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Vampires and Advertising FINAL Podcast Script

[Madison]

Welcome to today's episode! This podcast episode is brought to you by Madison Coleman, Rachel Maddux, Vini Wilson, and Katie Butler. Today we will be talking about vampires and advertising.

What comes to mind when I say the word vampire? Does a feeling of fear and terror take over? Do you think of a gory, blood sucking, killer? Or do you think of something a bit more comedic, like a campy sixties b-film about vampires? Now, what do you think of when I ask about vampires and advertising? Do you think of your favorite commercial, book, or maybe even T.V. show? Does a specific brand come to mind, or maybe even your favorite cereal that's only available around Halloween? We want to know if using vampire related themes for advertising is successful or not.

In this episode, we will examine why companies use vampire related themes when advertising their products. We will outline what characteristics have been highlighted, what emotions have been depicted, and what demographics have been targeted. Additionally, we will evaluate the consumer and their response. We will talk about the use of vampires in advertising for both the entertainment and the food industry, the vampire effect, the role that Dracula plays in Victorian era and modern advertising, the subcultures that advertisers target, and we will talk about vampire related marketing campaigns for television shows and movies. These immortal

beings have the ability to attract their victims through seduction and entrancement. In turn, can their capabilities stretch as far as the consumer?

Vampire related themed entertainment has been resurrected in the last few years. Although vampire movies were very popular in the sixties and seventies, the hype died down...until now. Books like the *Twilight Saga* and the *Vampire Diaries*, both of which have now been adapted into very popular film and television series, have only been feeding the fire. The sexy and charming characters, like Edward Cullen or the Salvatore Brothers become intriguing to the everyday person which leads to an almost tantalization of vampires. How might this affect the advertising world? Well let's say that an episode of a popular vampire romance series is airing during prime time on a Tuesday night, and a lot of people are tuning in. Viewers are being hooked with gripping plot twists and then all of a sudden it flashes to commercial. The viewer is left to watch the advertisements until the show comes back on. These commercial slots are valuable because the viewer is most likely going to watch the advertisements until their show comes back on.

Some shows even include advertiser's products in the actual production. One show in particular has had a lot of success. *Carmilla*, a lesbian gothic web series on YouTube, has been advertising U by Kotex, a line of feminine hygiene products throughout the entire course of the show¹. They have incorporated storylines like whether or not vampires get a period, which has led to a debate among viewers. The series is sponsored by Kimberly-Clark, which owns the U by Kotex brand. Apparently the whole point of the series is to sell the product, and I must say they did it quite cleverly.

Food products have also had major success advertising with vampires. Does Count Chocula ring a bell? Count Chocula, which is a part of the Monster Cereals line produced by the

General Mills Corporation, is a seasonal treat that was first introduced in 1971. For the past 47 years, Count Chocula has been a Halloween staple in most homes. The classic brown box with the Count Chocula character, a pun on Count Dracula, plastered on it is so iconic that it almost doesn't even need an ongoing advertising campaign to promote it. The original advertising campaign was a commercial where Count Chocula and Franken Berry, a fellow Monster Cereal, would argue over whose cereal was better². Does the voice of Count Chocula sound familiar? Well here's a fun fact, it's actually an impersonation of the iconic Dracula actor, Bela Legosi. In this case, a vampire themed product and advertising campaign has proved to be successful.

[Vini]

There have also been uses of vampire advertisements in the dental industry. One of my favorite advertisements is from a company called Dental Design³. In their advertisement, they showed a picture of a neck that was bitten by a vampire. However, instead of the typical vampire bite with two puncture marks, there was only one. This lets the audience assume that the vampire, who bit the person, only has one fang instead of the normal two. This was a very clever use of vampires for the dental industry. I love this advertisement because it isn't shoving the vampire element into your face. It's subtle yet obvious in the best way. It also helps that it creates a very funny image to the audience. This is an advertisement that I will probably not forget for a very long time.

Although there are many advertisements that stick in our minds, there are also many that we forget about because of what was focused on in the advertisement. This is called the Vampire Effect. The Vampire Effect occurs when certain things in the advertisement takes focus away from the actual product that it is about. There are many ways that this can happen. The

actual product can be overtaken by sex appeal, celebrities, or even the designs that were included into the advertisement. In an article by Loucas Papantoniou, the effects of sex appeal in advertisements were researched⁴. Loucas performed an experiment between two different coffee ads. One advertisement was kept simple with a picture of a fancy coffee machine in neutral tones and the name of the brand in a bright red color in the corner and their motto. In the other advertisement, two sexy women were portrayed with a man in the middle. One of the women was about to wipe coffee that had spilled onto the man's lap. The women were dressed in a way that was very sexually appealing. Most people assume that the ad that was more sexualized would be better remembered and it was, just not in the way that the brand would want to be remembered. In an online survey, it was revealed that although many people remembered the women and how the man had coffee spilled on him, not very many people knew what brand of coffee it was about or that it even was a coffee ad. On the other hand, the simple advertisement had much more success. Because of how they designed the ad, many people remembered the design and the actual name of the brand. The same thing occurred with celebrities in advertisements. In the research essay, "The Risk of Vampire Effect in Advertisements Using Celebrity Advertisements" by Tetyana Kuvita and Miroslav Karlípek, the authors came to the conclusion that often advertisement designers get too focused on catching the consumer attention than on the product itself⁵. They found out that when using an eye catching character like a vampire or a famous celebrity, it is better to start advertising with this character from the beginning rather than just one day have a random ad with it. When a character has been associated with a brand for a while, the consumers will know what product the advertisement is for when they see the character. When a vampire is just randomly there, the product is often forgotten about. It is commonly thought that the use of vampires and their sex appeal would

raise the amount of customers for the specific product. However, in reality, many studies have shown that the vampire and the sex appeal is remembered but the product is not. The vampire effect tends to suck the attention of the consumers away from the product. It has the opposite effect of what the creator meant to do.

[Katie]

Now that we've examined a handful of vampire-themed merchandise, marketing at the product level, and have had a chance to understand our vamp-driven consumer, let's explore a marketing campaign of a much larger scale- and in this specific instance, vampires are everywhere!

In its first season, HBO's *True Blood* quickly established an audience of loyal fans, however, their marketing team wanted more than just viewership, they wanted to immerse their audience into the world of *True Blood*. Season one's *Vampires Among Us* campaign let fans experience what it was like to live in a world where a product was openly marketed to vampires, not humans. For season two, vamp-based products wouldn't merely be around us, but vampires themselves would be integrated into our society. HBO referred to it as "hacking reality," where the goal was to blur the line between reality and fiction. According to Zach Enterlin, the vice president of advertising and promotions, "We are trying to create an alternate reality and have some fun. We're not trying to hit someone over the head with HBO branding, but it's a subtle wink that they can get a hold of and come along with us for the ride."⁶

The *True Blood* campaign began with a series of groundbreaking "faux" advertisements, which played on the imagery of blood and other vampire clichés. These ads hacked reality by using current campaigns of high profile brands and marketing their products to vampires. High

visibility advertisements, including outdoor, print, online, and radio, were placed on buses, billboards, and even in subways. Online ads included URL's which linked consumers to HBO's website. Corporations such as Harley Davidson, Geico, Mini-Cooper and Monster.com all participated in this campaign. At first glimpse, the ads were seemingly routine, but when studied closer, they would leave individuals puzzled. When viewers realized that these products were being marketed toward vampires, it had many questioning their validity and asking themselves, "Is this real?"

Online, HBO continued to blur the line of reality and fiction with *BloodCopy*, a website created specifically for vampires. This site was eventually officially transferred to Gawker's blog network. It became the first blog to be openly operated by a vampire and included numerous viral videos produced by HBO for *True Blood* Season Two. The blog drew criticism and sparked a debate over an advertising-blurring-with editorial controversy after Gawker's sales department and HBO pretended that the advertorial blog was a Gawker editorial property.⁷ In essence, the BloodCopy blog was not clearly defined as a "sponsored post," but instead was initially presented as editorial content.

While the vampire-directed advertisements, blogs, and websites were being cleverly disguised and created, HBO simultaneously ran a series of dark and compelling teasers and tune-in ads featuring the cast from Season one. These ads let viewers know exactly when Season two would air.

In order to reach their core audience and super-fans, HBO compiled their marketing efforts for a collective unveiling at Comic-Con 2009, a perfect setting for fans to mingle with the *True Blood* cast and to taste Tru-Blood orange soda, a formerly fictional element of the series, now available to consumers. By creating an innovative marketing campaign for *True Blood*

Season two, which integrated vampire life into society, HBO successfully retained viewers, expanded their audience, and generated a lot of interest amongst various media platforms. The groundbreaking, non-traditional, *True Blood* marketing effort continued throughout the series and was hailed as one of the most successfully thought out marketing campaigns to date amongst those in the advertising industry.⁸

[Rachel]

So with that in mind, let's back up a bit. Pop culture has always affected media. So, with *Dracula*, Bram Stoker is trying to clear British culture of destabilizing influences by repeatedly affirming the status quo and traditional values and ideology⁹. For example, Mina is put on a pedestal by the men in the novel. She's a married schoolteacher who learned new skills in order to support her husband's career¹⁰. And then there's Lucy, her flirtatious, single friend who has feelings for multiple men. By the time the reader even hears of it, though, she's already picked one and is engaged. All the characters who meet her adore her and find her sweet, but the novel paints her as a bad girl and she's punished for it. So *Dracula* assigns all good qualities to the humans in the novel and all the bad qualities to the vampires. Which makes sense, doesn't it? However, its descriptions of the vampire otherness are actually completely structured by the language and plot codes of the Victorian porn industry, so the novel ends up tapping into the same sex-sells tactics of the commercial culture it's trying to criticize. And of course, all the sex tactics are shown in the female characters: Lucy, Mina, and the three female vampires in *Dracula's* castle⁹.

In the late 19th century, the rise of trade unionism caused growth in the middle class and consumer culture. People had more money to spend and they wanted to make themselves seem as high class as possible. At the center of all of this was the phenomenon of advertising.

Advertising is, and has always been, intrinsically linked to the literature and pop culture of the time period. *Dracula* reflects the complex impulses and interests of the industry and how and why these issues are most often explored through discussions of femininity and female sexuality. The clearest example of this is how Dracula portrays Mina and Lucy, and how the character Dracula preys on them. Women were identified as primary consumers in most cultures and ads were created to portray them as provocative, sensual beauties. The female body was eroticized and used to sell anything you can think of, from soap to kitchenware.

Nowadays, advertising has gotten extremely specific and products are often created to target certain demographics and subcultures. Christina Goulding and Michael Saren research one particular subculture – the Goths – in the context of a biannual festival held in Whitby, ‘The Whitby Goth Festival’, chosen for its association with the legend of Dracula¹¹. Goth is a modern evolution of Gothic, so it makes sense that advertisers would draw heavily on the vampire aesthetic when creating marketing campaigns that target this particular group. Goth is very much a performance identity, so it is very fluid and is still shaped by modern vampire lore, and by extension advertising, because people are constantly buying new clothes and accessories to tune their look in the present day.

Vampires have been a part of the advertising game since it got started. They’ve spawned products, consumer groups, and advertising techniques. As we see in *Dracula*, they’re pretty much the personification of consumption and the sexy female vampire really gives itself to the whole sex-sells tactic that’s the most pervasive advertising technique used today. They’re used in every industry you can think of, from food to dentistry to feminine hygiene products. Sometimes the techniques are successful, and sometimes the vampire, or whatever variation is being used in the advertisement, sucks all the attention away from the product. It’s inconclusive

if they're a positive or negative factor for marketing campaigns, as success seems to vary depending on the product, the targeted consumer group, and the advertisement itself.

Endnotes

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