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Simplicity Breeds Clarity

When making an argument or using persuasion, images are useful in that they can be complex and communicate ideas that text alone could not. However, the simultaneous ability of images to be simplistic and natural also makes them ideal for conveying ideas that are modest and stark. The Australian Red Cross combined this ability with text to contradict a common belief among its audience and inspire a specific type of action.

The Australian Red Cross Blood Service (ARCBS) is a humanitarian movement with the International Red Cross that is focused on soliciting donations of two varieties for assistance in medical treatments: cash and blood. The advertisement plays upon this idea of donations by proposing that one is as, if not more, important as the other despite the fact that it may be the less popular of the two.

The overall vision that the ad portrays is blank and void. There are very few colors besides white and the subject matter is reduced to a simple, transparent box with a sign attached. Besides the box, the counter it sits on is plain white and the background is blurred. This has the effect of focusing the viewer's attention on the donation box and infusing a sense of lacking. ARCBS is communicating that something is needed with the overall tone of the image and pointing to the answer by directing attention to the box.

There are two main elements of the box that the creators of the ad clearly intended on conveying to their audience. The first is the black text attached above the box. The words "Money Isn't Everything" are purposefully larger than the rest in order to establish the theme of the advertisement. These are the words that relate directly to the main image of the

donation box and make an indirect suggestion to the viewers. The subtle message is, “something more is needed from you and the image should tell you what that is.” The second main element is the box itself. The image of the donation box is one that the creators know the public is familiar enough with to understand that it is commonly used to collect financial donations. However, the image of blood within the box, and not money, contradicts this common purpose and informs the audience of the kind of help needed.

The simplicity of an unnatural image like blood within a donation box efficiently grabs attention from the public. Without thinking, people are able to tell that something is “incorrect” about an image like that. So the fact that something is different also tells them that there is an underlying message. If the image was a donation box filled with a few coins, the viewers might not stop to “listen” to the message. Even if the text were more direct and changed to “we also need you to give blood,” the viewer would have turned the magazine page already or turned their eyes to a different billboard. The fact is that an abnormal image, no matter how simple it may seem, perplexes the viewer and draws their interest to the point where they want to comprehend it.

The creators assume that although its audience is concerned with the health of mankind, it is not informed enough on the ways to help and the variety of resources needed by societies like ARCBS. In other words, people care enough to give money, but they also need to care enough to give blood. By visually attaching “Money Isn’t Everything” to the image of the collection box, the ARCBS contradicts the assumption made by its audience that money is all that their society needs to make a difference.

The text contradicts the image of the box and tells viewers that they need to do more than empty the spare change from their pockets. Yet it does this in an indirect way that is a subtle suggestion. The word “blood” is barely used in the advertisement as it only appears in the society’s name and their website. The simple idea of blood being donated to the box, not

money, serves the purpose of soliciting action. It's important to note that the donation box is not full. This reinforces the overall theme previously explained of a void and has the connotation of lacking. The blood implies what the society wants from the viewer and the emptiness of the box implies why they want it. If the box were filled to the top, the viewer may not have sympathetic emotions that inspire him/her to go out and donate blood. One might think "they don't need my blood if the box is full." Instead, the pathos aspect of the advertisement invokes concern on the part of the viewer and encourages them to act.

Finally, the smaller text attached to the donation box has a related purpose in that it uses both pathos and logos to inspire the viewer. "Save up to three lives without spending a cent" still uses a bit of subtlety in not mentioning the word "blood," but it also educates the audience by informing them that they can save lives. The actual process of saving lives may involve a few doctors and nurses, but the creators of this ad want the viewer to feel as though they alone could be responsible for saving someone's life. The use of a factual number like three uses logos to argue why blood donations are so important and the "hero" aspect uses pathos as further encouragement.

The ARCBS advertisement uses very little subject matter so that the viewer is not distracted from the primary image. It's important for the viewer to recognize this primary image because of its abnormality that maintains his/her interest. This allows the text to combine with the blood to contradict the audience's conventional thoughts regarding what is needed of them. By assuming that they want to help, the creators suggest to the audience how using the simplicity of the blood and why using the emptiness of the box. The simple and modest image makes for a simple and modest message, but its creative clarity easily elicits sympathetic emotions and affects the viewer in ways much stronger than complex images could.