Visualization of technological utopianism
by corporate advertising campaigns in the 1980s:
South Korea LG's 'technopia' and
Samsung's 'humantech'

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Abstract

This study focuses on technological utopianism which was created by major corporations through their advertisement campaign designs in mid to late 1980s in South Korea. In this study, we analyse the contents in printed advertisements and TV commercials of LG's 'Technopia' in 1985 and Samsung's 'Humantech' in 1986. In the mid to late 1980s, South Korea was full of hope because the domestic economy improved rapidly, and the social environment was filled with expectations of globalization. LG and Samsung both focused on development of technology and wanted to visualize some kind of 'utopia', which was created by them through their ads. As the two rival companies had similar campaign purposes, the designs of their campaigns looked very much alike. The campaigns emphasized a meeting between technology and humans, wanted to be a hero who helps weaker and smaller humans, and expressed unrealistic depiction with computer graphics.

Keywords

Technological utopianism, corporate advertising campaign design, Korean corporation, technology visualization

Introduction

The economy of South Korea (hereafter, Korea) has grown rapidly over the decades. When the Korean War ended in the 1950s, Korea was one of the poorest and most undeveloped countries in the world. However, Korea maintained high levels of economic growth during the mid to later part of the 20th Century. Presently, Korea is considered by many as one of the more developed countries. During the economic growth, technological development played an important role. Major companies such as LG, Samsung, and Hyundai invested heavily in the progress of technology.

This study focuses on technological utopianism, which was created by those major corporations through long period advertisement campaign designs in mid to late 1980s. In 1980, Korea was full of hope due to enormous economic growth, and globalization through hosting the 1986 Asian game and the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul. These sociocultural backgrounds provided foundation of a corporation's dream to create a 'utopia' through their own technologies.

Two large Korean corporations visualized their images of utopia through large-scale corporate advertisement campaigns. LG, named Goldstar in the 1980s, was established in 1959 and produced the first Korean radio, which was the beginning point of the electronics industry in Korea. Samsung Electronics was established in 1969 and rapidly developed. After the 1970s, competition between LG and Samsung started in earnest to lead Korean electronics industry, which became the core industry in Korea in the 1980s and captured the biggest part of the exporting industries. Electronics industry was a high-tech and growing industry in the 1980s after light and heavy chemical industries. Presently, LG and Samsung are famous Korean companies in the world.

This study deals with corporate advertisement campaigns, 'Technopia' and 'Humantech', which were created by LG and Samsung, respectively. 'Technopia' is the compound word technology and utopia, and 'Humantech' is comprised of two words, human and technology. The two ad campaigns shared many similarities. They both started advertisement campaigns around the same time, and showed similar images and designs. The period lasted about ten years as corporate ad campaigns, which dealt with technology as core ad themes, sharing similar purposes for the ad campaigns. The campaigns received a great amount of attention for their new style and

they won many advertisement awards for that time. Ads were inserted in a paper and many kinds of magazines. At first, ads were shown at least once a week in the daily newspapers as an effective frequency for exposure.

This study focuses on the mid to late 1980s and analyzes ad designs into three themes. These ad campaigns lasted pretty long. Thus, there were substantial changes in the designs and the concepts of ads. By focusing on the mid to late 1980s, the ad campaigns showed a relationship between the corporations, technological utopianism and sociocultural background at the time through their ad designs.

Economic growth in the 1980s and technological utopianism

As I mentioned in the introduction section, Korea is well known for its rapid economic growth in a short period of time. However, Korea maintained high levels of economic growth during the mid to later part of the 20th Century. Even there is the term 'Four Asian Tigers (or Dragons)' that refers to the high-growth economies of Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan and Korea between the early 1960s and 1990s.

Many studies have shown that technological advancement plays core role of economic growth for both developing and developed countries. Many countries, including Korea, created special economic zones, export processing zones and science parks in 20th Century. Thanks to the good response of these specialized institutions, Korea became one of the centers for the new electronics industries in the 1980s. Korea's main industry varied with the period. The core industry in the 1970s was heavy chemicals, and was electronics in the 1980s. The mid to late 1980s economic boom produced a first time trade surplus (1986), which exceeded a $10 billion (US) gross domestic product (GDP) in 1987 and recorded unprecedented macroeconomic indicators. Korea's technological advancement was critical for economic growth over the past sixty years, and established an economic structure that provided diverse advantages to major companies and conglomerates (also called 'chaebols').

It is the economic background of the appearance of an ideology called technological utopianism in Korea. Technological utopianism (hereafter, techno-utopianism) is a kind of ideology of theory based on the premise that advances in science and technology will take a critical role to create a promising future and a utopia. The specific meaning of this term has changed through time, but the core idea is still the same as emphasizing science and technology's important role. Korea in the 1980s could be a stage of techno-utopianism, because it was full of hope that was shared by many in the country. Korea not only experienced astonishing economic growth, but hosted many international events such as the 1986 Asian Games in 1986 and the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul that opened the age of globalization.

This study captures the subjects, the major companies or conglomerates, which visually drew techno-utopianism. Many major companies such as LG and Samsung who are even still an important axis of the Korean economy rapidly grew in the late 20th Century. The two corporations were rivals and both wanted to dominate the leadership of Korea's electronic industry by showing their own techno-utopianism ad images through broad-scale ad campaigns. Consequentially LG and Samsung harbored a desire to create their own technological utopia through by designing ad campaigns at the same time.

Fig. 1: 'Humantech', 1986

Fig. 2: 'Technopia', 1989

Fig. 3: 'Technopia', 1990

Design analysis of corporate advertising campaigns

There are two approaches in most printed advertisement analysis. The first approach focuses on figurative features in the ad and the second approach concentrates on content elements. Images such as Illustrations and photos, typography, symbol marks, and border lines belong to figurative features. The headline, body copy, slogan and caption belong to content elements. This study analyzes corporate advertisings by both approaches in order to cover the ad design components thoroughly.

Images commonly cover a large proportion of printed 'Techno' advertising campaigns for both 'Technopia' and 'Humantech', which approximately covers over 70% of the whole surface area. In other words, full images which are designed by photos and illustrations play an important role to create a lingering impression in advertising design rather than blank space or lettering. Basically, meanings and messages exposed in images are the main criteria in dividing this chapter into three sections: 'Humanism', 'Heroism', and 'Unreality'. These three sections are not covering all the features and can be overlapping to some extent. Instead, they can reveal the key features of the techno-utopianism well in the ads.

Humanism

First, I will focus on the relational aspects of the human and technology shown in both 'Technopia' and 'Humantech' in the name of humanism. From the Samsung campaign 'Humantech', we can sense Samsung's intention to empha-size that their technologies are humanistic. 'Humantech's main slogan is "Technology which keeps in tune with the people is – Humantech". Similarly, 'Technopia's main slogan also shows a relationship between technology and human: "Meeting of the technology and the human-Technopia." In some of the ad campaigns, technology mostly visualized with robots meeting and shaking hands with humans (Fig. 1), and helping people (Figs. 2-4). Technology usually would become a robot incarnate if it is visualized as humanlike. Various ads are closer to humanoid (Figs 1, 2, and 7), some ads are like cartoon characters (Fig. 3), and other ads are little short of industrial robots (Figs. 4, and 8).

Then, why do the corporations want to connect their technology to human? Why do the corpo-rations personify technology visually and have robots meet people? First, as always, because technology was commonly seemed to be something cold and hard to the general public. Thus, the corporations wanted to overcome the cold images stuck in technology. To archive this goal, they illustrated humanlike technology with various types of robots in ad campaigns that help people (Figs. 2, 3, and 4), which seems so familiar and warm. The body copies in the right side of Fig. 1 are written as "To make people more convenient, to make people healthier, to make people safer". They created an image of efficient helpers having warm humane technology. This finding leads to next section that discusses enlightenment and heroism in ad campaigns.

Fig. 4: 'Humantech', 1987

Fig. 5: 'Technopia', 1986

Fig. 6: 'Technopia', 1986

Heroism

In the previous section, we analyzed both ad campaigns with a humanistic point of view. We found that both ad campaigns are very close to humanism, which takes us to other research questions. Then, what were the goals that LG and Samsung wanted to archive through the ad campaigns? What were the roles of LG and Samsung in the ad campaigns? In most ads, corporations explain their technologies and possibilities on the side portions with small photos and body copy writings. This may reflect the intention to inform the public their corporate values and im-portance. The goal to educate the public on the ignorant of technology is comprised in design explicitly and implicitly, which is called 'enlightenment'. The dictionary definition of enlightenment means to cause someone to understand something by explaining it or by bringing new information or facts. Likewise, through the ad campaign designs, the

Fig. 7: 'Humantech', 1988

Figure 8: 'Humantech', 1988

corporations wanted the public to understand what they had through visual descriptions. Then, who are the subjects of the enlightening people? That is the corporations. By taking the position of enlightenment and leading people, LG and Samsung put themselves in the position of the hero status.

The corporations' implicit intention to place themselves in a heroic position is expressed in two ways in the ad design. First, we focus on how humans would appear in ads. In most of ads, there are children rather than adults as the representations of humans (Figs. 2, 4~8). These ad campaigns were not a product advertisement, but a corporate one. Thus, LG and Samsung might have selected models fit with the future-oriented and future-responsible image they wanted to achieve. The children appearing in the ads were under age 5 to teenagers, which may suggest this age group can be the future partners of the corporations. More importantly, that age group is in need of someone's help. At this moment, the technology would help the children. In Figs 2, 4, and 8, technology represented by robots bestows a semiconductor, candle light, and torchlight on the children. The children take it gratefully and delightfully. Some of the ads such as Fig 2, 4, and 8 remind us of the Greek myth of Prometheus who gave fire to mankind. Children are generally small, helpless and immature as compared with adults. Thus, the technology and the corporations' help tends to be seen as much more valuable to them.

Second, representations of technology such as Saturn, a satellite, a gold humanoid robot, and an industrial robot are mostly larger than those of the human. Fig 5's head line is "What does it look like in the 21st Century?" In this ad, technology appears as Saturn with rich color and big size in the middle, which uses more than half of the whole ad. In comparison, children are relatively small, dark and are in a corner. In Fig 6, we can find similar theme and expression.

The model of human represents children rather than adults, and technology is portrayed relatively larger than humans. From these facts we can assure the corporations' implicit intention of being the hero and playing the leading role of progress towards the future and enlightenment of people. Thus, in the ad campaign designs of the future, the hero is the corporation rather than the human.

Unreality

The last and remarkable feature of ad campaigns is unreality. Almost all ads in the ad campaigns show a little bit of unrealistic and exaggerated depiction. The technology is quite abstract and conceptual rather than concrete and practical. Humanoid robots in the ads are basically far from real ones existed at that time. If LG and Samsung wanted to introduce their technologies in a realistic and practical way, they should have described how computers, optical communications and semiconductors are used in people's home and offices. However, LG and Samsung did not describe that. LG and Samsung just wanted to make unrealistic, nonexistent images for visualizing a utopia.

In the ad campaigns, there were TV commercials and printed advertisement since the beginning. Therefore, in this section, I analyze unrealistic designs and images that stood out from TV commercials. TV commercials are quite distinct from print ads as they generate the unrealistic world not only visually, but also technically with new computer technique, computer graphics (CG). The ad campaigns' TV commercials were the first CG created in Korea. Thus, they were the first chance for people to experience new video images by the new CG technique. CG represented three dimensional images, transforming freely with the ability to describe reality similarly.

Fig. 9: 'Humantech', 1986

Through CG, impossible expressions become possible, and the ad campaigns' TV commercials could make full use of its effects. Korean people experienced CG effects for the first time in the 1980s and, of course, were quite shocked.

One example of TV commercials, 'Humantech' in 1986, shows a typical flow of early

CG commercial (Fig. 9). In Fig. 9, there are only switching over florid images instead of any story line or clear theme. The commercial's graphic is unrealistic
and even closer to surrealism. This kind of video could be developed only from an advanced technique, which at that time was new CG. This kind of video causes people to forget reality temporarily and daze people with unrealistic visual fantasies.

Conclusion

This study focused on technological utopianism, which was created by Korean major corporations through the long period ad campaign designs in the mid to late 1980s. To visualize techno-utopianism, LG and Samsung used ad campaigns. There were three main features (i.e., humanism, heroism, and unreality) that are expressed in the campaigns name, images, slogan, body copies, and tools.

This study mostly concentrated on the common grounds of two ad campaigns. However, there were also differences, which were less important for the main topics. Because the ad campaigns lasted about one decade, there were many changes. This study focuses on the first five years of the ad campaigns, which reflected the initial intention of production and wide attention. After the 1980s, the social environment changed, and thus, the ads campaigns changed their contents away from techno-utopianism. Instead of utopia and heroism, LG and Samsung depict themselves as useful and practical corporations in real life. This change is related to labor, social problem, and interests in democratization.

Techno-utopianism created by major corporations in the 1980s may be the precursor of initiative transition from government to companies along with neo-liberalism. Actually, the relationship between the government and the corporations changed in the 1980s. Until the 1970s, the government supported the corporations politically and financially through tax benefits. However, since the 1980s, the government started to regulate the corporations, breaking off the reciprocal relationships. These historical examples, two ad campaigns, show how sociocultural backgrounds and design are closely related, and how design reveals various implicit intentions and purposes in ads.

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