appendix 3

Posters examined but not included in this thesis



Calling all SE London residents



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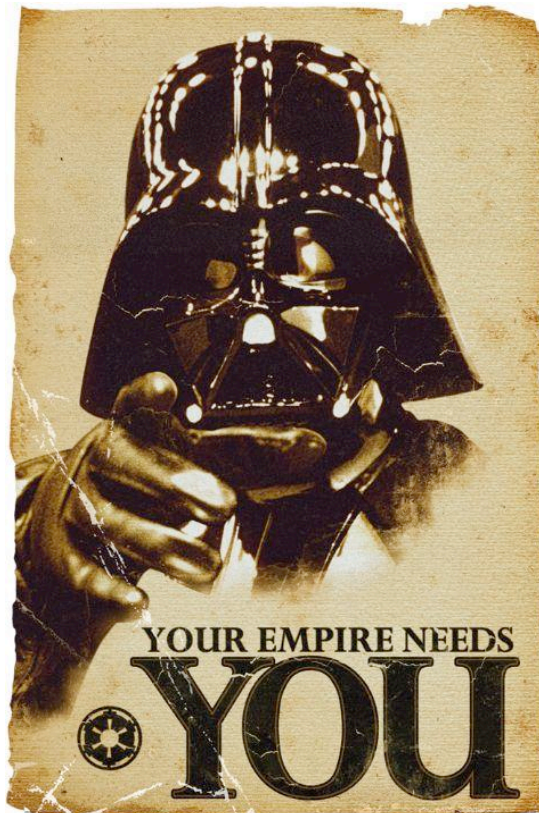
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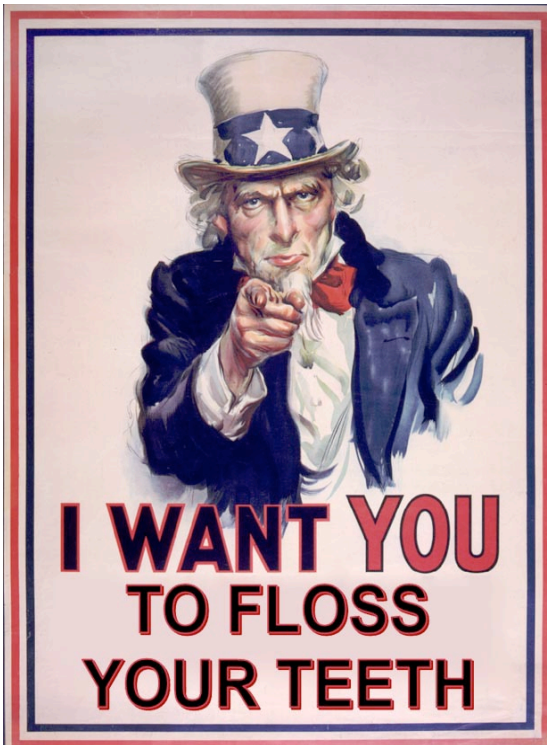


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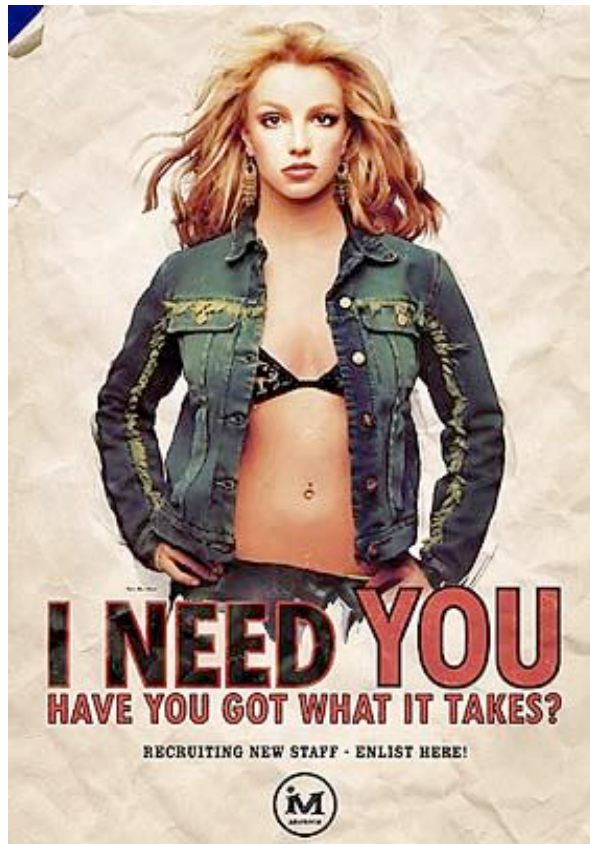
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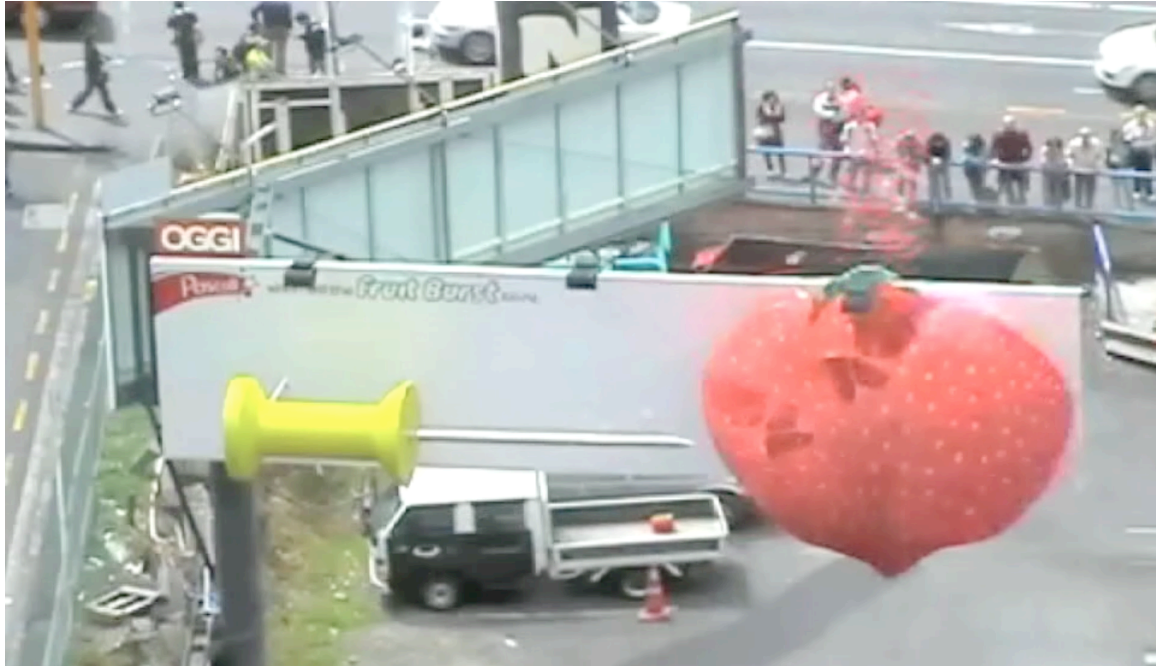


**CITIZEN TV
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YOU**



Appendix 4.

Billboards examined but not included in this thesis



Fruit Burst exploding billboard, 2009



Papakura District road safety 'bleeding' billboard, 2008



**Don't let your life
flash before you**

SLOW DOWN



Sequential billboards – Rodney County road safety, 2007



Sequential billboards – TV2, 2008