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Visualize Realize: A Study on Visual Metaphors in Health and Beauty Magazine Ads

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Submitted by

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Metaphors have become a powerful tool for advertisers today. Metaphors are used to enhance advertisements by capturing the attention of the ad's onlooker in hopeful anticipation that he or she will develop an infatuation with the particular item being portrayed. Metaphors work by broadening the meaning of a message, therefore creating limitless levels of interpretation.

The metaphors chosen and used for various advertisements greatly differ, because what may work well for one ad may be disastrous for another. For this reason, when creating and developing their ads, advertisers must take many things into consideration; because what may speak to and seem clear to one viewer, may go completely over the head of another. Therefore, the use and choice of metaphors in ads varies greatly depending on the products target audience. This divide can be seen in ads targeted towards different age groups, genders, background, socio-economic statuses and cultures in general. Diverse groups and individuals have divergent interests, concerns, life experiences and senses of humor. For example, one would probably not find a gun ad in a beauty magazine or a Chanel ad in a hunting magazine. For this reason, companies and advertisers must take these different interest group's needs, wants and desires into consideration when deciding where the best location to place a particular ad may be and what metaphors would be most effective. Only when all of these diverse factors are considered and examined will a particular advertisement be a success in capturing the attention of its targeted audience. Only then will the ad be positively viewed, received and effective, hopefully ensuring that the product will be a success.

A significant amount of time and research has been aimed toward studying the use of metaphors in ads; not only as an abstract idea but also due to great impact they have on viewers.

However, even though an immense amount of energy has been spent examining the various aspects of this topic, still much can be discovered and learned.

In spite of the fact that visual metaphors can be seen in numerous places, members of society tend to not recognize them, and even sometimes have a tendency to just ignore them. One proposed reason for this apparent failure of attention given to visual metaphors could be caused by the inadequate amount of speculation concerning metaphorical phenomena in visual media. Furthermore, visual metaphors are seldom located in representational art and photography (Fiske 97-100). Present-day advertising, with its common use of "nonrealistic presentational codes," is more advantageous to visual metaphors (Kaplan 41).

It is important for people to understand metaphors as a whole. According to Lakoff and Johnson, a metaphor can be defined as a combination of two or more elements in which one of the elements is experienced or understood in terms of the other element (Lakoff and Johnson). Metaphorical associations engage both similarities and differences between the fundamentals that are linked (Kaplan 41). Metaphors accomplish their ultimate effect when both the similarities and the differences are significant to the reader or the viewer: "The comparison process important to metaphorical thought created a simultaneous awareness of both commonality and difference, providing a figure/ground perception with pronounced clarity" (Pollay and Mainprize 26). Fiske claims that the most powerful metaphors are those in which differences between the elements are brought out and similarities are downsized. Ingenious metaphors ultimately unite a set of ideas that would usually be considered incongruent (Fiske 99-100).

Although several similarities exist between verbal and visual metaphors, it is important for society to be able to define the differences between them. It is evident that there are at least

three different characteristics separating verbal metaphors from visual metaphors. First, by common definition, visual metaphors contain an actual physical object or tangible form to symbolize the abstract idea that is being portrayed (Morgan and Welton 92-95). Therefore, one has "less latitude for different audience members to see or perceive different things" (Pierce 242). For example, if in a written metaphor a boy is called a "monkey," one may think of the metaphier as a chimp, an ape, or even a baboon. However, if the metaphor is used in a visual sense, whatever type of monkey (chimp, ape, or baboon) is shown, will be perceived. Essentially, "visual metaphiers are often more specific than their verbal or written counterparts" (Pierce 242). Second, "a visual metaphor can depict, emphasize, or focus on specific paraphiers that can be perceived as quickly as can the visual metaphier" (Pierce 242). Third, according to Dyer's conceptual system, metaphors occupy likeness of meaning, opposed to form, between the rudiments being compared. Essentially, by basing metaphors on visual presentation, it is the form of the medium that signifies the dissimilarity enabling the metaphorical connection to work (Fiske 158-172).

It has become uncommon in today's society to see advertisements that do not contain visual metaphors; they are extremely abundant. Metaphors in advertising can be acknowledged as a stimulus for more complicated levels of processing due to the high level of interest one experiences upon seeing the ad, essentially motivating curiosity about the product being advertised (MacInnis, Moorman, and Jaworski). According to Kaplan, presenting metaphors in a visual form helps to facilitate recall (Kaplan).

Visual metaphors are fundamentally plentiful and it important to be able to recognize them. Not only will doing so give one more insight as to what his or her wants, needs, and

desires are as a consumer, but also help him or her to gain a deeper understanding of who he or

she truly is as a human being.

In today's society, magazines have become just as popular, if not more popular, than

newspapers. The wide variety of magazines available to the consumer demonstrates the vast

diversity of interests among the world's population. Magazines are available almost everywhere;

through personal subscriptions, newsstands, check-out lines, the waiting room at the doctor's

office and innumerable other locations. It has become an impossibility to pass a day without

being in the presence of a significant number of magazines. Magazine subscriptions and

purchases ultimately work as endorsements, verifying what the public enjoys reading.

According to the Serial and Government Publications Division, there are over 75,000

periodicals published each year in the United States and Canada, and more than 125,000

worldwide. Magazines aimed toward women have always ranked in the top ten magazine

categories. Women make up 51% of the American population and they, by landslide proportions,

hold the most consumer power. This consumer power is strongly recognized and acknowledged

by advertisers, publishers, as well as marketers ("Periodicals" 1).

Considering what is known about the significant purchasing power of today's women, it

can easily be assumed that the advertisements placed within popular magazines are viewed by

many consumers. In addition, with the knowledge that the ads in these magazines are seen by

such an enormous level of consumers, it can be assumed that the advertisers and companies that

place their ads into these magazines put a great deal of time, effort and consideration into them.

The purpose of this paper is to compare various visual metaphors used in magazine

advertisements. My main focus will be on ads from health and beauty magazines aimed towards

young women. I will look for trends among these ads and examine how the product being

advertised is presented in the textual form as well as what part the visual message plays for the interpretation of, and overall understanding of the message. All of the advertisements I selected containing visual metaphors are from currently popular "health" and "beauty" magazines that are easily and readily available to the public. Upon further analysis of the ads I selected, I noted that a majority of them were for food items and cosmetic products. In regard to the food item ads, it appears that all of these advertisements focus on portraying the food as being a "healthy" and "smart" choice. This is a probable theory considering the fact that the people viewing these advertisements care about their health since they are reading a "health" magazine. In reference to my selected ads that did not contained a cosmetic product, it can be assumed that the reason for this is due to the fact that one who reads a "health" or "beauty" style of magazine probably cares greatly about their appearance as well.

As I flipped through Allure, Cosmopolitan, Self, Shape, and Health, I was astounded by the amount of ads that I believed to contain visual metaphors. Some were more obvious than others and my search turned into a game as I dissected each advertisement I came across. I determined that the most effective way for me to organize my analysis of each ad would be to follow the method of Julian Jaynes and construct a chart defining each element within my selected advertisements.

I began by defining the metaphrand as visual, verbal, or both. Jaynes defines the metaphrand as being the thing in which one wishes to describe. I continued by determining the metaphier being used in the ad, along with its specific domain, realm, and purpose. Jaynes defines the metaphier as that of which one chooses to create the no literal comparison with (Pierce 137). Was the domain human, nature, both human and nature, spirit or something else entirely? Was the metaphier's purpose to praise, condemn, or describe? Upon completing these

steps, I then defined the metaphier type as being archetypal, novel, systemic, or orientational. According to Michael Osborn, Archetypal metaphors "stubbornly transcend culture, time, and geography in political and cultural communication" (qtd. In Pierce 132). They are selected and used more often than novel metaphors, stay the same across time, condition, and cultures, grounded in direct, common human experience, are often based on human motivations, when used in a message they can often reach most audience members, and they often show up in the most important parts of the most important messages within any society (Pierce 132). "Novel metaphors are the language devices most easy for us to recognize as metaphors. … In a novel metaphor we conceptually join two dissimilar items that nonetheless have a specific similarity that allows new perspective" (Pierce 134). Systemic metaphors are defined as, "metaphors that work together within a system of human thought rather than as singular language devices" (Pierce 140). Orientational metaphors "are notable because they center our perception on the way that bodily experiences become the metaphoric motif that allow us to express basic and interrelated ideas of human expression" (Pierce 142).

My next step was to consider the probable paraphiers within each ad, and to then determine the ads invited paraphrands. Jaynes defines paraphiers as the "associations or attributes of the metaphier" which one is aware of. The invited paraphrands are those in which the advertiser hopes the audience will interpret after viewing the ad (Pierce 137). After this, I made a metaphrand and metaphier evaluation for the ad. Were the metaphrand and metaphier working together to praise, condemn or describe the item being expressed? Finally, I looked for verbal cues that would help me to determine this, and evaluated whether these verbal cues within the ad were working to praise, condemn or describe the product as well. I repeated these steps for all of the ads that I had collected from the assorted magazines. In order to organize my findings

for each ad I created a chart containing the key components stated above. Here is an example of

the chart I created in reference to an ad I found in <u>Health</u> magazine for NSF International:

Bib Citation:
NSF. Advertisement. <u>Health</u>. Oct 2009: 145

METAPHRAND: Multi-Vitamins				+	*METAPHIER:* Security/alarm lasers			
Visual	**Verbal**	**Mode**	**Placement**		**Visual**	**Verbal**	**Mode**	**Placemen**
Multi-Vitamin bottle	Noted on bottle: "Multi-Vitamins"	Behind lasers: Juxtaposed	Middle of page behind security lasers		Man and lasers protecting bottle on shelf	Noted in text on the bottom: "Dietary Supplements. Just one of over 200,000 products NSF certifies to help you live safer"	Protecting vitamins: Juxtaposed	In front of vitamins (middle of page)
					Domain	**Type**	**Purpose**	
					Human	Archetypal	Praise	
					Nature	✓ Novel	Condemn	
					Spirit	Systemic	✓ Describe	
					✓ Other	Orientational		
Paraphrand: Healthy, good for the body					*Paraphiers:* Security, defense, protect			

As I defined each of the elements within my chosen ads, I noticed a few distinctive

patterns. In a more general sense, I noticed a few key components represented in the ads as a

whole. As far as I could see, all of my ads follow a very distinctive visible pattern. First, the ads

all have a pictorial element used as a background, which generally fills up the entire page area.

Second, in addition to the pictorial element, the ads also contain a small textual component,

including the logo of the company or brand, and a short message which is used to reinforce the

visual element in the ad, as well as being used as an underpinning of the actual product being

advertised.

Similarly, another key aspect that I noticed when collecting and analyzing my ads is that

the same product is advertised in different ways. In other words, advertisers utilize different

visual metaphors for different ads of the same product. This is due to the fact that people who are from different cultures, backgrounds, age groups, genders, and who have diverse experiences in general interpret messages in different ways. By having a variety of different ads, an advertiser can reach a broader range of potential customers.

Correspondingly, just as Hariman noted, different advertisements utilize different cosmic ornaments. He states that, "Such ornaments might present a small object enlarged to dominate pictorial space, or a large object shrunken to fit into that space, or the repetition or fragmentation or transformation of an object to the same effect" (Hariman 2). In other words, this means that the elements within an ad can be presented in a variety of ways. For example, normally small things can be made bigger and generally large items can be made smaller to fully utilize the entire space the advertisement holds. It can also be transformed, fragmented and even repeated.

Since all of the ads that I collected are generally aimed toward the same audience, senses of different allegories can be determined within these ads. In the ads that I have selected, attractiveness, delicateness, healthiness, youthfulness and confidence can be seen. In my opinion, these are all traits that young women are most attracted to, thus these allegories are used in the advertisements I have selected because they are aimed towards this genre. I believe that these allegories fit in to those of which the women my ads are aimed towards want to obtain or adhere to.

In addition, just as Robert Hariman also notes in his study, the use of cultural transformation is also apparent among these ads. This means that when choosing what visual elements to use in their ads, advertisers will commonly choose those based on widespread ideas of beauty and communal assumptions evident in today's society. For example, advertisers would choose a picture of a thin woman with delicate features and a proportionate body over a chubby

woman with harsh features because this is how a beautiful person is perceived in today's society. Since a majority of my ads are for beauty products and healthy food options, this pattern definitely became apparent. Advertisers feel that by reinforcing these developed cultural beliefs into the visual elements of the ad, the ads observer will thus develop an affirmative implication between the product being portrayed and the idea. The product is essentially used as a signifier to ensure success represented by the proposal (Hariman).

Of equal importance, are the patterns that can be seen within the textual elements of an advertisement. First, the verbal elements within an ad are often manipulated for the benefit of the ad. This is done because the advertisers want the ad to have a precise effect on the viewer. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways. Words or phrases can be formatted differently, as can sentences, such as a well known proverb or idiom. Furthermore, changes in spelling are also apparent.

In like manner, foregrounding also becomes perceptible. Harris defines foregrounding as "a linguistic process in which some elements, such as words, phrases, sentences, stressings, intonations, or the like are given prominence or made more meaningfully significant by the communicator/language-user, in this case the creator(s) of a print advertisement" (Harris 3).

Equally, the importance of the ability to encode and decode can be seen in these ads. According to Chandler's study of semiotics, the comprehension of the message within an advertisement can only occur after the viewer has decoded the meaning. In order for decoding to take place, the receiver must first recognize and comprehend the message, and then interpret and evaluate the message (Chandler).

After I studied the ads I had gathered as a whole and made note of distinctive patterns used by all the advertisements that I had worked to collect, I decided to separate out the ads

advertising beauty products and look for distinctive characteristics and patterns within this group. I noticed a few more distinctive patterns. Given the nature of that which these ads are trying to sell, most of the advertisements for beauty products are visual, with the exception of a few of the ads being informative. The few informative ads that I found had both a visual element as well as a large textual element, which includes detailed information about the specific product that is being sold. These are ads in which the advertiser wants the viewer to have more information on the item being featured in the specific ad. An example of this can be seen in an ad that I found for an Olay product called "total effects." The ad not only contains a very large visual component, but also contains a rather long verbal description of the product and the various advantages it has for the user.

Bib Citation:
Olay-total effects. Advertisement. Health. Oct 2009: 56

METAPHRAND: Olay total effects				+	METAPHIER: "Total effects" tool box			
Visual	**Verbal**	**Mode**	**Placement**		**Visual**	**Verbal**	**Mode**	**Placement**
Full bottles of "Olay total effects products"	Olay written on both bottles Upper right hand corner Stated in text on bottom	Transference Also tool box combined with Olay bottle shape	Bottom right hand corner		Opened tool box	Description of "tools" written on tool box- characteristics of what lotion does for skin	Transference	Middle of page
					Domain	**Type**	**Purpose**	
					Human Nature Spirit ✓ Other	Archetypal ✓ Novel Systemic Orientational	Praise Condemn ✓ Describe	
Paraphrand: Hair product, anti-frizz					*Paraphiers:* Handy, convenient, compact, useful			

Another example of an advertisement that contains a significant amount of information is an ad for a Neutrogena product called "healthy skin liquid makeup." In this ad, the viewer can find the results from a clinical trial that was performed, as well as general information about the product.

Bib Citation:
Neutrogena. Advertisement. <u>SELF</u>. Oct 2009: 15

METAPHRAND: Neutrogena "healthy skin liquid makeup"				+	*METAPHIER:* DNA			
Visual	**Verbal**	**Mode**	**Placement**		**Visual**	**Verbal**	**Mode**	**Placeme**
Opened makeup bottle	Text on actual bottle, and "Neutrogena" stated about 3 times in surrounding text	Transference	Center of page to the right		DNA structures going into bottle	Clarification in text to the right	Transference	Top left corner of page
					Domain	**Type**	**Purpose**	
					✓ Human	Archetypal	Praise	
					✓ Nature	✓ Novel	Condemn	
					Spirit	Systemic	✓ Describe	
					Other	Orientational		
Paraphrand: Makeup, foundation, cover up					*Paraphiers:* Life, genetics, individuality			

This type of advertising is effective in presenting the viewer with documented information one would need to gain confidence in regard to the specific product. Advertisers use this technique because they want the viewer to understand that the product may not only be necessary for special occasions, or for the consumer to look beautiful, but rather for them to keep their hair, skin, etc. in a superior and healthy condition every day. Thus, the viewer may need additional information regarding the product, such as the type of skin, or hair the product is ideal for, how and at what frequency the product should be used, and even information on where one would be able to find the product.

In contrast to this, there are a few advertisements that contain absolutely no information regarding the product. This is especially evident in advertisements I found for food. Because the

foods "taste" cannot be experienced through just words alone, advertisers use metaphors and similes to describe the product instead. For example, in an advertisement for the "Special K" granola bar the granola bar itself is shaped into a slim woman's figure.

Bib Citation: Special K Bar. Advertisement. SHAPE. Oct 2009: 126									
METAPHRAND: Special K Bar					+	*METAPHIER:* Thinner waist			
Visual	**Verbal**	**Mode**	**Placement**			**Visual**	**Verbal**	**Mode**	**Placement**
Partial opened Special K bar wrapper	"Special K Bar" written on wrapper	Transference	Bottom half of page			Special K bar shaped to look like a slim waist	"Less waist written next to special k bar"	Transference	Middle of page
						Domain	**Type**	**Purpose**	
						✓ Human	Archetypal	✓ Praise	
						Nature	✓ Novel	Condemn	
						Spirit	Systemic	Describe	
						Other	Orientational		
Paraphrand: Breakfast, granola bar						*Paraphiers:* Healthy, good-looking, "hot"			

Another pattern that I discovered when comparing my various advertisements for different food items is that this specific genre of ads tend to focus more on what the product can do for the viewer; how he, or she, will benefit from it, and how he or she will be perceived by others after consuming it. The ads tend to focus less on saying much about the actual taste of the food in general. This type of advertising could be seen as precarious, given that the consumer becomes slightly unaware of exactly what he or she is purchasing. Essentially, the ideology in these types of ads becomes the main focus.

An additional pattern I noticed within my collection of beauty ads became apparent as well, especially in regard to those for assorted facial creams and similar products. These ads all have a similar problem: they function within a limited range of terminology. Thus, it becomes more difficult for an advertiser to create a unique ad in comparison to the other ads of competitors for similar products. This can also be seen among ads that are trying to sell everyday

products, such as makeup or shampoos. The more the product is one of everyday usage, the harder it becomes for the advertiser to present it in a new, unique and different way. Advertisers tend to solve this problem by featuring a celebrity in their ad, or may even try to create new possible uses for the product, which ultimately work by putting it in a new light. They do this to make their product stand out from its competitors. Something else that became blatantly obvious as I was looking for patterns within my chosen advertisements is the inclination for ads to include alarming and/or shocking elements that might be considered taboo to capture the onlooker's attention. Again, advertisers use this technique to stand out from their competitors.

Notwithstanding, another pattern I noticed is, even though I knew a visual metaphor was being used in some of the ads, a few advertisements seemed unclear and confusing to me. In other words, I am not really sure what the ad is advertising per se. One may also experience this phenomenon as a result of different life experiences he or she has had. Every ad is working to capture the attention of a specific target group. However, if the ad's observer is not a part of this "group," the textual and visual messages within the ad may appear unclear.

The advertisements that I have selected, as well as all the advertisements apparent in today's society can be categorized in a variety of different ways. Advertisers and different companies are constantly working to try and invent new ways to advertise their products, and this is especially obvious among those for different beauty products. The different techniques and methods used in the ads for the products that I have selected must cater to that of their intended target market: young women. The young women who these ads are intended for fit into a specific category; they are women who strive to be beautiful, exquisite, fashion conscious, trendy, and healthy.

Visual metaphors in advertising are a fascinating topic of study and remain widely unrecognized even today. Advertisements which contain metaphors can be grouped and categorized depending on a wide variety of different factors. All of the various ads that I have chosen to examine for this paper make up a captivating array in which metaphors are the key to their very existence. Many textual elements for the advertisements that I have selected are based upon metaphors, and these metaphors that the ads use are based on that of very human knowledge and understanding. So, "at the end of the day," I would have to agree with that of Lakoff and Johnson when they say, "metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature" (Lakoff and Johnson 5).

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