

Jesus in Film: Audience Reception from Poster Promotional Film

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Abstract

Art has seven categories, starts from literature, music, dance, writing, sculpture, theater, and film. One of the art categories has been debated into art with the consideration of the attraction of the film casting, the narration, the sound system to the social circumstances and the political background that affected the production of the film.

In 1916, a movie called “Christus” produced with an indication that there was a message. Stuart McPhail Hall, an initiator of cultural theories composed a theory that emphasizes the message encoding and decoding process. In the theory, the audience does not only receive the message delivered by the sender, but also be able to reproduce the message.

In the marketing mix communication, 4Ps elements always become a part of the analysis. Film, in this case, is the product of movie maker or producer. Thus, in the process of film socialization and marketing, those elements are then used to distribute the film. The promotion elements, a film always issues a poster to attract the audience which crystallizes the overall message of the film into symbols of headlines, bodycopy, and the logo of the film maker. This paper is used to record any message conveyed by and from the film which reflects Jesus' life in a movie poster.

Keywords: promotion, poster, advertisement, encoding, decoding, message, film

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Introduction

Various ads are spread around the world showing that advertising is a means of visible (visible) of marketing communications. Basically, the ad aims to sell the product in the form of goods, services, and ideas; because in general advertising broadly reach an audience of potential market both mass and a specific group that is targeted. It is a proof that the world of advertising is a dynamic industry and is strongly influenced by changes in technology, media, economic, social and political.

Six Eras in Advertising World

The timeline divides the evolution of advertising into stages, which reflect historical eras and the changes that lead to different philosophies and styles of advertising. The changes of environments, in particular media advancements, have changed the way advertising functions.

- a. The Early Age of Print (1704 – 1850)
Industrialization and mechanized printing spurred literacy, which encouraged businesses to advertise beyond just their local place of business. Ads of the early years look like what we call classified advertising today. Their objective was to *identify products* and *deliver information* about them including where they were being sold. The primary medium of this age was *print*, particularly newspapers. The first newspaper ad appeared in 1704 for Long Island real
- b. The Early Age of Agency (1850 - 1904)
The 19th century brought the beginning of what we now recognize as the advertising industry. Volney Palmer opens the *first ad agency* in 1848 in Philadelphia. The J. Walter Thompson agency is formed in 1864, the oldest advertising agency still in existence. P.T. Barnum brings a Swedish singer to the United States and uses a blitz of newspaper ads, handbills, and posters, one of the first *campaigns*. In 1868 the N.W. Ayer agency begins the *commission system* for placing ads—advertising professionals initially were agents or brokers who bought space and time on behalf of the client for which they received a commission, a percentage of the media bill. The J. Walter Thompson agency invents *the account executive* position, a person who acts as a liaison between the client and the agency. As advertisers and marketers became more concerned about creating ads that worked, professionalism in advertising began to take shape. The purpose of advertising during this period was to create demand, as well as a visual identity, for these new brands.
- c. The Scientific and Regulation Era (1904 - 1960)
In the early 1900s professionalism in advertising was reflected in the beginnings of a professional organization of large agencies, which was officially named the American Association of Advertising Agencies (known also as 4As) in 1917 (www.aaa.org). In addition to getting the industry organized, this period also brought a refining of professional practices. As 19th-century department store owner John Wanamaker commented, “Half the money I spend on advertising is wasted and the trouble is I don’t know which half.” That statement partly reflected a need to know more about how advertising works, but it also recognized the need to better target the message.

In the early 20th-century, modern professional advertising adopted scientific *research* techniques. Advertising experts believed they could improve advertising by blending science and art.

d. The Creative Revolution (1960 – 1970)

The creative power of agencies exploded in the 1960s and 1970s, a period marked by the resurgence of art, inspiration, and intuition. Largely in reaction to the emphasis on research and science, this revolution was inspired by three creative geniuses: Leo Burnett, David Ogilvy, and William Bernbach. Leo Burnett was the leader of what came to be known as the *Chicago school of advertising*. He believed in finding the “*inherent drama*” in every product. Ogilvy, founder of the Ogilvy & Mather agency, created enduring brands with *symbols*, such as the Hathaway Man and his mysterious eye patch for the Hathaway shirt maker, and handled such quality products as Rolls-Royce, Pepperidge Farm, and Guinness with product-specific and information-rich claims. The Doyle, Dane, and Bernbach (DDB) agency opened in 1949. From the beginning, William Bernbach—with his acute sense of words, design, and creative concepts—was considered to be the most innovative advertising creative person of his time. His advertising touched people—and persuaded them—by focusing on *feelings and emotions*.

e. Era of Accountability (1970 – 2001)

Starting in the 1970s, the industry-wide focus was on *effectiveness*. Clients wanted ads that produced sales, so the emphasis was on research, testing, and measurement. To be accountable, advertising and other marketing communication agencies recognized that their work had to prove its value.

f. Era of Change: Integration, International, and Internet (2001 – now)

Communication nowadays spreading *word of mouth* among a social network of consumers, companies became even more concerned about their practices and reputation. Integrated marketing communication (IMC) is another technique that managers began to adopt in the 1980s as a way to better coordinate their brand communication. Integration and consistency makes marketing communication more efficient and thus more financially accountable. (Moriarty, 2012: 13–17)

The JESUS Film

Jesus as the Christ, through Christianity, has experienced a long and varied relationship to those traditions long recognized as major religions of the world. (Tatum, 2009: 229). The early Jesus-films are highly episodic in structure and content, composed of "series of tableaux, autonomous units. Simple cuts and title cards join episodes and serve as rough transitions between them. The films evince no shaping of events into an integral narrative whole. The real connections between episodes, the transitions, are spontaneously made by the "reconstructive capacities of the viewer familiar with the Gospels that is, one who has already done that work of shaping and integrating the Gospel story as he or she has read or heard it. Rather than a narrative recounting of the story of Jesus or a fictionalized reworking of the Jesus-material, both of which become popular approaches later on in the Jesus-film

tradition, these early films are more like "reminders, iconographically cued remembrances from the source-text that is the Bible. (Baugh, 1997: 7)

Jesus is far too important a figure to be left only to the theologians and the church. In addition to the fact that postmodernism makes the distinction between high and low culture rather ambiguous, there are three justifications for JESUS-films. First, Jesus, along with the hero of the Western in various incarnations, is the American icon. Second, Jesus is a sign contested by various ideologies. We invest Jesus with our own personal meanings and use that construct as an authority for our own programs. Interestingly, while scholarship often obscures its ideological designs, such investments are rather obvious in religious and aesthetic criticism of the Jesus films. Third, and most important, comment on Jesus films simply because it is interesting. (Walsh, 2003: ix)

Films are neither icons to be emulated, nor are they distillations of evil. They are cultural products, deeply informed by the perspectives, values, and aspirations of their makers. They beg for creative discussion, for it is finally the uses to which Hollywood films are put that determines their function in American society. Many moviegoers considered the portrayal of religious subjects as irreverent in the early days of film. The Protestant iconoclasm in American culture, the immoral reputation of the theater and actors, and audience discomfort when actors did not look like the audience's mental image of various religious characters all contributed to this sense. Filmmakers and marketers attacked these notions by advertising the spectacular, authentic, and reverent manner of their treatment of religious subjects. For filmmakers, biblical and religious topics guaranteed audience interest and conferred an aura of respectability on their new industry. Accordingly, advertising rhetoric depicted the theater as a church and the film as a sermon. (Walsh, 2003: 2)

Early in the development of moving pictures there were those who immediately recognized the potential of film as a communications medium that could be used for evangelistic purposes – intending to bring non-believers to belief in Jesus as the Christ. Cecil B. De Mille, the great Hollywood impresario who created that Jesus spectacle known as *The King of Kings* (1927), wrote in his 1959 autobiography that he supposed more people had been introduced to the Jesus story through *The King of Kings* than through any other means, except for the Bible itself. He even calculated the total number of viewers to have been more than 800 million people; and he noted how the film had been used in faraway jungles by Catholic and Protestant missionaries. Obviously De Mille's silent film had enjoyed a long post-theatrical life. Certainly the best-known film produced for evangelistic use is the movie simply called *Jesus* (1979). I have previously observed how this film, which for thirty years has been "in the fields," intended to be a faithful rendering of the Jesus story according to the Gospel of Luke. Although this *Jesus* can be heard on screen in more than a thousand languages, the look of Jesus – played by Brian Deacon – remains unchanged. He still looks northern European. However, there is another Jesus film, from the same film era, that was adopted for evangelistic use. This Jesus projects a persona quite different from the Jesus in most other films. (Tatum, 2009: 256)

Poster Promotional

In the contemporary world, the purpose of the image has become its function as a product of mechanized production and financial exchange, especially as these are personalized in desires. The purpose of the advertising image is not to bring the absent object present, but to structure emotional reactions that are related to our consuming the product. The commercialization of the image is not limited merely to advertising, however. Even works of 'great art', the culturally hallowed masterpieces which adorn museums and the boardrooms of the corporate headquarters of multinational firms, have been stripped of their function as art and transformed into markers of wealth and power. As Robert Hughes has remarked, the extremely high prices paid for art 'have already done incalculable damage to the idea of art as a socially shared medium freely accessible to thought and judgment (Krug, 2005: 80)

The elaboration of precise aesthetic and interpretive systems, that is, social framings for the subjectivity of the dominant view, was well established by the end of the nineteenth century. The new mass production of the newspapers, facilitated by advances in printing technology, ensured the ubiquity of the image within the cultural landscape. The multiplying numbers of images guaranteed the success of such a system through its very commonness, through its own vulgarity. The new world of the image was created simultaneously with the creation of individual psyches which were well accustomed to the fleeting glance, the flickering image, and which were capable of taking in everything important in a glance (Krug, 2005:85)

An obsolete term for what is now described as poster, packaging, display and advertising design. The term itself was an uneasy Victorian invention, the word 'commercial' being intended to relegate these areas of graphic design to a lowly status. Communication design as a design discipline stresses the importance of experimentation within the framework of the contemporary design profession and the redefinition of traditional design areas, exploring new relationships between text, image and new technologies. It also encompasses information design, which focuses on making complex information, such as that required for forms, spreadsheets and databases, easier to understand. (McDermott, 2007: 43)

Audience Reception Theory – Encoding Decoding

Stuart Hall's "Encoding Decoding" model of communication essentially states that meaning is encoded by the sender and decoded by the receiver and that these encoded meanings may be decoded to mean something else. That is to mean, the senders encode meaning in their messages according to their ideals and views and the messages are decoded by the receivers according to their own ideals and views, which may lead to miscommunication or to the receiver understanding something very different from what the sender intended. (Hall 1993, 91)

Audience reception theory can be traced back to work done by British Sociologist Stuart Hall and his communication model first revealed in an essay titled "Encoding/Decoding." Hall proposed a new model of mass communication which highlighted the importance of active interpretation within relevant codes (Hill, 2010).

The social situations of readers/viewers/listeners may lead them to adopt different stances. 'Dominant' readings are produced by those whose social situation favours the preferred reading; 'negotiated' readings are produced by those who inflect the preferred reading to take account of their social position; and 'oppositional' readings are produced by those whose social position puts them into direct conflict with the preferred reading (Wilson, 2009)

The Hall/Morley model invites analysts to categorize readings as 'dominant', 'negotiated' or 'oppositional'. This set of three presupposes that the media text itself is a vehicle of dominant ideology and that it hegemonically strives to get readers to accept the existing social order, with all its inequalities and oppression of underprivileged social groups.

Conclusion

JESUS films with the classification of the film promotion poster in each era of advertising history are listed below:

1. Scientific and Regulation Era

- 1903 - La Vie Et La Passion De Jesus Christ - Dir Lucien Nonguet
- 1906 - La Naissance, La Vie Et La Mort Du Christ - Dir Alice Guy
- 1912 - From The Manger To The Cross - Dir Sidney Olcott
- 1916 - Christus - Dir. Giulio Antammoro
- 1923 - Inri - Dir. Robert Wiene
- 1927 - King Of Kings, The - Dir. Cecil B. Demille
- 1935 - Golgotha - Dir. Julien Duvivier
- 1942 - Jesus De Nazareth - Dir José Díaz Morales
- 1951 - I Beheld His Glory - Dir. John T. Coyle
- 1952 - El Martir Del Calvario - Dir. Miguel Morayta
- 1954 - Day Of Triumph - Dir. John T. Coyle, Irving Pichel
- 1954 - Il Figlio Dell'uomo - Dir Virgilio Sabel
- 1958 - O Redentor - Dir. Joseph I. Breen, Jr.

2. Creative Revolution Era

- 1964 - Gospel According To St. Matthew, The - Dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini
- 1965 - Greatest Story Ever Told, The - Dir. George Stevens
- 1969 - Son Of Man - Dir. Dennis Potter

3. Era of Accountability

- 1971 - Jesus Nuestro Señor - Dir. Miguel Zacarías
- 1973 - Jesus Christ Superstar - Dir. Norman Jewison
- 1975 - Il Messia - Dir. Roberto Rossellini
- 1977 - Jesus Of Nazareth
- 1978 - Karunamayudu (Ocean Of Mercy) - Dir. A. Bhimsingh
- 1979 - Jesus - Dir. Peter Sykes
- 1989 - Jesus Of Montreal - Dir. Denys Arcand
- 1995 - Revolutionary, The - Dir. Robert Marcarelli
- 1996 - Kristo - Dir. Ben Yalung
- 2003 - Gospel Of John, The - Dir. Philip Saville

4. Era of Change

- 2004 - Passion Of The Christ, The - Dir. Mel Gibson

- 2006 - Color Of The Cross Part 1 - Dir. Jean-Claude La Marre
- 2007 - Color Of The Cross Part 2 - Dir. Jean-Claude La Marre
- 2007 - Messiah, The - Dir. Nader Talebzadeh
- 2012 - Apostle Peter And The Last Supper - Dir. Gabriel Sabloff
- 2014 - Son Of God
- 2015 - Killing Jesus - Dir. Christopher Menaul

A focus group is a form of qualitative research in which a group of people are asked about their perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes towards a product, service, concept, advertisement, idea, or packaging. Questions are asked in an interactive group setting where participants are free to talk with other group members. The research question is the movie posters strengthen or weaken the message of JESUS as a redeemer.

Three results are (1) Audience in the dominant hegemony position stated that in each era, poster strengthen the message of JESUS as a redeemer (2) Audience in the negotiated position stated that in era of accountability, there are 2 posters that weaken the message of JESUS as a redeemer, (3) Audience in the oppositional position state that none of posters promotional film weaken the message of JESUS as a redeemer.

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