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Framing and Symbolic Modes in Public Service Announcements

by

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SUMMARY

This dissertation investigates selected South African televised public service announcements. Framing theory forms the basis of the examination of these socially orientated commercials as a mediated reconstruction of relevant social issues highlighted in the media at any one time. Framing elements are identified that assist the constructor of such commercials and guide the development of the public service announcement's narrative and structure. Symbolic modes are identified as key framing elements. Metaphor and metonymy as symbolic modes are investigated as being particularly instructive for their role in anchoring the core message of the public service announcement with imagery relevant to the general framing of the message.

In order to determine the suitability of framing and framing elements as guidelines for the constructor, an in-depth analysis is conducted to identify the presence of these elements in existing public service announcements. It is argued that the presence of framing elements in existing public service announcements shows a degree of consistency with which such elements are applied in the construction of social messages in the television medium. The process of constructing a public service announcement is documented, with the main focus being on the application of framing elements in this process. The application of framing elements in the construction of public service announcements shows these elements to be successful as guidelines for the constructor.

Framing and framing elements, including symbolic modes, are accepted as effective methods of development of the public service announcement, from an intuitive understanding of the organisation for which the message is created, to the final construction of the televised message. Televised public service announcements are explored as multifaceted socially orientated messages that allow various approaches for further investigation, including the investigation of these messages in other media, such as radio or in print.

Key terms

Public service announcements

Framing

Metaphor

Metonymy

Embodiment

OPSOMMING

Hierdie verhandeling ondersoek sekere uitgesoekte Suid-Afrikaanse, sosiaalgeoriënteerde advertensies (*PSAs*), soos uitgesaai op televisie. Raming (*framing*) vorm die basis van die ondersoek van sulke advertensies, as boodskappe van sosiale belang wat onder die soeklig in die media kom op enige spesifieke tydstip. Ramingselemente word geïdentifiseer as hulpmiddel vir die skepper van sulke advertensies. Ramingselemente sluit die figuurlike uitdrukkings metafoor en metonimie in, wat aan die skepper van sosiaalgeoriënteerde advertensies die geleentheid bied on 'n kernboodskap te vorm met die hulp van toepaslike beeldrykheid.

Om vastestel wat die rol van raming en ramingselemente in die konstruksie van *PSAs* is, is 'n analise onderneem om die aanwesighed van ramingselemente in sulke advertensies te bevestig. Die aanwesigheid van ramingselemente dui die mate waartoe hierdie elemente konsekwent deur skeppers van *PSAs* toegepas word. Die konstruksie van die *PSA* as proses word aangeteken, met die fokus op die werkswyse wat gevolg word in die toepassing van ramingselemente. Die aanwesigheid, sowel as die toepassing van raming en ramingselemente in *PSAs*, dui daarop dat hierdie metode en elemente wel beskou kan word as suksesvolle hulpmiddels in die konstruksie van die *PSA*.

Die identifisering en toepassing van raming en ramingselemente, insluitend metafoor en metonimie, word aanvaar as suksesvolle werkswyse in die konstruksie van *PSAs*, 'n proses wat gevolg word, vanaf die daarstelling van basiese insig ten opsigte van die organisasie waarvoor die boodskap geskep word, tot die finale konstruksie van die advertensie. *PSAs* wat op televisie uitgesaai word, word ondersoek as boodskappe met veelvuldige sosiale implikasies wat verskeie invalshoeke bied in die ondersoek daarvan, insluitend die ondersoek van *PSAs* in ander media soos radio of die pers.

Sluitelterme

Sosiaalgeoriënteerde advertensies (*PSAs*)

Raming (*Framing*)

Metafoor

Metonimie

Beliggaming (*Embodiment*)

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DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation, which I hereby submit for the degree Master of Arts in Drama and Film studies at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at another university.

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DEFINITION OF TERMS

- Framing

Framing is regarded as a dynamic and adaptable process of applying knowledge structures, within the borders of which interpretation and designation of meaning can occur. In this study, the elements that form part of this structure are identified, based on a hypothetical framing model developed by Hill and Levenhagen (1995).

- Hyperreality

Within the context of this study, the term hyperreality refers to the way in which fictional signs of reality in media images represent the mediated domain in which these signs operate and have meaning. Signs of reality refer not to an external reality, but to the mediation of reality. In this way, signs of reality become wholly self-referential and paradoxical in nature.

- Public service announcement (PSA)

For the purposes of this study, this term refers to a commercial made for a charity or non-profit organisation as a form of social awareness, where a call to action is made to the viewer. The South African televised public service announcement in particular is investigated.

- Style of the television medium

In terms of this study, in accordance with Bordwell (1985:50), style refers to the systematic use of cinematic devices. Bordwell applies this term in the analysis of narration in film. It is argued that the systematic use of cinematic devices is pertinent to the television medium in general, and the construction of the televised PSA in particular.

- Symbolic modes

Metaphor and metonymy are regarded in this study as two primary symbolic modes of communicating meaning, and furthermore, may be regarded as the source for much of our understanding and conceptualisation in everyday life (cf. Lakoff & Johnson 1980). The presence of these modes is investigated in South African televised public service announcements as a means by which constructors of PSAs can guide the viewer to interpret the message within predetermined boundaries.

- Umbrella message

The term, in this study, refers to the overarching message of the PSA, encapsulating three aspects, namely, the objectives, the importance of the objectives and the actions required to meet the objectives of the organisation for which the message is created. It is argued in this study that these three aspects form the basis of the development of a suitable narrative for the PSA.