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## CHAPTER

# 13

## ADVERTISING

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### OVERVIEW

The average American is immersed in advertising:

- U.S. ad spending in 2006 reached a record \$285 billion—the equivalent of \$950.00 for every person in the United States.<sup>1</sup>
- An hour of prime-time network programming contains 18 minutes of advertising, down from 16 minutes in 2003 and 12 minutes in the 1980s.<sup>2</sup>
- By the age of 65, the average American has seen two million TV commercials.<sup>3</sup>
- American children are exposed to 40,000 ads per year.<sup>4</sup>
- When *Dateline NBC* recently asked children to choose between a banana and a rock with a Scooby-Doo sticker on it for breakfast, nearly all chose the rock.<sup>5</sup>

It is safe to say that the United States has arrived at the stage of *ubiquitous advertising*, in which all conceivable public space is dedicated to advertising, including checkout lines, gas pumps, ATM machines, and urinals. In addition, *place-based video screens* show advertisements in public spaces. As an example, AccentHealth, a marketing company, has placed TV screens in 10,800 doctor's offices across the country.<sup>6</sup> Advertisers also reach consumers in nontraditional ways, including podcasts, blogs, video games, e-mail messages, cellphones, and video-on-demand.

Some disagreement exists about the effectiveness of advertising messages. Studies show that nine out of 10 people can't remember the product

or company featured in the last commercial they watched, even if it was less than five minutes ago.<sup>7</sup> However, Tony Schwartz makes an important distinction between *memory* and *recall* in advertising:

Researchers narrowly focus their questions on a subject's recollection of commercial content, which they consider the essence of what makes a message effective.... [However,] if we make a deep attachment to the product in the commercial, there is no need to depend on their remembering the name of the product. Seeing the product in the store should evoke the association attached to the product in the commercial.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, although you may not remember specific information about an advertisement, the ad may make the product appear familiar to you when you are wandering down the grocery store aisle. By the age of two, children have developed a loyalty to specific brands.<sup>9</sup>

And further, beyond promoting particular brands, advertisements send cumulative messages about what kind of world we live in, media stereotypes, sexual roles, and measures of success.

### Function

Advertising performs a variety of manifest functions:

- Informing the public about a product
- Attracting the attention of the consumer to the product
- Motivating the consumer to action
- Stimulating markets
- Supporting the business community
- Establishing and maintaining a lasting relationship between the consumer and a company

American consumers rely on advertising for services and goods. We scan the papers for bargains, entertainment information, holiday gift ideas, and trends in fashion. Public service spots warn us about dangers in society (e.g., "Say no to drugs") and encourage us to be better citizens by giving to various charities.

At the same time, advertising serves a number of *latent* functions:

*Persuasion.* Advertising cannot convince consumers to purchase something that they truly don't want: if you don't like coconut, no ad will convince you that you do. However, impulse displays located by the checkout counters in stores stimulate a desire for items that you do fancy but may not be thinking about at the moment. And in cases in which the customer is already shopping for a product, ads are designed to steer the consumer to their particular brand.

Nevertheless, advertisers try to convince us that we don't merely want a product but, in fact, *need* it. Indeed, advertising copy is often phrased in the form of an imperative, or command (e.g., "Buy it today!").

*Shaping Attitudes.* Before advertisers can influence specific consumer behaviors, they are often faced with the more fundamental problem of shaping *attitudes*. The agency of Campbell-Mithun-Esty sees its primary task as creating "desired attitudes" among consumers: "What attitudes must we establish or change? What habits do we want formed? Do we want that person to know something new has happened, or become aware of additional product uses, or sample our product, or change a negative attitude or misconception?"<sup>10</sup>

Some ad campaigns are designed to create a positive *image* for the company rather than sell a product. For example, in 2006, major oil companies such as ExxonMobil and the British Petroleum Company (BP) ran television ads, conveying messages about how the company cleans up the environment and searches for new solutions to energy problems.

When encountering a public relations advertisement, it is also appropriate to ask *why* the company has chosen to solicit the good will of the public. In this case, the ad campaign was designed to enhance the credibility of the oil industry, which has reported record profits while at the same time hiking up the price of gasoline.

*Fostering Consumer Culture.* One of the cumulative messages found in advertising involves the value of consumerism in American culture. Advertisers encourage the audience to think of themselves in terms of their consumer behavior. Advertising promotes membership in a group (e.g., "The Pepsi Generation"), united by common consumer habits. Indeed, by wearing designer labels or sweatshirts with commercial logos, consumers have been transformed into walking billboards, advertising these products.

This conditioning begins early. The premise of a popular board game called "Mall Madness" is a trip to the mall, complete with no-limit credit cards. An ad for the game uses a jingle containing the lyrics, "It's our world, girls, so let's SHOP!" But according to a sixth grade media literacy student at Rosman School in St. Louis, Missouri, the toy manufacturer "wants us to think the most important thing to girls is shopping—but it ISN'T!"<sup>11</sup>

In contemporary culture, education has been reduced to knowledgeable *consumerism*. In the past, an educated person was regarded as someone who was exposed to the world of ideas and had developed the critical skills that enabled him or her to ask questions, analyze options, reach logical conclusions, and make decisions. Today, however, an educated consumer is measured by whether he or she has the background and ability to be a "smart shopper." Thus, the slogan on the web site for Sym's Department Stores is, "An educated consumer is our best customer."<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the chain refers to their salespeople as "educators"; they have

taken over the teacher's role of instructing their "pupils" on matters of importance—that is, how to consume wisely.

*Establishing Standards of Behavior and Lifestyle.* Advertising is in the business of establishing standards of behavior—how to look, where to go, and what to do with our time. In addition, ads have become a part of our lifestyles. Ad slogans have been incorporated into peoples' common vernacular (e.g., "Drop the Chalupa").

Advertising also has assumed a principal role in the delineation of taste. A marketing executive for Pepsi-Cola once offered the opinion that his competitor, Diet Coke, had made a conscious decision to keep the taste of its product indistinct: although nobody initially *liked* Diet Coke, no one *disliked* the product either. Then, through clever promotion ("Just for the taste of it"), consumers learned that it was stylish to drink Diet Coke and eventually developed a taste for the soft drink.

*Entertainment.* Advertising was one of the first public communications formats to realize that any message, if presented in an entertaining fashion, will attract the interest of the public. For instance, one of the prime attractions of the Super Bowl is the ceremonial unveiling of new commercials. Indeed, the Super Bowl commercials have become such an entertainment spectacle that in 2007 a separate program was aired on CBS to host "Super Bowl's Greatest Commercials 2007," hosted by Jim Nantz and Daisy Fuentes.

However, advertising must not be so entertaining that it distracts the audience from its primary function of promoting a product. Robert K. Passikoff, president at Brand Keys, observes, "Entertainment is not the same as engagement. People looked at the Ellen DeGeneres commercials and said, 'This is the funniest thing, so clever.' And then they pulled out [the product]—their Visa card."<sup>13</sup>

*As Principal Message.* Instead of simply supporting programming, in some cases, the programs themselves are advertisements. The Home Shopping Network attracts large numbers of viewers who enjoy the merchandising of products. Only slightly less subtle is MTV. In addition to the sponsors of MTV programming, the entertainment content *itself* is advertising—the music videos provide exposure for recording artists, promoting artists' concerts and CDs.

### Media Communicator

In advertisements, the media communicator plays a major role in influencing the intended audience. Advertisers strive to establish a *parasocial* relationship with the audience, making the consumer feel known, appreciated, and special. The Campbell-Mithun-Esty Ad Agency observes, "We must come into our customers' homes and lives as understanding friends and remain as welcome guests because of the honesty and good grace with which we present ourselves."<sup>14</sup>

Although ads are presented through channels of mass media, they often assume an interpersonal tone. It should not come as a surprise that the personal pronoun "you" is the most frequent word used in advertising. For instance, a radio spot for Hampton Inn includes the following claim:

At Hampton Inn, we know how you feel... Hampton Inn—We're with you all the way.

Because Hampton Inn "knows you" so well, they are in a unique position to provide for all of your lodging needs.

These ads emphasize the longstanding relationship between a company and its customers, so that advertisers can ask for (and expect) consumer loyalty. The word "trust" is another frequently used word in advertising (e.g., "Wal-Mart stands for 'trust.'").

Identifying the hidden media communicator in an ad is an important step in the analysis of media messages. To illustrate, advertisers increasingly invent online profiles who appear on sites like MySpace and Facebook to reach young people who avoid television commercials. Saul Hansell provides the following example:

(In 2007), a Facebook member using the name Brody Ruckus, who said he was a Virginia Tech student, created a group on Facebook and said that if 100,000 people joined it, his girlfriend would agree to have sex with him and another woman at the same time. The group soon attracted 430,000 members.

Some members became suspicious, however, and discovered that there was no Brody Ruckus registered at Virginia Tech. They traced the group to Ruckus Network, a college-oriented music service. Facebook shut down the group, citing its policy against commercial activities by members (unless, of course, they are paying advertisers).<sup>15</sup>

In this case, teenagers in the audience had accepted these messages from their "peers," little realizing that the jargon was written by adults, whose interests, values, and motives differ markedly from the kids in the audience.

Ads directed at children often feature actors and models who are a bit older than the target audience members and, as a result, serve as role models. The thought process of young audience members works according to the following syllogism: 1) The kids in the ad are cool and popular; 2) These kids use the product; 3) I want to be like them; 4) I want to purchase the product.

Adults make the same mistake of thinking that the performers in ads are the actual media communicators. Thus, an ad in which Tiger Woods endorses a deodorant operates according to the same syllogism: 1) Tiger is cool and popular; 2) Tiger uses the product; 3) I want to be like Tiger; 4) I want to purchase the product.

Performers in advertisements fall into the following categories:

*Actors.* Casting directors screen candidates carefully to find actors who will be most convincing in the role. Hooper White advises advertising executives,

You should furnish the casting director with a complete written description of the actor you have in mind. Is he or she hard nosed or easygoing, aggressive or passive, funny or serious, quiet or loud? Don't limit the written description to physical details. Be sure to discuss, in writing, the *entire characterization*. You will find that this forces you to clearly identify the character, thereby helping the casting director to find the right actor.<sup>16</sup>

*Personas.* Some characters have become a staple of a company's advertising strategy. Because the audience has known characters like the Marlboro Man, Mr. Whipple, Madge the manicurist, and Juan Valdez for decades, they are regarded as real people who can be trusted to tell the truth about the benefits of the product. As a result, the actor who portrays "Juan Valdez" has become a worldwide celebrity:

When Juan Valdez walks the streets of Manhattan or Paris, a poncho over his shoulder, delighted passers-by point, yell greetings and ask for autographs. He is thronged. "It's astonishing the power of publicity," said the man who has portrayed Juan Valdez since 1969, Carlos Sanchez. "My Colombian friends see how the American people receive me, taking photos, and they say it is crazy."<sup>17</sup>

More recently, Volkswagen created a profile page for "Helga," the virtual German character in some of its commercials, on MySpace. Participants could add Helga to their list of friends. In addition, they could see and comment on the commercials and download Helga ringtones, buddy icons, and life-size images.

*Celebrities* like Jessica Simpson frequently are hired to serve as spokespeople for products. The rationale is that consumers who admire Ms. Simpson will accept her recommendation to use a particular product. Indeed, taking this strategy a bit further, some celebrities have their own line of products, such as Jessica Simpson's line of cosmetics, called Dessert. We should remember, however, that these performers are paid hefty fees, whether or not they actually use the products they endorse. Moreover, celebrity ads often elevate these spokespeople to positions of undue authority, such as former weatherman Willard Scott endorsing Riopan Plus II cold medicine or Hollywood actors promoting political candidates.

*Models.* Advertisements frequently use models who display the desired "look" that the target audience admires. These models also embody a cultural ideal, which in many cases is not only unrealistic, but unhealthy. The female models in fashion and cosmetics ads are, on average, between 13 and 19 pounds underweight which, according to the American

Psychiatric Association, falls within the range of anorexia.<sup>18</sup> Women are constantly asked to compare themselves to the models and actresses who appear in advertising. In order to sell their products, ads continually tell their female audience members that they are inadequate—overweight, need cosmetic "support" to look better, or simply are too old. This barrage of messages can have a harmful effect on the self-image of young girls and women.

*Icons.* Cartoon characters like Charlie Tuna, Tony the Tiger, and the Keebler Elves are icons that have been created to personalize the company. They must be likable, memorable, and project qualities that can be associated with the product. However, these fictitious characters have no connection whatsoever with product quality or company policy. To illustrate, in 2001, a sex discrimination lawsuit was filed against MetLife, a life insurance corporation, which has licensed the Peanuts character Snoopy to represent its corporate image. There is no small irony in this loveable symbol representing a company that has been anything but endearing to its workers.

A related strategy involves creating fictitious people like Betty Crocker and Aunt Jemima who become associated with a product. In some cases, a succession of models have been selected, projecting an image of the ideal homemaker that is more in line with the times.

*Real People.* Testimonials from "average people" lend authenticity and credibility to an ad. The more amateur their performance, the more the audience identifies with them and believes their testimony. This "real people" approach should not be confused with a strategy in which actors portray average consumers.

A variation on this strategy involves using actual company personnel to sell the product. CEOs like August Busch III, head of Anheuser Busch Brewery, are not polished pitchmen; however, the consumer enjoys seeing the corporate heads of companies as "regular guys" who believe in their product.

*Attention Getters.* Every local television station carries commercials by outrageous pitchmen who attract attention by screaming, roller-skating, dressing up in ape suits, or by offering "crazy, crazy low prices." Of course, it is not unreasonable to ask: why would anyone want to buy a product from a person who is either that crazy or that annoying?

*Product as Character.* In addition, agencies strive to establish an identity for their product in the mind of the public. John Ferrill, executive vice president and creative director of Young & Rubicam, explains,

Every product has a personality. Whether the clients have consciously thought about it or not, people perceive a brand in a certain way. Jell-O is a member of the family; it's friendly, it's fun. Anacin is very businesslike; it gets the job done, but it does it in a very straight, unglamorous, matter-of-fact kind of way. I could name almost any product and you'd have some impressions on ... really what it is. The

brand personality is the description of a product stated as though that product were a person.

If you're trying to write a statement for Oil of Olay, you might characterize the brand as "feminine". You might say she is mysterious, possibly foreign in origin. She understands beauty secrets and the needs of women. She is an authoritative friend.

### Comparative Media

One of the most formidable challenges facing advertisers involves finding the most efficient way to reach their target audience. The most direct means of convincing a consumer is through face-to-face communication, so that customers can actually feel, smell, see, and taste the product for themselves. However, in order to reach a mass audience, advertisers must rely on *indirect* experience to promote the merits of their product. For instance, beer ads must rely on visuals to suggest the taste and texture of the beverage. To illustrate, in a classic Miller Draft Beer ad, opening the bottle instantly transforms a hot climate into a frosty winter world. In this case, the visuals call to mind the cold, crisp taste of Miller Beer.

Every medium has its own distinctive characteristics that determine its ability to promote particular types of products to specific audiences. Jay Schulberg of the Ogilvy and Mather Advertising Agency explains,

... the media can do different things. TV can create awareness more quickly with a larger percentage of the population at a lower cost. To do that in print becomes prohibitively expensive; it's almost impossible. However, print can inform better.

If one has a complicated message, or where the consumer is spending a lot of money for a product, such as a VCR or a television set, people want information, and you can get a lot more into print than you can get into a 30-second spot. So where TV may create the awareness, say, for a car, people want to read about what the car has, in my view.<sup>20</sup>

Advertisers consider the following factors when deciding on which medium to use:

- Which medium is best suited to convey the advertising message?
- Which medium is the target audience most likely to use?
- Which medium can display the product most attractively and effectively?
- Given the costs and benefits associated with each medium, how can clients make the most efficient use of their advertising budgets?

*Print.* The medium of print is unmatched in its ability to convey detailed information about a product. In addition, the tangible nature of print allows consumers to refer back to ads when they want specific information. Consequently, people rely on newspapers more than any other medium when they are ready to make a purchase.<sup>21</sup>

Table 13.1  
Media Comparisons

Advantages	Disadvantages
<b>Newspapers</b> Geographic Market Selectivity Flexibility — Ease of Ad Insertion Editorial Support Broad Coverage Considerable Reader Interest	Lack of Permanence Poor Printing Quality Limited Demographic Orientation Wasted Circulation High Cost for National Advertisers Ad Can Be Buried
<b>Magazines</b> Demographic Market Selectivity Long-Life Ad Capability Good Quality Print Production Editorial Support Reader Interest Upscale Audience/Prestige	Lack of Flexibility in Last-Minute Changes Limited Availability High Cost—Especially for Color Limited Local Ad Opportunities Ad Can Be Buried
<b>Radio</b> Geographic and Demographic Market Selectivity Universal Accessibility Relatively Inexpensive Personal Nature of Radio Pace Determined by Advertiser Local Appeal Portability Costs for Ads Have Remained Stable Growth of the Radio Audience Flexible Format Time can be bought on short notice Changes can be made on short notice	Lack of Permanence Perishability Clutter Lack of Visual Support Limited Impact—Background Medium
<b>Television</b> Visualization of Product Geographic Market Selectivity Significant Market Penetration Can Deliver Huge Audiences Legitimacy of Medium	Perishable Ad Message Unless Repeated Relatively Expensive Clutter—Messages Lost in Group of Ads Not Terribly Selective Medium Limited Time for Presentation Relatively Inflexible Format Ad slots often bought up well in advance of presentation
<b>Internet</b> Flexibility—Ability to Update Ads Can Blend in with Editorial Text Can Use Multiple Media to Convey Information Ad More Effective Outreach to Potential Costomers Ability to Track Consumer's Other Purchases Ability to Track Effectiveness of Ads Ability to Target Audience—Microcasting	Ad Can Be Immediately Deleted Can Get Lost in Clutter Expensive to Maintain Site Difficult for Consumer to Locate the Ad—Lack of Comprehensive Web Index

Print ads also have the advantage of blending in with editorial content. For instance, in fashion magazines it is often difficult to distinguish between fashion articles and ads promoting a line of apparel. Moreover, readers tend to associate print ads with the publication in which it is published; consequently, ads placed in prestigious periodicals are accorded commensurate respect.

Print ads generally are very carefully crafted. In contrast with a 30-second television spot, an advertising team concentrates on the equivalent of one frame for a print ad. All elements have been carefully selected in this one moment to fulfill the objective of the ad.

*Radio.* The lack of visual support in radio obviously makes it impossible for an ad to actually show the features of a product. However, radio advertisers can take advantage of the imaginative possibilities of the medium to sell their product. For instance, a radio spot for the Volkswagen Jetta asks, “How do I help you visualize the Volkswagen Jetta?” The narrator then plays a variety of classical selections to suggest gracefulness, performance, and being “at one” with the car. He concludes by inviting us to “imagine the difference between mere transportation and pure driving pleasure.”

Like print ads, radio commercials can blend in with the regular programming. To illustrate, in 2007, KZPS FM in Dallas, Texas, announced plans to promote its products conversationally in what the company calls “integration.” A prototype provided by the station offers the following scenario for advertising Southwest Airlines:

The D.J. later discusses the South by Southwest music festival, a popular annual event held in Austin, and concludes, “You know, the best way to get down to Austin for South by Southwest is Southwest Airlines. They have tons of flights. It’s the way I travel.”<sup>22</sup>

Radio ads feature catchy jingles, as well as sophisticated recording techniques and performance. In fact, former ad composer Barry Manilow was able to parlay his understanding of jingles (simple melodies and snappy lyrics) into a successful career as a popular artist.

The radio advertiser must condense information into the abbreviated time allotted, at the same time making sure that the information is presented clearly enough to be easily followed. The message must be simplified and the presentation concise. The radio advertiser is limited to one minute, or approximately 200–300 words; in contrast, the print advertiser can use as many as 1,000 words to promote the product.<sup>23</sup> The pace is determined by the advertiser, so that if the audience is inattentive, the message is irretrievably lost. But, as mentioned earlier, radio listeners are often engaged in competing activities, so they may be particularly susceptible to advertising messages.

*Television.* Television is certainly the most prestigious advertising medium. Merely by appearing on the airwaves, products (and companies)

assume a measure of legitimacy. No matter how goofy the local pitchmen may act, they enjoy a minor celebrity status in their community, simply by appearing in front of the camera.

According to Arthur Bellaire, an effective television spot must combine visuals, sound, and narrative information to convey its message:

The video and the corresponding audio should relate. Don’t be demonstrating one sales feature while talking about another.... While the audio should be relevant to the video, don’t waste words by describing what is obvious in the picture. Rather, see that the words interpret the picture and thereby advance the thought. Rely on the video to carry more than half the weight. Being a visual medium, television is more effective at showing than telling. Avoid static scenes. Provide for camera movement and changes of scenes.<sup>24</sup>

Television offers the following advantages in the promotion of products:

- *Demonstration.* Television is supreme in its ability to show how a product is used.
- *Dramatization.* Advertisers find that ads are effective when they “activate” the product by showing it being used by people. Beyond simply demonstrating how a product is used, television ads present a scenario in which the product makes a significant impact on the lives of the characters.
- *Performance.* More than other media, television is particularly adept at presenting people who are consuming and enjoying the product. A convincing performance can make a difference in persuading its audience to purchase the product.
- *Affective Appeal.* The combination of music and pictures can touch the emotions of the viewer.

Innovations in media technology have added to the challenges facing TV advertisers. Although advertisers spend about \$70 billion a year on television commercials, digital video recorders now enable viewers to skip the ads altogether.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, 88 percent of the TV commercials went unwatched in homes that had the black box.<sup>26</sup>

In response, advertisers have developed the following strategies to keep people tuned to the ads:

- Airing one-second ad spots called “blinks.” Presenting brief commercial spots doesn’t give listeners time to change the station before the message is delivered.<sup>27</sup>
- Producing commercials in which the product being advertised is unclear. This “mystery” keeps people in suspense (and watching).
- Personalizing ad messages to appeal to the specific interests and needs of the audience.
- Emphasizing the quality of production, so that the entertainment value of the spots is, in some cases, superior to the programming.

*Digital Media.* The Internet has certainly revolutionized the advertising industry. In the early days of mass media, advertisers used a *broadcasting* strategy, in which they used direct mail, radio, print, and television, hoping to interest some of the mass audience within this broad sweep. As print, radio, and television became more sophisticated, marketers were able to *narrowcast* their messages, developing a demographic profile of their target audience and then devising an ad strategy to reach their intended audience.

Interactive technology enables advertisers to move to a *microcast strategy*, in which advertising messages are personalized to meet an individual's specific interests, buying habits, and financial capacity.

Web sites commonly install *cookies*, a piece of software which plants small, traceable files on the computers of the people who visit their site. This *meta information* (i.e., information about the information) enables advertisers to track activity on the Internet, so that they can gather precise information about the individual consumer. In 2006, Internet companies Yahoo and AOL developed the capacity to instantaneously analyze what their users searched for on the Web and then construct an advertisement that takes their personal interests into consideration. Josh Bernoff observes,

An audience of 200,000 people you know intimately might be as valuable as an amorphous mass of 20 million. After all, a person with a deep interest in a subject is more likely to watch an ad about that subject. "You and I may not care to watch a commercial for Preparation H. But for someone with hemorrhoids, it might be the thing he is most eager to hear about. And he's the one the makers of Preparation H want to talk to."<sup>28</sup>

To illustrate, if you visit the Sears web page to purchase camping equipment, Sears will upload not merely any purchases but also other areas that you have browsed through, such as cowboy boots. The next time that you visit Sears on the Web, the homepage will be personalized, notifying you about any bargains in boots. In addition, if the web site has personal information on you (either by buying the information from another web site or by giving you a "prize" to fill out a form), the homepage will be able to give you advance notice of a relative's birthday and then make suggestions for an appropriate gift.

After browsing through the virtual selection of boots at the Sears site, you may begin to receive unsolicited e-mails from other companies about sales for boots. It is now commonplace for this "preference" information about an individual to be sold throughout cyberspace—so now every boot company on the planet knows of your interest.

A related marketing technique is called *performance-based advertising*, in which a company establishes a network of web sites with links to its site and then pays these "affiliates" for referrals. To illustrate, C-net has signed up thousands of individuals and companies to post a link to C-net

on their web sites. C-net then pays the affiliate for every referral. This system is potentially a very lucrative source of income for Internet search directories and content providers, giving these sites an impetus to attract as many visitors as possible. Consequently, it is important to consider *why* particular links appear on a web site.

The fluid nature of interactive media also makes it easy to camouflage the advertising function, so that advertising is often difficult to detect. Advertising links may be inserted into editorial copy, without being labeled accordingly, so that individuals seeking additional information on a topic instead find themselves in an advertiser's web site. These links may also be included because the web owner is being paid an advertising fee. Eric Eiffron explains,

For example, nytimes.com offers a link to barnesandnoble.com next to its online book reviews, and *The New York Times* gets a piece of the action if anyone buys a book via that route. Because it's the *Times*, we can be fairly sure that reviews aren't skewed to help sales. But it has to be noted that the *Times* now has a financial interest in that book being reviewed that it didn't have before. And it's not coincidental that ... while most of the newspaper's past articles are available online for just one year and can only be retrieved by paying a fee, the *Times* has made 19 years of book reviews available for free (with the Barnes & Noble "buy option," of course).<sup>29</sup>

The banner, or pop-up ad automatically appears on the desktop as the user hits a particular site. In 2006, 30 percent of consumers sometimes clicked on banner advertisements on the Web. And 61 percent report later visiting the web sites advertised.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, television and web technology are converging, so that the old television set is being transformed into an "entertainment monitor." The large screen will be divided, with the left-hand side reserved for continuous advertising. The world on-screen will then become a virtual display window; if you fancy a pair of shoes that an actor or actress is wearing on a situation comedy, you will be able to click on the image and order the item.

## AUDIENCE

The American Marketing Association offers a rather curious definition of advertising: "A paid form of a *non-personal* presentation and promotion of ideas, goods, or service by an identified sponsor aimed at a particular target market and audience [emphasis mine]."<sup>31</sup>

However, it can be argued that in many respects, advertising is an extraordinarily *personal* form of mass communications. After all, the success of an ad depends upon advertisers' ability to identify and then persuade one person. Indeed, John O'Toole, chairman of Foote, Cone & Belding Advertising, regards advertising as a form of interpersonal communication. He observes, "When the chord is struck in one, the vibrations reverberate in millions."<sup>32</sup>

Advertisers devote considerable attention to research to become familiar with their audience. *Demographic* research refers to the study of human populations. Demographic categories include: *age, gender, income, education, occupation, race, religion, and family size*. Demographic considerations such as geographical location can play a large role in consumer buying patterns. For example, black is the predominant automobile color on the East Coast, while white and lighter shades of cars are preferred on the West Coast.

*Psychographic* research identifies the attitudes, values, and lifestyles shared by groups falling within these demographic categories. Psychographic research enables advertisers to identify the consumption patterns of particular subgroups. To illustrate, Otto Kleppner predicts that after completing college, you will go through the following stages of consumerism:

- *Young single*. You have moved to your own apartment and begun to make your own buying decisions. A high proportion of this income is spent on clothes, personal care, recreation, and entertainment.
- *Young marrieds, no children*. In general, you become more home-oriented. For all but a small proportion of these households, the wife works, providing a higher standard of living for the household. Most consumer buying decisions begin to be made by the female.
- *Young marrieds, children under six*. At this stage, the couple becomes tied down. If the wife quits her job, the family income goes down—although in most cases, the wife continues to work. A move to a larger apartment or house is required.
- *Young marrieds, children over six*. Your children have entered school. At this point, the wife has more freedom for activities outside of the home. The children begin to influence purchasing decisions.
- *Older marrieds with children*. Your expenses increase for education, weddings, etc. You begin to engage in more activities away from home. For instance, you begin to travel more frequently.
- *Older marrieds, no children*. Your children have left home. Smaller living quarters are now required. Your consumption patterns no longer need to consider the children.
- *Older singles*. At this stage you have become widows, widowers, divorcees, and unmarried men or women. You experience a dramatic change in lifestyle as your income is reduced.<sup>33</sup>

Advertisers have discovered that lifestyle has a direct bearing on consumer patterns. For instance, automobile purchases are most numerous among young married couples with no children, as well as young married couples with children over six. And because young marrieds with small children are generally less mobile than other groups, they are the most promising prospects for television purchases.

Advertisers can even predict consumer buying patterns on the basis of a consumer's previous purchases. The BBDO Advertising Agency uses a

system of *Lifestyle Indicators (LSI)* to predict cross-product consumer buying patterns: "[We can] relate the usage of your product to the usage of other products. Through this method we can determine whether your prime prospects drink wine or beer, if they travel outside the U.S., what kinds of cars they drive, what books they read, etc."<sup>34</sup> Thus, after you have made a purchase, you may be flooded with e-mails promoting other products that, according to Lifestyle Indicators, will be of interest to you.

Through psychographic research, advertisers have become particularly adept at identifying the fears, anxieties, and areas of insecurity of their target audience, and then flooding them with personalized messages that, first, trigger their insecurities, and then present their product as the solution to their "problem." Reporter Lisa W. Foderaro provides the following illustration:

Pam Fitzgerald, managing partner of a marketing company in Virginia who struggles with her weight, bristles at the diet-plan spam, wondering "who knows how much I weigh." And her heart aches for one of her young employees, the only one in the small firm not to have finished college, who seems to be a magnet for spam pushing Johnny-come-lately bachelor's degree programs. "It's rubbing him raw day in and day out," she said. Worsening the psychic toll is the increasingly focused tailoring of spam of all stripes.<sup>35</sup>

*Multiple Audiences*. Media programming may be directed simultaneously at both a manifest and latent audience. To illustrate, ads that appear in women's magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* or *Vogue* are often surprisingly alluring and seductive, given that the target audience consists primarily of heterosexual women. One way to account for this sexually titillating advertising is that the latent audience actually consists of *males*. Women readers project themselves into the role of the model and then respond to the ads from a male perspective. ("How would he like me in this outfit?") This explanation has some rather disturbing implications. For although progressive magazines like *Cosmopolitan* purport to be fashionably liberated, this advertising strategy suggests that women still depend upon male approval in American culture.

## CONTEXT

### Historical Context

In order to reach people in the most immediate manner possible, advertising is extraordinarily sensitive to historical events. These events provide a context of meaning for the commercial message. For instance, after the terrorist attack of 9/11, Calvin Klein altered its campaign from a sexy appeal to a more "poignant" approach—snippets of film, in home-video style, of family moments, shot in retro black and white, set to the 1960s Burt Bacharach song, "What the World Needs Now Is Love."



## Cultural Context

**Advertising and Popular Culture.** Advertising may furnish perspective into cultural attitudes and values. As an example, in 2004 the Staples office supply chain launched an advertising campaign in which customers pushed an “Easy Button,” that demonstrates how convenient it is to shop at their stores. The Easy Button says “Easy” on top and “Staples” along the side. Pushing the button activates a recording of Staples’ slogan: “That was easy!” The popularity of this prop was so overwhelming that Staples began merchandising the Easy Button for \$4.99. As of 2006, the chain sold nearly 1.5 million “Easy Buttons.”<sup>36</sup>

One way to account for the unexpected popularity of the promotion is that it taps into the concerns of individuals who are struggling to contend with a world in which they feel overwhelmed and powerless. One ad executive speculated in *Brandweek* that the Easy Button is an “elegant metaphor, speaking to a yearning for solutions to the complexities of the modern world.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, the commercials present scenarios in which pushing the Easy Button instantaneously solves difficult problems. In one ad, an Easy Button builds the Great Wall of China, just in time to thwart an invading army. According to reporter Rob Walker, people turn to the Easy Button to solve their problems.

According to Shira Goodman, Staples’ top marketing executive, the company has received letters and tracked reports of a dizzying array of Easy Button uses, from people pressing it to cheer on the kids during kitchen homework sessions to, somewhat incredibly, a woman who took one to her mother’s chemotherapy sessions. The Canadian prime minister was famously filmed with an Easy Button in his office. “This one is a little scary,” Goodman says, “but I’ve personally been on airplanes and seen them in the cockpit.”<sup>38</sup>

**Reflection of Cultural Preoccupations.** Advertising can also disclose areas of cultural interest and concern. In that respect, ads can furnish perspective into the following *cultural preoccupations*.

**Sex.** American advertisements reflect our culture’s ambivalent, adolescent preoccupation with sex. What are some of the cumulative messages about sex which can be found in American advertising?

- *Sex is a cultural obsession.* The sheer quantity of sexually oriented ads suggests that sex is a national fixation. All products (from perfume to automobiles) have sexual implications. Sex is always on our minds.
- *Sex is dirty.* American ads encourage a voyeuristic approach to sex. The audience peeks at models on the printed page or screen, which provides much of the sexual tension in the ads. Female models are posed in a posture of innocence, seemingly unaware that they are objects of desire. If they look at us boldly, they fall into the category of “bad girls.”

American ads convey the message that sex is dirty and must be repressed. In contrast, European advertisements generally are much more explicit than their American counterparts. Nudity is not uncommon, either in print or television ads. *Appearance is everything.* You are only as sexy as you look. We do not accept imperfections, either in our sex objects or, by extension, in ourselves. Consumer items, then, assume a magical quality, transforming people into desirable, sexy creatures.

- *Sex is confined to a narrow stage of life.* Sex is a youth-oriented activity. In advertising, sex ends with marriage. Advertising rarely depicts older adults in sexually suggestive situations.
- *Sex is objectified.* In many ads, women are reduced to sexual objects. Ads often show only part of females’ bodies, reinforcing the notion that sex appeal is associated with certain parts of the anatomy. Sex is not presented as an aspect of a larger relationship but an end in itself.
- *Sex is a contact sport.* Sex is a contest, in which people compete for the attention of others. That’s why we need all the commodities we can muster. Sex has very little to do with one’s partner but instead is an ego-centered performance, undertaken for the approval and admiration of others.
- *Sex is a consumer item.* The sexual style of ads has become its substance: products are sexy. In the ultimate depersonalization of sex, we are asked to believe that the products advertised in a seductive fashion, like cars, have sexual properties.

**Aging.** Americans’ preoccupation with youth is reflected in advertising. Ads for a range of products reinforce the ideal of youth by featuring models who are young, healthy, and fit. Julia Smillie observes, “Constant exposure to images of youth create an impression that youthfulness is the norm and that in order to be accepted, (the consumer) must strive to stay young.”<sup>39</sup> In a television ad for Just for Men Hair Coloring, a group of young people, male and female, are gathered together. One of the people has grey hair. His entire figure is washed out and devoid of color. Thus, grey is equated with being dull and boring, dreary and unattractive. The ad then instructs the man to “Get back in the game” by getting rid of grey hair. Once he has committed to using the product, color is restored to his image, and he is no longer ostracized from the group.

An ad for New Age hair color promises that the product will “restore your hair to its natural color,” inferring that aging is an unnatural process. An ad for Shiseido skin cream establishes age as an enemy: “The fragile skin around your eyes. This is where time strikes first.” Advertising for cosmetics, plastic surgery, exercise equipment, and hair replacement plans make the very ambitious promise of restoring youth. The headline for an Oil of Olay ad declares, “I don’t plan to grow old gracefully, I intend to fight it every step of the way.”

**Cleanliness.** American advertising often plays on our cultural insecurities about cleanliness. Asked where this antibacterial fetishism comes

from, Dr. Jeffrey S. Duchin replies, "A lot of it is not based on science. It is based on our national psyche and what we value - purity and cleanliness."<sup>40</sup>

Over the years, ad campaigns for Listerine mouthwash have been directed at a range of anxieties related to halitosis:

- "Could I be happy with him in spite of THAT?" (1923)
- "It brought him untold misery; yet only he himself was to blame." (1924)
- "Often a bridesmaid but never a bride." (1924)
- "Why had he changed so in his attentions?" (1924)
- "Their first conversation betrayed the fact that she was not fastidious." (1925)<sup>41</sup>

**Cultural Myths.** American ads frequently tap into cultural myths, including the following.

**Progress.** According to this cultural myth, new is better. Change is good for its own sake. Advertisers persuade customers that this year's models are superior to last year's. Advertisers create new markets by denigrating the old model, breaking last year's promise of quality and durability.

**Appeal to Mythic Past.** At the same time, a nostalgic appeal to our mythic past establishes confidence in the product. For example, the highly successful Motel 6 ad campaign positions the hotel chain as a throwback to simpler times. Spokesperson Tom Bodett is a latter day Will Rogers who offers country wisdom and hospitality in a depersonalized corporate world. With country fiddle music playing in the background, Bodett assures us, "We'll leave the light on for ya."

**Individualism.** Americans like to see themselves as rugged individualists, in the mold of John Wayne and Clint Eastwood. However, a delicate balance exists between *individualism* and *conformity*. People who are *too* different become cultural rejects (nerds, geeks, etc.). The trick to rugged individualism, then, is to stand out by being the epitome of style. The Marlboro man simply leads the pack of conformists.

Advertising sends the message that the way to assert one's individuality in contemporary society is through consumer behavior. Ironically, then, our range of individual expression has been reduced to the creative selection of products.

**Cultural Change.** Ads may also function as a barometer of cultural change. To illustrate, in a TV spot for Toyota Tercel, a young man has been commanded to drive his friends to some unknown destination in his new automobile. He is clearly uncomfortable in this role and lays down a series of rules to protect his new Toyota. ("No eating in the car.... No fooling around.... You have to help me wash it afterward.") The voice-over declares, "Because your values may change, but your friends don't." The message here is clear. As part of his upward mobility, this baby boomer now treasures material goods (i.e., his Toyota), even more

than his friendship with his old buddies. The commercial makes this statement without apology; according to the ad, this is as it *should* be—part of the maturation of the American consumer. These old friends have become a source of aggravation and embarrassment. The implication is that if they don't grow up (as responsible consumers), they will be left behind.

**Worldview.** What kind of world is portrayed through advertising?

In many ads, what is really being sold is the *worldview* of the commercial. When you buy a designer shirt or sunglasses, you are purchasing far more than the product; you are entering the upscale and trendy world depicted in the ad campaigns. Jennifer Steinhauer observes,

To promote a lifestyle, a company must obsessively market its products through ad campaigns in which the product is not nearly as central as the people using it.... In most Nine West ads, it is hard to make out the shoes or bag for sale. But the women are young and sexy and never far from a great-looking guy and a romantic setting. A shopper is meant to believe that if she buys the whole package—clothes, tables, sheets and bras—she will join the elite club of those living out the brand's lifestyle in its ads.<sup>42</sup>

The inference is that purchasing the product somehow admits you into the world of the ad.

Thus, mentally airbrushing the product out of an advertisement can identify the worldview surrounding the product. Imagine a beer commercial, in which young people are cavorting on the beach. Now, mentally delete the product from the scene. What remains is a delightful social occasion, replete with plenty of music, flirting, and celebrating. But when the product is placed in the center of the activity, the ad conveys the message that beer is central to this good time—indeed, you can't really have a party without someone bringing a keg.

Beyond the promotion of specific products, ads convey cumulative messages about the world of advertising. Some of these elements include the following.

• **A Material World.** The worldview of ads is reduced to what we can see, feel, touch—and buy. In the here-and-now world of advertising, style has become substance. People discover meaning through the acquisition of consumer goods. To illustrate, in November 2000, a billboard was posted in the Westfarms mall in Hartford, Connecticut, which said, "This holiday season let's all take a moment to wish for peace on Earth." However, as part of the advertisement, the words "for peace on Earth" were intentionally crossed out, replaced with the wish "that you'll be one of the lucky winners to get all your Visa purchases for free."<sup>43</sup>

In the world of advertising, identity has become a disposable commodity. We can (to all appearances) become anyone we want on the basis of how we look and what lifestyle we adopt. As Andre Agassi, former tennis star and pitchman for Canon cameras observed, "Image is everything." Appearance becomes ascendant; the emphasis is now on youth, looks, and health.

- *An Uncomplicated World.* This world offers simple solutions to complex problems: all issues can be resolved by purchasing the right product. The advertising world is populated by uncomplicated people who find fulfillment through laundry detergents and car wax.
- *World of Immediate Gratification.* According to cultural historian David Shi, Americans suffer from "acceleration syndrome," in which they are increasingly impatient:

Waiting has become an intolerable circumstance. We get on an elevator and immediately rush to close the door button for fear of waiting 10 seconds ... Technology has helped create products designed to save time: fax machines, express checkout lines, speed dialing, remote controls, overnight mail delivery, e-mail. But in saving time, these products are making us even more impatient.<sup>44</sup>

This sense of urgency permeates the world of advertising. In commercials, people cannot postpone their gratification for more than 30 seconds. In a McDonald's ad campaign, the merits of the product are sung to the tune "Temptation," enticing us to rush to McDonald's. To rewrite an old adage, "Nothing worth having is worth waiting for."

- *A Self-Absorbed World.* In this narcissistic world, satisfaction does not stem from helping others. Instead, pleasure comes from helping yourself to as many products as you can afford. Why buy L'Oreal hair coloring? "Because I'm worth it." Why spend your money at McDonald's? Because "You deserve a break today." A pre-Christmas radio spot for The Cheese Place asks, "Don't we owe ourselves a little self-indulgence? So why not be a little selfish before the gift giving begins?"<sup>45</sup>
- *A Competitive World.* Advertising creates a competitive environment, in which consumers are continually asked to compare themselves to others. For instance, women are told that they are overweight, need cosmetic "support" to look better, or simply are too old. This barrage of messages can have a dramatic impact on the self-image of young girls and women. However, advertising fosters an unattainable ideal of female beauty. Through digital imaging (a computer manipulation technique), fashion photographers eliminate models' wrinkles and imperfections. For example, a photograph of actress Michelle Pfeiffer for the cover of *Esquire* magazine required extensive retouching—costing over \$1,300—before the image was suitable. A work order for the job included the following directions: "Soften eye-lines, soften smile line, trim chin, remove neck lines, add blush to cheek, add hair on top of head." Ironically, then, even those models who have become our standards of female beauty fail to measure up to this ideal.
- *An Optimistic World.* Ultimately, the worldview of advertising is optimistic, in that even the most troublesome problems can be resolved through the acquisition of consumer goods. Ads show happy people celebrating their good fortune. And we too can "discover the possibilities" of life and assume control of our own destinies through prudent consumerism. However, Stephanie Coontz warns,

The flip side of the urge to have it all is the fear of settling for too little ... Some individuals turn even leisure into a form of relentless work as they strive to avoid "missing out" on opportunities. Others are terrified by the possibility of "premature" commitment: The sense that all choice is good and more choice is better is a profoundly destabilizing one for interpersonal relationships.<sup>47</sup>

- *A Class Segmented World.* The world of advertising is divided into two groups: the haves and the have-nots. Advertisers for Nike and Reebok have built a market for \$300 basketball shoes by convincing teenagers that these items are the keys to status. Many young consumers feel pressured to keep up with this fashion trend, despite the inflated cost of the shoe.

*Images of Success.* In an attempt to present products in their most positive light, ads associate their products with success. As an example, a classic ad campaign, "Where you're going it's Michelob," presents the product as a metaphor for success in American culture.

Michelob is a premium beer which is targeted at an upscale audience. In the television version of this ad, a variety of people are headed toward a state of being called "Michelob." The first sequence follows two characters ascending a mountain (accompanied to a jingle which begins, "You're on your way to the top."). These upwardly mobile characters overcome odds and are in complete control of their environment. The commercial is choreographed in such a way that all of the characters (mountain climbers, businesspeople, a truck driver, a young couple hustling to meet one another, and people at a barbecue) appear active and purposeful. These fast-paced commercials are characterized by a series of quick cuts. The latent message is that the Michelob lifestyle is exciting and glamorous.

Michelob is equated with self-knowledge, certainty, confidence, and a sense of direction. The music reminds us:

Where you're going it's Michelob.

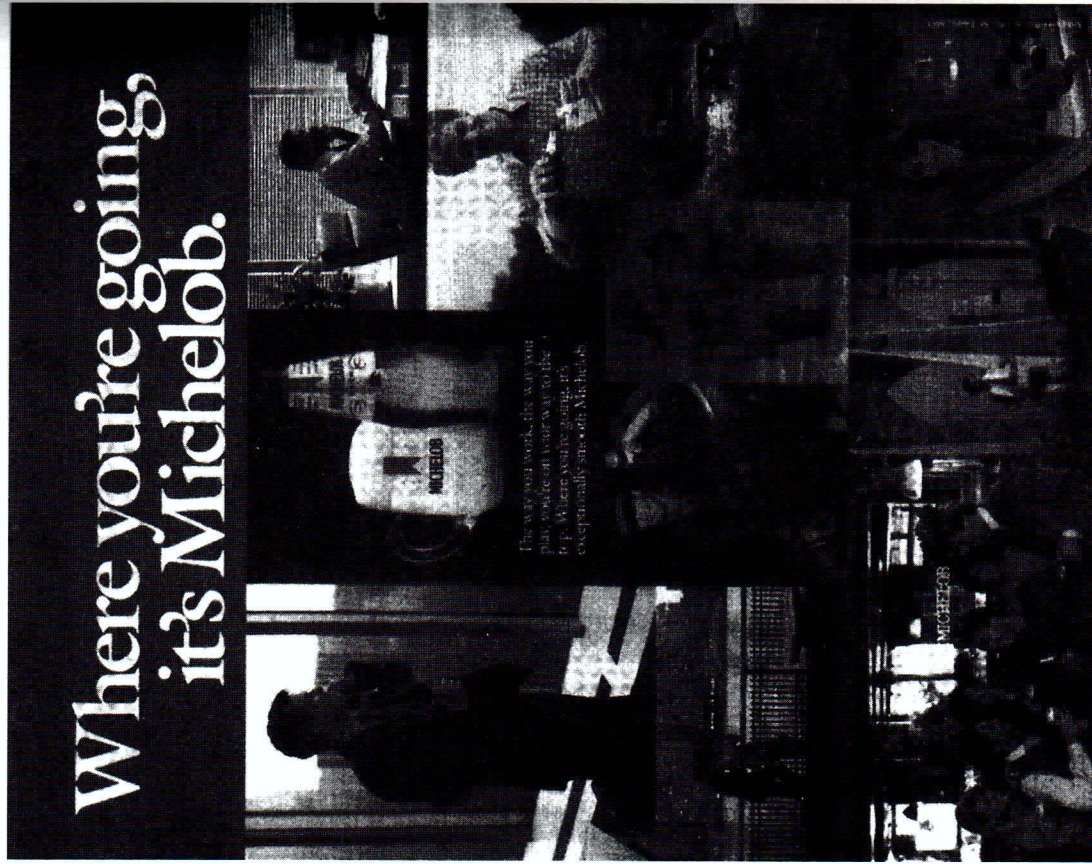
And along the way you know just where you are and where you're going.  
You've always known it.

These characters are all young, beautiful, and physically fit—there is not a beer belly in the crowd. The main figures are always in the middle of the frame, the center of attention. Everyone is watching (and admiring) them. And because the use of the personal pronoun "you" projects the audience into the advertisement, we are by extension watching people adoring us.

The culmination of the characters' quest ("Where they're going") is the earthly equivalent of heaven—success, or at least, a frosty Michelob. Michelob is a just reward for hard work and an acknowledgement of achievement. As a metaphor for success, Michelob offers an easy solution to complex problems. Thus, even if you are a total failure, you can maintain the *illusion* of success by drinking a Michelob.

Figure 13.1

This Michelob ad offers a composite picture of success in American culture. The ad appeals to the audience by associating the product with these images of success. Courtesy of Anheuser-Busch Companies, Inc. and Fleishman-Hillard, Inc.



#### MEDIA LITERACY TIPS

#### WORLDVIEW

Questions to ask with regard to *worldview* in advertising include:

- What kind of world is being depicted in the ad?
- What kind of lifestyle is promoted in the ad? Consumers may actually be attracted to the lifestyle depicted in the ad, of which the product is only a small part.
- What is the role of the product within the *worldview* of the ad? Imagine the ad without the product to see whether that consumer item is indeed an essential part of that world.
- If you did not know what product was being promoted, what would you think was being advertised? Consumers who are interested in the primary product may also be compelled to purchase the other consumer items depicted in the ad.

*Ideology.* The world of advertising is dominated by mainstream culture. Increasingly, however, advertisers recognize that subcultures represent a substantial market. As an example, the buying power of African Americans grew by 127 percent in 14 years (from \$318 billion in 1990 to \$723 billion in 2003).<sup>48</sup> As a result, many ads now target the African American community. However, as John Leo points out, some of these marketing strategies continue to exploit poor segments of the African American community to sell their products: "The malt liquors, marketed primarily to poor members of minority groups, use cobra, bull, dragon, tiger, stallion, and pit bull. The idea is to sell wildness and power to the powerless (high alcohol content is part of the same strategy)."<sup>49</sup>

The G. Heilman Brewing Company took this approach one step further, introducing a strong malt liquor with the brand name of *PowerMaster*. However, this overt promise of empowerment-through-alcohol generated protests by minority groups, and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms withdrew its approval for the brand name. But as Leo points out, "So long as this theme is covert, nobody seems to object, but the G. Heilman Brewing Co. found out what happens when the fig leaf is dropped."<sup>50</sup>

*Media Stereotyping.* Because advertisers have a limited amount of time to reach their audience, they rely heavily on stereotypes. To illustrate, a 2006 television spot for Gillette Razors takes place at the Gillette "lab," where two "scientists" test the quality of the latest innovations in their shaving gear. The first is an older gentleman—he is short, with unruly hair, and speaks with a thick German accent. The other scientist is a younger Asian man. Both are wearing white lab coats.

Advertising promotes membership in a group (e.g., "The Pepsi Generation"), based upon common buying patterns. Indeed, by wearing designer

labels or sweatshirts with commercials logos, consumers have been transformed into living advertisements for products.

However, groups portrayed in ads are depicted mainly in consumer-oriented terms. The heritage and political ideology of groups are stripped away, leaving only their appearance and lifestyle as their only distinguishing features.

Moreover, subcultures that are not part of the mainstream are often presented as stereotypical buffoons. A Wendy's ad campaign depicted various "fringe" groups like hippies, who foolishly wanted such unsavory food as alfalfa sprouts. This caricature had the trappings of the 1960s hippie—the long hair, mannerisms, and language—but was devoid of the political and social ideology of the counterculture.

#### MEDIA LITERACY TIPS

#### IDEOLOGY & STEREOTYPES

As you analyze ads, ask the following questions with regard to *ideology* and *stereotype*:

- To what groups (or subgroups) do the characters belong?
- In what settings are they presented?
- Are they the primary or secondary characters?
- Are they at home or at work?
- What kinds of products do they promote?
- What do the stereotypes reveal about cultural attitudes toward these groups?

*Hierarchy of Values.* Advertising often associates products with traditional values such as family and Christmas spirit. For instance, some ads equate consumerism with American democracy. An ad campaign for Chevrolet announces that its new line of trucks is "An American Revolution." Freedom has been reduced to the freedom to *buy*.

#### MEDIA LITERACY TIPS

#### HIERARCHY OF VALUES

Questions to ask in regard to *values hierarchy* include:

- What manifest values are being used in the promotion?
- What connection does the product have with these values?
- What latent values seem to be most prized in the advertisement?

Figure 13.2 Many ads associate the purchase of products with traditional values such as family, Christmas spirit, and patriotism. This ad campaign for Chevrolet cites its trucks as part of "An American Revolution." However, this appeal to sell products only cheapens the actual values it pretends to espouse. Courtesy General Motors Media Archive.



**Social Marketing.** Media literacy can be a useful tool in shaping messages that influence the attitudes and behaviors of individuals. The rationale behind social marketing is that the tools of media literacy can be used to promote pro-social behaviors. To illustrate, one study found that young Massachusetts adolescents were significantly less likely to smoke if they were exposed to an anti-smoking media campaign. Smoking rates declined by 50 percent among 12- to 14-year-olds who were exposed to the messages, compared with those who didn't recall the ads.<sup>51</sup> In Florida, an anti-smoking campaign featuring a series of television commercials produced a 54 percent decline in middle school tobacco use over the past two years, and a 24 percent drop among high school students.<sup>52</sup> By examining media presentations as a cultural text, social marketers can identify the attitudes and concerns of the audience and, then, construct media messages that influence its intended audience. To illustrate, an examination of

popular media programming would suggest that messages dealing with *appearance* would be far more effective with this audience than *health* messages. Twelve year olds don't internalize messages about the likelihood of cancer 60 years from now; however, they do respond to ads in which a member of the opposite sex is turned off because the smoker's breath smells.

### Structure

**Ownership Patterns.** In the market-driven American media system, programming is often subordinate to advertising. As an ABC network executive explains, "The network is paying affiliates to carry commercials, not programs. What we are is a distribution system for Procter & Gamble."<sup>53</sup> As an indication of the importance of advertising revenue, during radio's golden era of the 1930s, the stars took second billing in many shows to the sponsors. Examples included "The Kraft Music Hall (starring Bing Crosby)" and "The Pepsodent Program (starring Bob Hope)." This practice changed only after advertisers realized the power of a celebrity to attract an audience.

Recently, sponsors have begun to produce original programming for cable television, obtaining final control over all aspects of programming. In 2006, Unilever put together two specials built around its Axe Shower body wash: "Gamekillers" on MTV and "Exposing the Order of the Serpentine on SpikeTV." And in the same vein, toy manufacturers Mattel and Hasbro developed movie versions of Hot Wheels, G.I. Joe, Bionicle toys, Super Soaker squirt guns, and My Little Pony to promote their products. The companies have veto power over the script and the writers. Jim Wagner, senior vice president for entertainment marketing at Mattel, explained, "We need the entertainment to create a brand for us that's long term."<sup>54</sup>

According to Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, advertisers insist on bland content that supports the status quo:

Advertisers ... choose selectively among programs on the basis of their own principles. With rare exceptions these are culturally and politically conservative.... Advertisers will want, more generally, to avoid programs with serious complexities and disturbing controversies that interfere with the "buying mood." They seek programs that will lightly entertain and thus fit in with the spirit of the primary purpose of program purchases—the dissemination of a selling message.<sup>55</sup>

Ronald K. L. Collins cites instances in which reporters have been called off of stories involving advertisers: "In a confidential survey of 42 real-estate editors by the *Washington Journalism Review*, nearly half said publishers and senior editors had prohibited critical coverage of the industry for fear of offending advertisers."<sup>56</sup>

*Advertising and Government Regulation.* The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) was created by Congress in 1914. It is headed by five

commissioners appointed by the president. In 1938, the FTC was given the authority to protect consumers from unfair and deceptive advertising. If there is an illegal activity, both the company and the advertising agency may be held responsible.

According to Lee Peeler, associate director of the FTC, advertisements must comply with three basic rules: 1) An ad cannot be deceptive—that is, mislead consumers to their detriment; 2) Objective claims must be supported with competent studies; and 3) Advertisers are responsible for the reasonable implications of their ads to consumers. Peeler explains, "If an advertiser says 'I didn't really mean to convey that,' well, that doesn't get them off the hook. All of advertising law is based on what consumers take from the ad."<sup>57</sup>

Although Congress has not provided a comprehensive definition of the term "deceptive," the FTC considers the following criteria in determining whether an advertisement is deceptive:

- The nature of the misstatements (i.e., Is it likely to deceive someone?)
- The nature of the audience targeted by the ad (e.g., children, senior citizens)
- The significance of the ad to the consumer's decision to purchase the product (i.e., Is it likely to play a material role in the decision to buy?)

Once a company is found guilty of using deceptive advertising, it may choose to comply voluntarily with the recommendations of the FTC; in this case, a consent order may be filed with the court, in which the company agrees to halt the ad without technically admitting guilt. Another option is to seek a thorough litigation. The FTC also may simply notify the public that an offense has occurred. Finally, in some cases the FTC may require corrective advertising, whereby the advertiser must for a reasonable amount of time include corrective statements in their advertisements.

The question remains, however—if regulatory policies and enforcement procedures have been in force for more than half a century with regard to deceptive advertising, why do misleading ads continue to appear in the media?

In 2005, the FTC filed 77 actions in federal district court to protect consumers against unfair and deceptive trade practices and obtained 103 judgments ordering more than \$824 million in consumer redress, and 15 judgments ordering payment of more than \$6.6 million in civil penalties. But according to attorney Michael Kahn, most of the cases of misleading advertising are never brought to the attention of the FTC:

Nothing is officially "deceptive" until declared so by an appropriate tribunal. More than 90 percent (of allegedly misleading ads) are never brought to anybody's attention. The FTC is a woefully understaffed organization, not set up to handle a large volume of complaints. They are reduced to looking for the worst examples, the ones they can win. For every one they target, there are probably a hundred others out there.

Moreover, advertisements may not be misleading in a legal sense but induce the public to buy a product by appealing to the emotions or making subtle promises about the benefits of the product. According to Joseph R. Baca, director of the office of compliance at the FDA's Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition, "The thing is, a lot of claims we see out there are puffery. But they don't get to the point where we can call them fake or misleading."<sup>59</sup>

## FRAMEWORK

### Introduction

In advertising, the introduction is intended to attract the consumer's attention, lead the consumer into the rest of the ad, and to encompass the essence of the product.

Beyond mere identification, a *brand name* creates an immediate impression and establishes the character of a product. For example, "Hamburger Helper" creates a positive, distinctive image, whereas "Cheap Cereal Filler Meat Supplement" puts a less rosy spin on this type of product. Some brand names are intentionally exotic or mysterious, conveying the message that the product is unexpected, new, and fresh.

Selecting brand names has become more complicated in a global market. Some words may be difficult to recall in a foreign language or suffer from an unflattering translation. For instance, the literal Spanish translation for the Chevrolet Nova is "No go." Worse yet, the name "Coca-Cola" in Chinese was first rendered as "Ke-kou-ke-la," which means "Bite the wax tadpole," or "female horse stuffed with wax," depending on the dialect. Coke then found a close phonetic equivalent in Chinese, "ko-kou-ko-le," which is loosely translated as "happiness in the mouth."

As a result, the strongest trademarks are often *neologisms*—words which have been invented for products. The look and sound of these neologisms are designed to suggest connotative meanings about the essence of the product. For instance, when Amtrak unveiled its new high speed train, the Acela Express, to serve the Northeast, Amtrak president George D. Warrington explained that this neologism was selected to represent a new conceptual orientation for the railroad:

Acela is more than just a name for Amtrak's new high speed trains, Acela is a brand representing a whole new way of doing business. A combination of acceleration and excellence, Acela means high speed and high quality—we are changing the journey for every customer on every train with faster trip times, comfortable amenities and highly personalized service.<sup>60</sup>

At times, a brand name can give the consumer a false impression about the product. For instance, Hostess came out with "Hostess Cupcakes Lite," which claimed to be one-third fewer calories than the regular cupcakes.

However, a close examination of the label reveals that the Lite cupcakes are actually one-third *smaller* than the original version. One can easily imagine a "superlite" concept, with 50 percent fewer calories, with a package containing one cupcake.

A catchy *slogan* is also integral to the success of an ad. Five times as many people read the headline than the copy in the body of the ad. Memorable slogans are clever, rhythmic, alliterative, and manage to capture the intended character, or spirit of the product.

For instance, "Just do it" is a very sophisticated and effective motto, even though the name of the product (Nike) is never mentioned. The slogan lauds athletic effort and tells us that we can succeed despite the odds (or excuses). Buoyed by this pep talk, we are prepared to achieve our goals. The latent message is that Nike athletic footwear will provide essential support in this quest.

Ultimately, the slogan is a not-so-subtle imperative to buy the product: "Just do it."

As with brand names, advertising slogans may assume a different meaning with an international audience. For instance, when Kentucky Fried Chicken advertised in China, it did not realize that its slogan, "Finger-lickin' good" was translated into "Eat your fingers off"—not a very appealing prospect.

The *package* can create a positive first impression and make a product appear unique. Consumers are drawn to distinctive *packaging*, as though the *product* was different.

To illustrate, Classico pasta sauces are packaged in a mason jar, which suggests a homemade quality for the product. Thomas Hine explains,

(The ornate Classico jar) encourages people to taste the sauce not as the common commodity it has become but rather as an expression of a place, with its own culture and distinctive ingredients. It makes people feel they are not simply opening a jar of sauce but doing something just a little more special.<sup>61</sup>

Hine points out that a package like Classico provides a sense of membership and identity for the consumer:

It's flattering to the buyer: "We know you've traveled, and we know you don't buy industrial tomato sauce, that you're a more discriminating buyer and are willing to pay a price of about 40 to 50 percent more than Ragu."<sup>62</sup>

In 2007, R.J. Reynolds introduced a new line of Camel cigarettes for women, in which the only differences were the name of the brand and the package. Stuart Elliott explains,

Camel No. 9, has a name that evokes women's fragrances like Chanel No. 19, as well as a song about romance, "Love Potion No. 9." Camel No. 9 signals its

intended buyers with subtler cues like its colors, a hot-pink fuchsia and a minty-green teal; its slogan, “Light and luscious”; and the flowers that surround the packs in magazine ads.<sup>63</sup>

Moreover, because companies repackaged products to meet the emerging needs of its customers, packaging concepts can also provide insight into cultural changes. For instance, Campbell’s “Soup for One” was developed in response to the increasing number of people who live alone, as well as those whose hectic schedules prevent them from sitting down for the traditional family meal.

**Illogical Premise.** Ads that appear perfectly reasonable on the surface may be based on an illogical premise. To illustrate, a television ad for Coors Light beer promotes its product as a health drink. As young men and women cavort around the beach in swimwear, the voice-over reminds us that you do not want a beer that will “slow you down.” However, upon reflection, it is obvious that a steady diet of beer—regular or light—will hardly keep you trim and fit.

The ad campaign “Newport Lights—Alive with pleasure” provides another excellent example. Given the medical evidence about the health hazards of smoking (which by law must be cited in the ads), this claim could hardly be more absurd.

### Plot

**Explicit Content.** When a product is unique, clearly superior to its competition, or of public benefit, the advertiser’s task is easy. However, if a product is indistinguishable from other brands on the market, the advertiser must devise strategies that make the product appear alluring and distinctive. This task is even more of a challenge when a product is harmful to the public, such as alcohol or cigarettes.

Consumers should remain skeptical of false and misleading ads. Some ads present an *incomplete* or *distorted* message, telling only a half-truth in order to present the product in the best possible light. To illustrate, the FDA issued a statement that advertisements for COX-2 drugs Celebrex and Bextra are misleading by failing to disclose the side effects of the drugs. The FDA cited five print and television ads for making “unsubstantiated effectiveness claims.”

Examining explicit content can disclose the following inconsistencies, fallacies, and incongruities in advertisements.

*The Big Promise* is a claim that is far beyond the capacity of the product. As an example, Axe deodorant has emerged as the top brand in less than four years by promising to help men attract more women. An ad on the Axe web site depicts a scene in which a mob of bikini clad women charge madly toward the beach; they come upon a man who is spraying

himself with Axe deodorant. The ad slogan suggests a cause/effect relationship between the deodorant and attracting women: “Spray More. Get More. The Axe Effect.”

### MEDIA LITERACY TIPS

#### THE BIG PROMISE

When examining ads, consider the following questions with regard to the big promise:

1. What promises does the ad make with regard to the product?
2. Which promises can the product reasonably keep?
3. Which promises are beyond the capabilities of the product?

Although the Big Promise in an ad may well be more subtle than the above example, its message is conveyed quite clearly to members of the audience. In 1997, a Michigan man sued Anheuser-Busch for false advertising, claiming that he did not have success with women after drinking the product. He said the implicit promises in the beer advertisements did not come true for him, causing physical and mental injury and emotional distress, so he sued the beer manufacturer for \$10,000.<sup>64</sup>

*Hyperbole* is a part of the American storytelling tradition, which relies upon exaggeration or absurd overstatement to make a point. Examples can be found in such tales as George Washington’s coin toss across the Delaware River and the legendary Paul Bunyan. In a country of seemingly limitless resources, Americans magnify events and locations for emphasis and dramatic effect. This literary device also capitalizes on the American competitive spirit. Everything we do (or own) must be the best. However, advertising sometimes makes claims (e.g., “Milwaukee’s finest beer”) which are, in fact, merely a statement of opinion.

A *simile* is a literary device which refers to a direct comparison between two things; such comparisons are introduced by *like* or *as*. According to William Lutz, similes are employed “whenever advertisers want you to stop thinking about the product and start thinking about something bigger, better, or more attractive than the product.”<sup>65</sup> For instance, a wine that claims “it’s like taking a trip to France” is designed to induce the consumer into romantic reverie about Paris instead of thinking about the taste of the wine.

*Parity statements* refer to ads which are worded in a way that suggests that a product is unique, when what the ad is *actually* stating is that the product is indistinguishable from its competition. For example, Rick Berk-off points out that the Personna Double II slogan (“There is no finer razor made. Period.”) could be rephrased as follows: “Personna Double II: It’s no better than its competition. Period.”<sup>66</sup>



In 1996, Eveready Battery Company registered a complaint with the National Advertising Division of the Better Business Bureau about the excessive claims of the Duracell Battery Company, as encapsulated in their slogan, "The World's Most Advanced Battery." In response, Duracell changed the slogan to a parity statement which only *implied* product superiority: "No Battery is More Advanced."

*Extraneous Inclusion* occurs when superfluous information appears in the ad that suggests a relationship to the claims of the product. For instance, the FTC filed a claim against Winston Cigarettes for an ad campaign in which they claimed that their product had "no additives." Lee Peeler explained, "The ads left the implication that no additives made Winston safer than other cigarettes, and that's not true."<sup>67</sup> The terms of the settlement required that the ads include the disclaimer, "No additives in our tobacco does NOT mean a safer cigarette."

A syllogism is a subtle line of reasoning that seems true but is actually false or deceptive. For example, a magazine ad for California Almonds has the slogan, "California Almonds: A Tasty Snack & Nutritional Feast." The copy of the ad presents the following logic:

- Roasted almonds are tasty
- Roasted almonds are healthy
- So, "whenever the urge to snack comes out, make sure California almonds are in."

The ad suddenly shifts from promoting the *product* (almonds) to a particular *brand* (California Almonds). The question to be asked, then, is: even if you believe the first part of this syllogism, couldn't you then buy another brand of almonds?

*Unfinished statements* make implied claims that advertisers are unable to stand behind. Instead, they leave it to the consumer to complete the statement. Lutz provides the following examples:

- Batteries that "last up to twice as long." Twice as long as what?
- "You can be sure if it's Westinghouse." Just exactly what we can be sure of is never explained.
- "Magnavox gives you more." This slogan never details what you get more of.<sup>68</sup>

*Qualifier words* should also send a white flag to the consumer. However, phrases such as "some restrictions apply" are either quickly flashed on the TV screen or uttered with inhuman rapidity by the announcer, insinuating that this information is inconsequential. Some qualifier words try to create the illusion of quality, but in fact negate this claim. For instance, the term "chocolate flavored" candy suggests that you are eating chocolate, when in reality you are ingesting artificial ingredients that simulate the taste of chocolate.

Lutz has identified other qualifier words commonly used in advertising:

- *Help.* The next time you see an ad for a cold medicine that promises that it "helps relieve cold symptoms fast," don't rush out to buy it. Ask yourself what this claim is really saying.... "Help" only means to aid or assist, nothing more. It does not mean to conquer, stop, eliminate, end, solve, heal, cure, or anything else. But once the ad says "help," it can say just about anything after that because "help" qualifies everything coming after it. The trick is that ... you forget the word "help" and concentrate only on the dramatic claim. You read into the ad a message that the ad does not contain. More importantly, the advertiser is not responsible for the claim that you read into the ad, even though the advertiser wrote the ad so you would read that claim into it.
- *Virtually.* Lutz warns that claims like "virtually spotless" are deceptive. "After all, what does 'virtually' mean? It means 'in essence or effect, although not in fact.' Look at that definition again. 'Virtually' means *not in fact*. It does *not* mean 'almost' or 'just about the same as,' or anything else."<sup>70</sup>
- *New and Improved.* An advertiser can present a product as "new" if there has been a "material functional change" in the item. In the same way, a product advertised as "improved" suggests that it has been "made better." However, ads frequently make such claims for products that feature only slight modifications (e.g., changing the shape of a stick deodorant).

#### MEDIA LITERACY TIPS

#### EXPLICIT CONTENT

A *Consumer Guide to Advertising* invites the public to consider the following questions in regard to the *explicit content* of ads:

- Can the advertiser support its claims?
- Be wary of any claims, and search for independent confirmation, particularly for large purchases like automobiles and appliances.
- After watching the ad, do you really know what the product is or does?
- As amusing as some ads can be, do they provide us with anything more than a brand name? What about price, value, size, shape, and nutritional content? A wise consumer ... focuses on all of the information needed to make an informed choice.
- What's not in the ad?
- Sometimes the most important information is not even mentioned in the ad. It could be that the 15- or 30-second spot is just too tight to fit everything in, but it could also be a deliberate evasion or half-truth on the part of the advertiser....<sup>71</sup> Know what you're getting before (making a purchase).

*Affective Response.* Advertisements often present scenarios that trigger emotions and then manipulate these feelings to sell their product. Despite working within a very limited format (e.g., a 30-second TV spot), ads are

able to evoke intense emotional reactions among members of the audience. Advertisers recognize that products are purchased for psychological as well as product satisfaction. Consequently, ads often strive to accentuate the *emotional benefits* of a product. Thus, the phone company is not merely selling a communications system but furnishes the means by which you can "reach out and touch someone" you love. This approach may be used even when the product does not have a clear emotional benefit. As an example, a Christmas radio spot for Kretchmeyer Hams presents the product as a vital part of a family holiday celebration. After dinner, a young man offers a moving toast: "There is no place I'd rather be right now than with my family." This may indeed be true; however, the ham can claim no more responsibility for the emotional richness of the moment than the silverware or canned peas.

Ads featuring puppies and babies are guaranteed to produce a warm reaction. The advertiser hopes that the consumer will transfer these positive feelings to the product. Humorous ads work on a similar principle. Laughter is a positive emotional response; we are grateful to people who make us laugh. Arthur Bijur, president of the Freeman Advertising Agency explains, "If you can share a smile with someone, you've made a friend. Humor works because it warms people up and relaxes them. Humor creates connection, opens a window to get a message in and makes people feel good about your brand."<sup>72</sup>

Emotional appeals are tailored to generate a response from the target audience. For example, a Michelin Tire advertising campaign featured the slogan, "Because so much is riding on your tires," accompanied by a picture of a cute infant sitting on one of their products. In this case, the ad was directed at young parents, capitalizing on their protective instincts.

Ads may be directed at one of the following intrinsic *psychological motivations*.

*Quest for Identity.* From the moment we are born, we are engaged in a quest to discover who we are. One effective ad strategy involves promoting the product as the culmination of this search for identity: products assume a significance because they tell you (and others) exactly who you are. To illustrate, consider the text in a print ad for the Mercury Cougar:

*In the Beginning  
You look like everybody else.  
Then something happens  
Maybe it starts with the way you wear your hair.  
Or the colors you put together.  
But pretty soon, you don't look like everybody else.  
You look like you.  
And then something really funny happens.  
Everybody else wants to look like you.*

*Love.* An untold number of products have been promoted in the name of love. Consumer products are positioned as tangible symbols of affection, affirming the depth, sincerity, and permanence of your love.

Some ads position their product as an essential ingredient in the courtship ritual. Using the right product will make you more attractive and desirable ("Making close comfortable"—Norelco Shavers). Giving the proper present can win a person's heart. And some products even promise improved performance in lovemaking ("Make it last a little longer"—Big Red Gum).

These ads call attention to the pleasure that you'll bring your loved one through a thoughtful purchase. But at the same time, this approach is a subtle appeal to the ego of the purchaser; imagine how grateful your partner will be upon receiving the gift, and how wonderful you are for giving it.

Love between family members is another very powerful psychological motivation. A McDonald's television commercial begins with a young man walking wistfully through a children's playground. He stops at a McDonald's and orders a breakfast to go: "I'm having breakfast with my daughter," he explains to the young woman at the counter. The next scene shows the young man at the hospital, gazing fondly at his newborn child. The ad suggests that daddy's Egg McMuffin has played a significant role in this deeply personal moment. However illogical, this very powerful latent message about the connection between father and daughter reinforces the manifest pitch for McDonald's.

*Need for Approval.* From infancy, all human beings share a longing for approval. A persistent latent message in advertising is that people can satisfy their need for acceptance through their consumer behavior. One particularly effective version of this appeal centers around the complex relationship between children and their parents. For instance, a television spot for the U.S. Marines begins with a young, tough looking young man returning home from boot camp. He is met at the train by his younger brother. The Marine immediately asks whether his dad is still angry with him for having enlisted in the Marines. Behind this rugged facade, the soldier is still a little boy seeking his father's approval.

The scene shifts to the Marine entering his old house. He is dressed in full military regalia. His father looks at him from across the room. Silence. Suddenly, Dad moves toward his son and embraces him. This reconciliation scene touches young males in the audience who may be sorting out their own complex feelings toward their fathers. The underlying message is that by joining the Marines, a young man can find the resolution to this fundamental need for acceptance.

*Guilt.* American culture can be characterized as exceedingly guilt-ridden. We feel remorse for any number of real and imagined transgressions. Advertisers capitalize on these irrational feelings to promote their product. For instance, the ad campaign for Michelin tires discussed earlier ("Because so much is riding on your tires") depicts an infant surrounded (and protected) by the product. The latent message is that parents who

care about their children must buy Michelin tires. However, this affective appeal does not hold up under rational scrutiny: Is the choice of brands critical to being a good parent? (Why not buy new Goodyear tires, for instance?) Does buying Michelin tires automatically make you a good parent? And if you're a responsible parent, shouldn't you worry about the other features of the car as well (e.g., the fuel line or transmission), as well as other drivers and *their* tires? The list could go on and on.

#### MEDIA LITERACY TIPS

#### GUILT-PROVOKING ADS

When confronted by *guilt provoking ads*, ask the following questions:

- *Why am I feeling guilty?*
- *How will purchasing the product assuage my guilt?*
- *Is the choice of brand important?*
- *Could an advertiser exploit these feelings of guilt to sell me other products?*

*Nostalgia for Significant Moments.* These ads attempt to associate products with those significant moments that touch people's lives. For instance, ads about first experiences cleverly tie the product into individuals' sense of nostalgia. An online ad for the virtual dating service match.com shows formally dressed boys and girls at a dance. The slogan declares, "Love is Complicated. Match.com is simple." The black-and-white photo signals that this is an old photo and that the pre-teens are reminiscent of the baby boomers who are considering enrolling in the service. The photo recalls a simple, innocent time, when finding romance was easy.

This "snapshot" evokes memories of similar events in their lives that subtly encourages consumers to think positively about the service.

Another line of ads exploits the audience's sentimental attachment to *holidays*, such as Christmas, Fourth of July, and Thanksgiving. Advertisers link their products with holidays ("Kretchmeyer: Your Christmas Ham"), in hopes that these good feelings will be transferred to the product. The business community seizes upon holidays like Mother's Day or Valentine's Day as excuses for special promotions (i.e., "Halloween Madness sales"). Taking this promotional tack to the extreme, the business community has even *invented* holidays such as Grandparent's Day as advertising gimmicks to stimulate sales.

*Fixation with Death.* Sigmund Freud theorized that from birth, people experience a primal attraction to death. H. J. Eysenck explains,

Freud postulates that the organism has an innate tendency to revert to its initial state. This instinct, which would lead to self-destruction, has to be diverted

outward by the developing organism.... The death instinct represents one of the two major classes or drives and motives, which—for psychoanalysts—comprise all motivational processes.<sup>73</sup>

Freud's theory of the death instinct might help to account for why people race cars, skydive, and find other ways to live "close to the edge" of death.

Several different ad strategies are manifestations of our love/hate relationship with death:

- *Denial of Death.* This ad strategy promotes products as a safeguard against death. Castleguard Security system reminds us that, in an impermanent world, "Give the most valuable gift of all ... the gift of security." Advertisements for diamonds are even more blatant, selling immortality in the form of their product. A diamond insures that love will be permanent, and that the fortunate couple will live happily ever after.
- *Loss of Control.* Death represents the ultimate loss of control. BBDO advertising offers the following insight into how the Gillette Deodorant campaign, "Never Let Them See You Sweat," capitalized on our primal need to maintain control in our lives:

The "Product" stance is that it "goes on dry, stays dry". But this did not differentiate this superior performing product until the "You" attitude was added: Control, Aspiration. The resulting theme line, "Never Let Them See You Sweat," and the campaign featuring rising young entertainers, has helped revitalize the brand.

- *Abandonment.* A classic TV commercial promoting the Prudential Insurance Agency focuses on the testimony of a grieving widow. She has been abandoned by her husband and now must contend with the emptiness of her life. "We thought it would never happen to us," she laments, realizing that she is not only alone but impoverished as well. In this case, the insurance represents both financial and emotional comfort and security.
- *Longing for the Past.* An ad for Tyson chicken reminds us, "So for over 50 years, we've made sure that Tyson's chicken is the leanest and meatiest that they can be." This ad establishes a tradition which makes us feel rooted and safe. At the same time, this return to the past provides us with a sense of confidence in the future.
- *Fear of Failure.* In American culture, failure is regarded as a form of death-in-life. To illustrate, Thornton C. Lockwood analyzed a series of "Slice of Death" AT&T ads, featuring testimonials by businesspeople who have been let down by their current phone system:

The problem the agency chose to dramatize ... was phone failure and the problems that creates for business people; loss of credibility with clients, lost sales, demoralized workers, management confusion, and ultimately, even business failure.<sup>75</sup>

Significantly, the first test storyboard scenario was even more overt: a malfunctioning (and malevolent) telephone swallows a young woman who is taking phone orders at a restaurant.

• *Fear of the Unknown.* An ad for "The Travelers" contains a photo with religious overtones: a skyscape, with streaks of light shining through the clouds. The headline reads,

Financial Serenity

The Strength to Leap

Beyond the World of Worry

Armed with the protection afforded by The Travelers (with its slogan, "You're better off under the Umbrella"), the audience is prepared to meet whatever challenges lie ahead.

However, affective appeals like those cited above offer only superficial, antiseptic emotional experiences that ultimately trivialize genuine emotional experiences. We are spared the complications and consequences that are a part of any genuine emotional commitment. Our involvement need only last for 30 seconds; then we can move on.

*Implicit Content.* Nowhere is consequence portrayed as more direct and immediate than in the world of advertising. The relationship between the significant events in the narrative is clear. Ads dramatize how products fulfill needs and solve personal problems. Ads show smiling, satisfied consumers who have benefited from the purchase of the product.

However, the long-term consequences generally go unmentioned in these ads. For instance, the calories and cholesterol contained in fast food, over time, make American children the most obese in the world. Or the debt accrued by credit card holders, who do not consider that they eventually have to pay for their purchases (with hefty interest charges).

## Genre

In order to be instantly recognizable, advertisements often borrow from established genres, such as the drama, music video, and sitcom. For instance, TV infomercials for health products and self-motivation materials mirror the format of the talk show, complete with host, desk, audience, and a "guest" who hawks the product.

At the same time, advertising can be considered a distinct genre of its own, with a distinct structure, plot, and characters.

*Formulaic Structure.* Advertisements generally operate within the format of order/chaos/order.

- *A problem is quickly introduced which throws the character's world into chaos.*
- *The product is presented as a means of solving the problem.*
- *Order is restored through use of the product.*

The conclusion is geared to inspire the consumer to action.

Indeed, some ad campaigns first *create* a problem and then offer a solution—in the form of their product. For instance, "ring around the collar" was not an area of tremendous concern until the makers of Wisk brought this situation to the attention of the public.

Print ads offer a variation of this formula, with the visual emphasis on the restoration of order. The problem is either indirectly alluded to (e.g., AT&T's ad, "Six Cities. Two Days. Easy"), or left entirely to our imaginations (e.g., pictures of beautiful women wearing Maybelline eyeliner). In this case, audience members are asked to believe that the purchase of the product will transform an ordinary looking woman into one of the exotic looking models in the ad.

*Formulaic Plot.* In a television commercial, the plot dramatizes the effectiveness of the product, as well as its benefits for the consumer. In the process, however, ads frequently exaggerate the value of the product and its impact on the individual. The product is generally central to the narrative, the latent message being that the product plays an integral role in our lives as well.

One type of ad campaign features a repetition of the plot; only the specific nuances differ. For instance, the Charmin toilet paper ad campaign, featuring Mr. Whipple, always replays the same basic plot:

Several women pause while grocery shopping to squeeze the Charmin, commenting that they cannot resist the temptation because Charmin is so "squeezably soft." Mr. Whipple appears and, warning the ladies not to squeeze the Charmin, confiscates the goods. However, to Mr. Whipple's embarrassment, the ladies point out that he, too, is fondling the toilet paper—a testament to the irresistible softness of Charmin.

Between 1964 and 1985, Charmin's agency, D'Arcy Masius Benton & Bowles Communications, produced over 500 Mr. Whipple spots—all with the same formulaic plot. This approach was so successful that Mr. Whipple was brought out of retirement in 1999.

*Conventions.* In order to compensate for the limited time and space in which to present their message, ads commonly use costumes, props, and sets to send subtle cues about the product. For instance, an ad promoting a headache remedy may feature an actor who is wearing a white lab coat. The unstated message is that this spokesperson is a medical expert whose advice should be heeded.

Advertising relies on a stable of stock characters (e.g., The Harried Housewife, Out-of-it Husband, Sex Siren). These stereotypes evoke instant recognition by the audience by drawing upon a common cultural understanding and consensus.

## MEDIA LITERACY TIPS

### ADVERTISING CONVENTIONS

The following questions are useful in considering the role of *advertising conventions*:

- *What conventions are used in the ad?*
- *How are these conventions used in the ad?*
- *What messages are these conventions designed to convey?*
- *How are these conventions used to promote the product?*

### Illogical Conclusion

Advertisements do not always follow logically from their initial premise. As mentioned earlier, ads frequently conclude with a Big Promise: the product will bring you happiness or success. An example would be the Head and Shoulders ad, in which a young man finds romantic fulfillment after washing his hair. At the very least, advertising exaggerates the importance of a product. For instance, the ads in which a couple jump in the air to celebrate their purchase of a Toyota would appear to be something of an overreaction.

### PRODUCTION ELEMENTS

In advertising, as with all media formats, style reinforces messages. The originality of a presentation is an indication that the product is unique as well and encourages the audience to see (and think about) the product in a new way. Production elements can also create a mood that affects how we react to the product. And in some cases, style may make a product look better than it is.

### Editing

Copywriters for print advertising strive to keep their messages brief, concise, and simple. John Caples advises ad copywriters to write to the level of a sixth-grade student.<sup>76</sup> At the same time, an effective copywriter elaborates and clarifies, “creating a word picture that makes crystal-clear the specific advantage of every feature.”<sup>77</sup> Variety in sentence structure avoids monotony and creates a fresh, energetic mood which will carry over to the product. Caples observes that short sentences “put speed and excitement into your ad” and move the audience to action, while long sentences can furnish useful explanations about the product.<sup>78</sup>

In television, a director can condense a vast amount of information into a limited time frame through editing. Television commercials contain a myriad of images and information. Directors are faced with the challenge

of cutting up to 16,000 feet of raw footage to 45 feet for a 30-second ad. Because each second becomes critical, an enormous amount of attention is devoted to the selection and arrangement of images.

For instance, in a 30-second ad selling Kodak camera equipment, a series of photographs encompass the lifetime of a woman.

In addition, the television soundtrack and picture are commonly speeded up by as much as 25 percent without being noticed by the audience. Dr. James MacLachlan claims that this method increases the unaided recall of the content by 40 percent.<sup>79</sup>

The editing technique of quick cuts is also geared to attract and maintain the attention of the audience. This “MTV” style generates a sense of excitement, sending the latent message that the product is exciting as well. In addition, this style is considered *avant-garde*, which indirectly comments on the “hipness” of the product.

### Color

The selection of bright colors and dramatic color contrasts attracts the attention of the consumer—which is the principal goal of an advertisement. But in addition, the choice of colors sends other subtle messages about the product. Otto Kleppner observes,

*Color talks its own psychological language: To make a drink look cool, there will be plenty of blue in the background; to make a room look warm (for heating advertisements), there will be plenty of red in the background; springtime suggests light colors, and autumn the dark tones. Thus a clue to the choice of the dominating color may often be found in the mood in which the product is being shown.*<sup>80</sup>

The choice of colors may also be tied to the psychological profile of the target audience. John Lyons points out that commercials targeting young girls are often shot through pink and green filters to create a warm, romantic, and traditionally “feminine” tone which subtly influences young girls’ response to the product.<sup>81</sup>

### Scale

The magnification of images can be a very deceptive ad technique. For example, extreme close-ups make small products look big. As a result, toys that look impressive and durable on screen may in fact be small and flimsy.

### Relative Position

The layout of an advertisement can dictate the response of the audience. In Western culture, a person glancing at an ad is most likely to focus initially on the upper right-hand portion of the page.

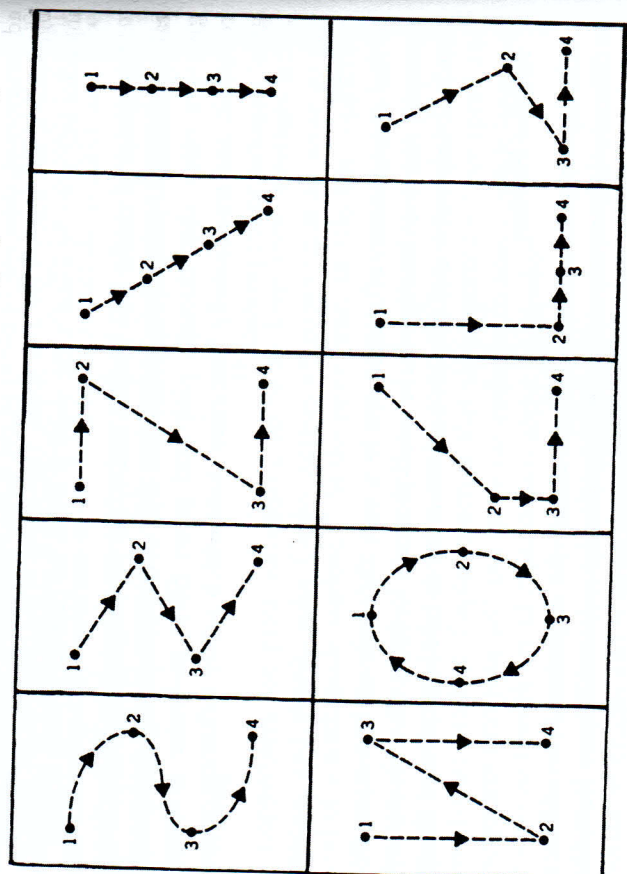
Advertising directors often employ the technique of *structured motion*, in which the layout is designed to lead the audience through an ad in a predetermined way. Otto Kleppner explains,

The art is to attract attention at the head of the page, and by having optical stepping-stones leading from there to the end, hold the ad together and lead the reader through the copy. Flow may also be helped by the line of direction of the artwork, sweeping across the page. It may be helped by *gaze motion*, that is, having the people in the picture look toward or, perhaps with other elements of the ad, lead the eye to the center of attention.<sup>82</sup>

To illustrate, every summer, TV ads for Lipton's Ice Tea appear, in which beautiful young people frolic around a swimming pool. Just as our eyes are drawn to these alluring male and female bodies, these images dissolve and are replaced by shots of the product and the brand label.

Ads frequently position their product as the center of the world of the commercial, suggesting that it is an essential part of the situation presented in the advertisement. As mentioned earlier, in beer ads, the product is placed in the middle of the activity. Consequently, these ads convey the message that beer not only accompanies a good time, but it is impossible to have fun without a provision of beer.

Figure 13.3  
A variety of structured motion patterns—ways in which people look at ads.



Ads often depict situations in which the person modeling the product is the center of attention—presumably due to the consumer item being advertised. The advertiser encourages the audience to identify with this principal figure, so that the audience vicariously receives approval by using the product.

*Advertising Space and Gender Role.* In the 1970s, Erving Goffman conducted a study of the use of ad space as a reflection of cultural attitudes toward women (see Figure 13.4). More recent photographs show women in a greater diversity of poses, reflecting the changing role of women in contemporary culture. For instance, the March 2007 issue of *Vogue* included ads in which the models were looking straight into the camera. In several of the ads, the model's pelvis is thrust forward, so that it is the closest body part to the camera. The models appear comfortable with their sexuality as a vital part of their total identity; this nonverbal behavior, then, reflects a growing acceptance of the total integration of a woman. However, it can be argued that this contemporary body language signals only the *appearance* of change. Samantha L. Harms observes that this trend also can be regarded as a further exploitation of a "bad girl" image: "In these ads, the company logos are placed prominently near the models' open legs, in an effort to attract the attention of the readers. Thus, the ads definitely associate their products with sex."<sup>83</sup>

*Camouflaged Warnings.* Product warnings are designed to be as inconspicuous as possible. For example, the disclaimers in cigarette advertisements appear in very small print and are separated from the main visual field. Sometimes the disclaimer is camouflaged by the color and graphics of the ad. In 1999, Mazda Motors of America was fined \$5.25 million for failing to make adequate consumer leasing disclosures in its television ad campaign. The FTC ruled that the disclosures that appeared in the commercials were in small and unreadable print, offset by distracting images and sounds.<sup>84</sup>

#### MEDIA LITERACY TIPS

#### EFFECTIVE AD LAYOUTS

Otto Kleppner outlines the following criteria for effective ad layouts:

- Is it arresting?
- Is it clear?
- Is it orderly?
- Is the most important idea given the most important attention?
- Does it invite reading?
- If the trademark is needed to identify the product, is it sufficiently visible?
- Does the layout leave the desired impression about the product?<sup>85</sup>

## Product Placement

*Product placement* refers to an advertising strategy in which the products are incorporated into media presentations. Product placements in media presentations have become commonplace in the world of advertising, generating \$4 billion annually.<sup>86</sup>

Figure 13.4

**A, Upper/lower space:** Men are frequently situated in a higher physical space in ads, in contrast to females who are lying down or sitting on the floor. Goffman contends that being relegated to a lower space symbolizes women's social status in a male-dominated world. **B, Cant:** Female models often pose in a "cant" position, in which the head or body is bowed. The latent message of this body language is deference, submission, and subordination. **C, Attentional vectors:** Women frequently direct their attention toward the male, who is clearly the center of attention. The male has been empowered to the degree that he is free to focus his attention elsewhere. This visual cue instructs the audience to place more importance on the male. **D, Shielding:** Female models are often screened from direct contact with the world of the ad, suggesting that women are dependent and require protection. Women are often stationed behind a barrier or peek out behind another person (generally a male). Women may also be positioned in the background or at the edge of the frame, which suggests a subservient position. Photographs by Carolyn Slonim.



Figure 13.4. (Continued)

Figure 13.4. (Continued)



Is product placement an effective promotional vehicle? In 1982, the producers of the film *E.T.* approached Mars, Inc., the makers of M&M's candies, proposing a deal in which in return for a fee, the candy would appear in the film; the company declined. Instead, Reese's Pieces were visually displayed in the film, as E.T.'s young earthling companion Elliott used the candy to mark a trail for the alien to follow. Within a month of the premiere of the film, sales for the candy jumped by 65 percent.<sup>87</sup>

In 2004, the product placement market jumped by 30.5 percent to \$3.46 billion, \$1.87 billion of it in TV. Overall, the number of placements on TV rose to 107,839 in 2005, from 81,739 in 2004.<sup>88</sup> The media research firm PQ Media predicts that by 2009, the overall number will reach \$6.94 billion.<sup>89</sup> In 2005, Volkswagen signed a long-term product placement deal with NBC Universal that cost the automaker an estimated \$200 million. Under the terms of this agreement, Volkswagens will appear in movies released by Universal Studios, as well as television programs appearing on NBC and other networks owned by General Electric, such as Bravo, SciFi, and USA.

On a per-episode basis, the number of product placements is staggering. In 2006, the telecasts of the reality show "Contender" averaged 500.9 individual occurrences of products placed in its shows—almost 30 times that of traditional commercial messaging.<sup>90</sup>

In a typical product placement arrangement, an agency signs a client for a retainer and places the product as many times as is appropriate and

possible. Increasingly, advertisers have become reliant on this strategy. Ray Warren, managing director at OMD USA declares, "If there's going to be a can of soda on a table, it might as well be our client's can of soda."<sup>91</sup> Thus, it is no surprise that in an episode of the television series "Five Days to Midnight," Mountain Dew (a product of PepsiCo) made three appearances along with a Pepsi-Cola vending machine and a clock decorated with vintage Pepsi-Cola logos.

Advertisers have now begun directing product placement at their target audiences. For instance, in 2006, Dodge paid several million dollars and committed more than \$10 million more in marketing to place its vehicle in the teen action film *Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer*. In addition, U.S. advertisers have now begun directing product placement at children. For instance, in one scene of *Curious George* (2006) an animated movie for very young children, George is seen relaxing amid broken crates of Dole produce, with the product spilling out. His guardian, the Man in the Yellow Hat, drives a Volkswagen.

Product placement is now becoming commonplace in all media. As an example, in 2005, HarperCollins Publishers released a children's book, entitled "Cashmere if You Can." The plot of the book follows the adventures of Wawa Hohhot and her family of Mongolian cashmere goats who live on the roof of Saks's Midtown Manhattan store. Although there is no clear disclosure of Saks's involvement, the setting of the story is hardly an accident; a Saks Fifth Avenue marketing executive came up with the idea, and the department store chain owns the text copyright.

Product placement can also be found in popular music as well. In the top 20 songs of 2005, Mercedes-Benz was mentioned 100 times, Nike 63, Cadillac 62, Bentley 51, and Rolls-Royce 46.<sup>92</sup>

Some genres are particularly well-suited for product placements. For instance, the Reality genre lends itself to product placements, in part because the sets must include branded products as part of its "real" look. As a result, in 2005, Reality programs contained an average of 11:05 minutes per hour of brand appearances, as compared to 3:07 per hour for scripted entertainment programming.

Product placements are beginning to appear in newscasts as well. A 2006 survey asked 266 marketing executives if they had ever paid for product placement in newscasts. Nearly half said yes. And nearly 46 percent of those who had not paid for placement replied that they would consider doing so in the future.<sup>93</sup>

Product placement strategy is designed to create an identity for the product by matching it with the characters that project its desired image. For instance, General Motors vehicles Pontiac, Cadillac, and Buick were featured throughout the first season of the sexy TV drama "Falcon Beach." Each vehicle was matched with the character most closely mirroring the consumer profile of the brand. Thus, Paige (Jennifer Kydd), the lead female



character, was depicted driving a sleek Pontiac Solstice, while her mother (Allison Hossack) drove a reliable, sturdy (but stylish) Cadillac SRX.

Using products as props or part of the set legitimizes the product and is therefore a very subtle form of persuasion. For instance, in a 2006 episode of the NBC drama series *Friday Night Lights*, two characters met for dinner at an Applebee's restaurant.

A more subtle form of product placement is *product integration*, in which products are cleverly embedded into the narrative. Products become central to the story, conveying the message that these items are essential to the characters (and the audience as well). For instance, in a 2006 episode of *Seventh Heaven*, sponsored by the makers of Oreo cookies, a young suitor proposed to his girlfriend, by giving her a diamond ring embedded in an Oreo cookie. Product placement is also becoming central to character development in a narrative. Marc Graser provides the following example from *The New Adventures of Old Christine*, a situation comedy on CBS starring Julia Louis-Dreyfus:

Toyota's plucky hybrid has become synonymous with Julia Louis-Dreyfus' environmentally conscious character on the CBS sitcom. It helps that the car has been central to many of the show's plots, including one where it has a run-in with a gas-guzzling Hummer.<sup>94</sup>

Indeed, product placement has become such an effective advertising vehicle that in some cases, the entire storyline is conceived with product placement in mind. In 2006, Lifetime, a cable network, consummated a deal with Perfectmatch.com that extended through the entire 13-episode run of its sitcom *Lovespring International*. Perfectmatch.com, an actual online dating service, is incorporated into the series as an archrival of the fictitious company in the series. In the first episode, the owner of the agency screams at her staff about their poor performance: "Do you know how many people have signed up for Perfectmatch.com in the last five minutes? 1,623." In another episode, a dissatisfied client declares, "I would have had better luck on Perfectmatch.com."<sup>95</sup>

However, some writers and producers complain that the imperative to slip product promotion into a script can undermine the integrity of the story. Scott Miller, a story producer on the reality show *American Dream Derby*, a horse-racing contest that appeared on GSN earlier this year, said he was required to get Diet Dr. Pepper into every episode, regardless of what was happening on-screen:

These were moments when people were crying, or two cast members were screaming at each other, or two allies were sneaking off to strategize, and there were several times when it was: Let me stop and make sure everyone has a can of Diet Dr. Pepper. I'd literally be below the frame line, handing a can of Diet Dr. Pepper

to someone who didn't have one. First and foremost, I want to tell a good story. I'm not necessarily there to help make a commercial.<sup>96</sup>

In 2005, a collective of show business unions, including The Writers Guild of America, West, and the Writers Guild of America, East, and the Screen Actors Guild, denounced the practice of "stealth advertising" and called for a code of conduct to govern this practice. The group issued a position paper saying,

We are being told to write the lines that sell this merchandise, and to deftly disguise the sale as story. Our writers are being told to perform the function of ad copywriter, but to disguise this as storytelling.<sup>97</sup>

### Movement

Movement can play a significant role in television advertising. Movement can also draw the attention of the consumer to specific features of the ad. In addition, the technique of slow motion enables the audience to scrutinize the product demonstration, adding to the dramatic emphasis of the ad.

The motion can also set the tone for the promotion. Motion can lend a dynamic feel to the media presentation, giving the impression that the product is exciting and glamorous.

The *direction* of the movement also conveys messages. For instance, in a television spot for *Sports Illustrated*, a sports nut leans toward the camera to tell us about "a great deal" if we subscribe to the magazine. This movement suggests a familiarity and confidentiality with the audience which inspires trust.

Many advertisers now favor the "shaky camera technique," in which the camera jumps around, much like an amateur home video. In contrast with the slick style found in conventional TV spots, this style produces a genuine, "just folks" impression. In addition, Thornton C. Lockwood found that the shaky camera technique employed in an AT&T "business reality" ad campaign "underscored the stress and discomfort the characters experienced" by not using AT&T.<sup>98</sup>

### Word Choice

*Connotative Words.* Words are very carefully chosen in advertising. However, upon close inspection, these words can convey a false impression. For instance, processed foods with healthy sounding names such as Lean Cuisine and Healthy Choice frozen dinners call attention to the health benefits of the product. However, according to a system called

Guiding Stars that rated the nutritional value of food on a scale of zero to three stars, these brands received *no* stars.<sup>99</sup>

Many of the most common and persuasive words used in advertising fall into the following categories:

- *Commencement* words suggest immediacy, importance, and a sense of urgency:

*Introducing*  
*Announcing*  
*Now*  
*Suddenly*

- *Convenience* words appeal to the consumers' interest in products that will make their lives easier:

*Easy*  
*Quick*

- *Transformational* words promise new levels of experience:

*Sensational*  
*Startling*  
*Amazing*  
*Remarkable*  
*Miracle*  
*Magic*  
*Revolutionary*  
*Improvement*

- *Directives* tell the consumer what to do:

*Hurry*  
*Compare*

- *Customer Advantage* words offer the consumer a feeling of control, vision, wisdom, and superiority:

*Bargain*  
*Offer*  
*Free*  
*Sale*

*Codewords.* Codewords refer to terms that have a particular significance for the target audience. For instance, Audi, an import luxury sedan has been a longtime sponsor of NBC radio's *Wall Street Report*. "Audi-watch" spokesperson Amy O'Connor urged her audience to "put Audi on our *shortlist*." This corporate codeword (meaning a select group that has survived an elimination process) is both familiar and appealing to the upscale audience Audi is trying to attract. Indeed, identifying these codewords can be a useful method of discovering the intended audience for advertisements.

## MEDIA LITERACY TIPS

### CONNOTATIVE WORDS

A *Consumer Guide to Advertising* cautions the public about *connotative* words commonly found in the food industry:

*Natural.* If you think this product is automatically as good for you as fresh broccoli, think again. Read the label: on one box of cake mix "natural" included modified food starches, mono and diglycerides, gum arabic, etc. (The one exception is meat and poultry labels where natural means "minimally processed.")

*Dietetic.* This usually means low in sodium and does not necessarily mean reduced calories.

*Light or Lite.* Could mean anything, and may mean nothing. Don't assume that it's lower in calories unless it's on a meat label.

*No sugar.* Yes, but it could have sugar substitutes such as corn sweeteners. Watch for the words containing "glucose, sucrose, fructose, and dextrose."

*No artificial ingredients.* What's artificial to you may not be artificial to a food manufacturer! There are no laws that prevent ingredients such as "hydrolyzed vegetable protein" (which involves chemicals) from being included in products listed as containing "no artificial ingredients."<sup>100</sup>

## Connotative Image

What kinds of images are most prevalent in advertising?

The public is fascinated by pictures of *people*—particularly young, attractive women. Pictures of *babies and animals* tap into a wellspring of emotional experience which are sure to generate a positive reaction in the audience. Images that emphasize the *rewards* of a product are also common. For instance, real estate ads generally show customers either learning about the sale of their home or walking into their new house. A *Consumer Guide to Advertising* suggests that the public consider whether the visual images in an ad correspond with the words:

By playing with ... visuals, the text can be absolutely accurate, but the image in the mind's eye may suggest something very different ... Be suspicious. Don't rely on visual images alone to provide you with accurate information. Listen carefully to the words, read the labels and then decide if this product or service is for you.<sup>101</sup>

Some advertisers have overlooked the *cultural context* of a connotative image—with disastrous results. To illustrate, the logo of Nike AirJordan basketball shoes included the word "Air" in stylized script, which was nearly identical to the configuration of the Arabic script for "Allah." Offended by what they considered a sign of disrespect to the Muslim

religion, the Council on American-Islamic Relations threatened to organize a boycott among the world's one billion Muslims. Nike subsequently apologized for this unintended slight and pulled the shoes from distribution.

### Sound

*Music.* Music serves a variety of functions in advertising. Music can generate feelings of excitement, joy, and pleasure, which advertisers hope will be transferred to the product. Music also can provide dramatic emphasis, underscoring the advertising message presented by the words and images. Music often establishes a tone (e.g., solemn, whimsical, elegant) that instructs the audience on the appropriate response to the advertising message. And finally, the rhythm and repetition of melodies can trigger the consumer's recall of a product at a later point.

The music in TV ads can make an ad not merely palatable but enjoyable. The jingles are often well-produced; in fact, in the 1970s, "I'd like to buy the world a Coke" went on to become a popular hit single. The entertainment value of the music makes it more likely that the audience will stay tuned to the commercial.

Ads customize the soundtrack to its target audience. For instance, Ford Motor Company's marketing research indicates that pickup truck buyers are likely to be country music fans.<sup>102</sup> As a result, Ford truck ads often feature country music to attract its intended market.

Advertisers can also purchase the rights to popular commercial songs. The cost can be prohibitive—up to \$250,000 for a one year license<sup>103</sup>—however, using popular songs enables advertisers to transfer the popularity of a hit tune to their product.

A related approach involves using a popular tune, but inserting new lyrics with a commercial message. For instance, a classic Toyota commercial substituted the following lyrics for the Monkees' signature hit "(We're the Monkees)":

Hey hey, we're Toyota  
Toyotathon time of the year  
Savings are better than ever,  
Come on down today.

In some cases, advertisers hire "sound alike" artists to add to the original flavor of the spot. In fact, in 1989 Bette Midler was awarded \$400,000 in a suit against the New York advertising agency of Young & Rubicam for using one of her former backup singers to imitate Midler's rendition of "Do You Want to Dance" in a Ford Mercury commercial.<sup>104</sup>

Using *original* music and lyrics can also be an expensive undertaking, but a song that has been especially commissioned for the ad is sure to complement the messages presented through dialogue, voice-over, and

Figure 13.5

Advertisers who target international audiences must be sensitive to the cultural context of words and images. This Nike logo, which bares a striking resemblance to the Arabic script for "Allah," deeply offended the Muslim community. Photograph courtesy of Cary Wolinsky/Trillium Studios.



visuals. In addition, an original jingle sends a message about the uniqueness of the product.

Older songs in the public domain can serve as an inexpensive way to set the tone for local ads. Because the copyright law has lapsed, this music is free. These “generic” songs can be found in most local libraries. However, because this music appears so frequently in commercials, there is no hope of any product identification with the music.

**Background Sound.** Sound effects dramatize the commercial message by simulating the sounds commonly associated with the product. The sound of a can opening, a carbonated beverage being poured into a glass, and people talking and laughing can contribute to the verisimilitude of a beer ad. When ads are produced in a studio, the media communicator uses sound effects to re-create the noises that the audience would expect as part of the environment of the ad. However, finding sound effects that capture the more elusive qualities of the product can present a challenge for the audio engineer. For instance, discussing the production of an ad for G.E., Halogen Headlights, Hooper White explains,

When the G.E. Halogen Headlight was first turned on in the graphic picture, we highlighted it with a burst of white sound (an effect quite peculiar to a synthesizer). This burst was followed with a synthetic French horn statement, which became the musical logo for the headlight. This horn statement was reiterated three times as the G.E. headlight was mentioned in the voice track.<sup>105</sup>

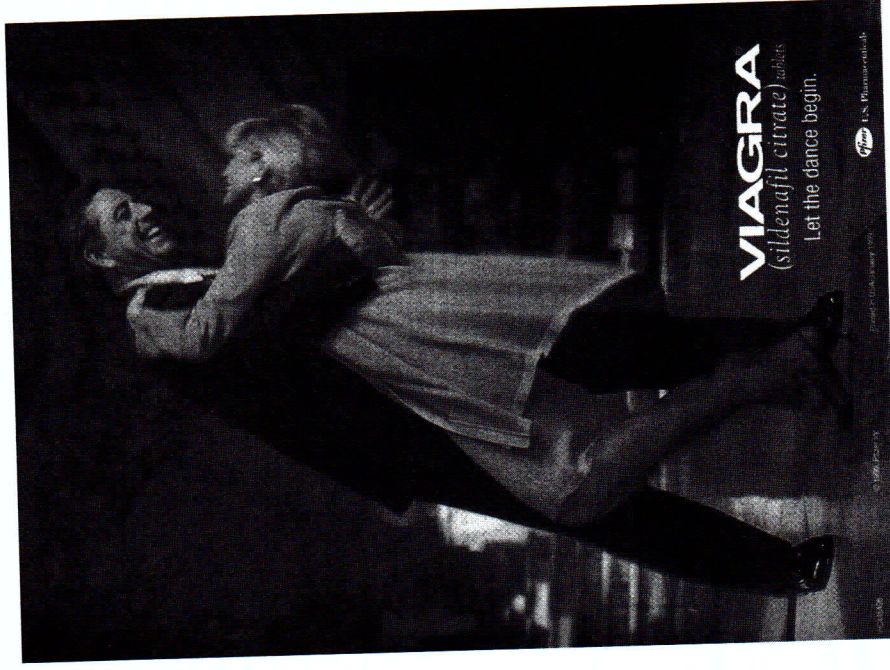
## CASE STUDY

Janis Valdes, a faculty member in the department of communications and journalism at Webster University, conducted the following media analysis of a print advertisement for Viagra, using selected keys to interpreting media messages:

In early 1999, Pfizer Pharmaceuticals launched a major national ad campaign for Viagra, a drug designed to counteract erectile dysfunction. A media literacy analysis of a Viagra print ad using the keys of context, framework, and production values provides insight into American popular culture's preoccupation with youth and fulfillment of the romantic ideal. Within this context, the Viagra ad is a modern fairy tale—Cinderella or perhaps Sleeping Beauty is more to the point: a mature couple restored to youthful vigor and living happily ever after, thanks to the magical powers of Viagra.

Although demographics reveal that seniors are a growing majority in the U.S., media messages bombard us with youth-worship. Americans' obsession with aging has created an enormous market for the fountain of youth in all its guises: face lifts, tummy tucks, wrinkle creams, flashy sports cars, and all manner of remedies to increase energy, memory, and sexual function. This cultural context sets the stage for Pfizer Pharmaceuticals to introduce Viagra in December 1997.

Figure 13.6 This Viagra print ad campaign reflects American popular culture's preoccupation with youth and fulfillment of the romantic ideal. Photograph courtesy of Pfizer Inc.



A full-page ad in the March 1999 issue of *Condé Nast Traveller* features a handsome, gray-templed man in a well-cut dark suit dancing with a slender, silver-haired woman who is dressed in a gold dress and jacket ensemble. The couple is dancing in what, on close inspection, appears to be the foyer of a European castle. The couple's elegant appearance, combined with the setting, create an ambiance of affluence and privilege. The background is in soft focus, bathed in a golden light that suggests sunset and romance. The dancers themselves represent a very traditional notion of a romantic couple. The man is considerably taller than the woman, so that he occupies the upper, or dominant space in the photo. His strength is evident as he easily dips his partner with just one arm, his other hand free. The woman's foot and head are slightly blurred with motion, capturing the spontaneity of the moment. Her husband is literally “sweeping her off her feet” in this romantic place. A woman discreetly descending the stairs in the center left of

the background provides an audience for this rendezvous, shifting it to a public setting, which hearkens back to the notion of a ball.

Here the romantic ideal has been extended to include those over the age of 25. Nowhere do we find a trace of the unpleasant realities that aging often brings. In fact, the only hint of the couple's maturity is their hair color. In this world, age brings wealth and prestige, the freedom to do as one pleases, and power—the power to buy back one's potency, in pill form if need be. The phrase “Let the dance begin” may spark memories for a generation raised on romantic tunes like “Dancing in the Dark,” “I Could Have Danced All Night,” and “Shall We Dance?” “The dance” can be interpreted as a metaphor for sex, couched in delicate terms to avoid offending the intended older audience. But the big promise of the ad is that Viagra will restore not just the sex but the romance to the relationship.

The image of the spontaneous and glamorous couple in the ad trades on the romantic ideals the audience was raised on and the fairy tale ending we'd all like to believe in. In keeping with the romantic illusion of the ad, no patient information is included in the text. The inclusion of hard facts about sexual dysfunction and possible side effects would spoil the romantic mood. Ultimately, the ad is not selling a pharmaceutical product, but the most sought-after commodity of all—a return to the romance of youth.<sup>106</sup>

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