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# The Use of Visual Metaphors in Print Advertisements

Lisa M. Janos

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The Rochester Institute of Technology

School of Communication

College of Liberal Arts

The Use of Visual Metaphors in Print Advertisements

by

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*A thesis* submitted

in partial fulfillment of the Master of Science degree

In Communication & Media Technology

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*This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my father, John Janos (1955-2013), for his never ending love and support.*

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THE USE OF VISUAL METAPHORS IN PRINT ADVERTISEMENTS

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Master of Science in Communication & Media Technologies

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Abstract

This study examined advertisements in which metaphorical comparisons were made between cosmetic/beauty products and food. The purpose was to identify what rhetorical themes emerged among the advertisements and to determine if the visuals could provide sufficient content for a marketing message. Twelve images from four companies were chosen. An analysis was performed on each through the application of visual semiotics. Findings indicated that a visual metaphor approach can deliver involved rhetorical marketing messages to the viewer. The theme of indulgence was clear among the ads and the comparison of cosmetics to food suggested that the product should become part of the self, not to be ingested the way food would be, but to be absorbed into the daily lives of consumers.

*Key words:*

Visual Metaphor

Print Advertisements

Semiotics

### The Use of Visual Metaphors in Print Advertisements

According to Pieters and Wedel (2004), the magazine industry claims an estimated 13% of all advertising spending in the United States. With such a heavy investment in this medium it is not surprising that companies would want to concentrate on sending the strongest, most persuasive message possible through their print advertisements. However, with nearly 50% of magazine content being advertisements, efforts must be put forth not only to persuade consumers, but to stand out amongst the clutter as well (Pieters & Wedel, 2004). But, print ads and print media in general face more threats than just clutter. There is a growing belief that print media will soon be replaced by online publications, and with sales in both the newspaper and magazine industries dropping, this concern may soon become a reality (Orchard, 2010). In addition to this, the interactivity offered through the Internet is thought to be an advertiser's dream. McMillan, Hoy, Kim, and McMahan (2007) state that "Researchers have shown interactivity is a key component of Internet advertising and in most cases, increased interactivity is associated with positive factors such as improved attitude toward the brand and the Web site, greater purchase intention, and greater likelihood of returning to the advertiser's Web site" (p. 223). With such opportunities available through the use of the Internet, one may wonder why advertisers continue to utilize print channels, especially if they are a dying media. According to Orchard (2010), advertising revenue accounts for the majority of profits for both newspaper and magazine publications. The loss of the profits gained from advertising would prove detrimental to these businesses. With that said, it is important that magazines and newspapers maintain their



relationships with advertisers and highlight the benefits they have to offer to marketers through this channel.

The results of this study suggest that print ads and media can in fact compete with the interactivity of the Internet. It just needs to be examined in a different way. Although it might not involve the clicking of a hyperlink, sound effects, or moving pictures, print media can offer a unique draw to the consumer through an alternative approach. Though it may not be the same type of “interactivity” offered through the Internet, there are a number of ways advertisers may choose to invite the reader to interact with a print spot. This research project will focus on one such approach: the use of the visual metaphor. Using such images in print advertising invites the viewers to make sense of the ad and to draw their own conclusions. A close examination of the visual metaphor and an analysis of twelve industry examples will give insight to this technique of visually engaging an audience and reveal what it may have to offer.

### **Context**

The use of visual metaphors in print ads has proven effective for catching readers’ attention and encouraging them to interact with the ad (Sullivan, 2008). Recently, a trend seems to have emerged in which many cosmetic and/or beauty companies are portraying their products as fruit or food in their print advertisements. One must wonder what the draw to this strategy is. Martin (2005) discusses the notion that food is ingested, thus becoming part of the “self” as we digest and turn what we eat into what we need to live. Perhaps the use of the visual metaphor particularly involving food items is trying to say that the product will become part of the “self.” It will become part of our identity or it should be how we identify ourselves. Marshall (2005) examines the importance attached to eating meals together as a family. Meals are a part of our lives; they have tradition and rituals surrounding them like time of day, specific number of

courses, or proper dining behavior. From a marketing standpoint, portraying the product as food through the use of a visual metaphor could be a way of trying to make the product itself a part of those traditions and/or rituals. The advertisers could be trying to suggest that the product or even the company is or should be a part of the family.

This thesis explores the concepts behind the visual metaphor and why this approach is used so predominantly in the advertising world. Various types of visual metaphors investigated in other research studies are also reviewed. A semiotic framework is then used to investigate the construction, meaning, and consequences of these metaphors within cosmetic campaigns. Twelve advertisements from various companies, DKNY (Donna Karan New York), Essie, Clinique, and EOS (Evolution of Smooth), are analyzed in this study.

### **The Visual Metaphor**

Before diving into the concept of the visual metaphor, it may be helpful to first define the term “metaphor” in general. According to Berger (2012), the metaphor is a form of analogy, or “A mode of communication in which meaning is generated by making comparisons” (Berger 2012, p. 241). A metaphor is actually a strong analogy which suggests equivalence between the two objects/things being compared (Berger, 2012). For instance, if you say that your love is a rose, then you are using a metaphor. Suggesting such equivalence will cause the receiver of your message to attribute qualities of a rose to your love. So, a rose is beautiful and if your love is a rose then your love must be beautiful as well (Berger, 2012).

Such comparisons or metaphors can be (and often are) portrayed through the use of visuals rather than words. This ability to make such a strong comparison can be very valuable from an advertiser’s stand point since the visuals in an ad have been found to be the most important element of an ad in capturing the target’s attention (Pieters & Wedel, 2004). Furthermore,

Sullivan (2008) suggests that you are able to do more with an image than you can with words. He states that "... (you can) say with one image what you might need 20 words to say. Visuals get a lot of work done quickly and simply" (Sullivan, 2008, p. 61). These features of an image described by Sullivan (2008) can be especially helpful to advertisers when trying to get their message across. Not only do they often have limited space in an advertisement, but the viewer is only willing to contribute so much time to examining an ad. The message needs to get the viewer interested fast to maintain this attention.

Rather than use a simple image in an ad, many advertising campaigns are choosing to take it a step further with the application of the visual metaphor...but why? To start, many scholars agree that the use of a visual metaphor catches the attention of the viewer by looking out of place (Gkiouzepas & Hogg, 2011; McQuarrie & Philips, 2005; Sullivan, 2008). The two items being compared in a visual metaphor are often very dissimilar. This goes against what the viewer expects to see and therefore attracts their attention. This dissimilarity is often referred to as incongruity. McQuarrie and Phillips (2005) explain that such incongruities are a deviation from the expected, they "... invite (the viewer) to elaborate on how the incongruity can be resolved" (McQuarrie & Phillips, 2005, p. 8). In other words, the incongruity in a visual metaphor puts the ball in the viewer's court. He/she is asked to then fill in the gaps to determine just what the ad is trying to say. By requiring that the image be cognitively processed to interpret meaning, the ad then becomes interactive (Gkiouzepas & Hogg, 2011; Lagerwerf & Meijers, 2008; McQuarrie & Philips, 2005; Scott, 1994; Sullivan, 2008). In addition to this, allowing the viewer to create their own meaning from the image has in some cases been found to increase the persuasiveness of the ad. This is because the viewer is allowed to draw their own conclusions, instead of being told what to think or what the connection is supposed to be (McQuarrie & Philips, 2005).

Past research surrounding customer value helps to shed light on just what it is that could be making the visual metaphor more persuasive. Customization of products has been found to increase value in the eyes of the customer, by allowing them to form the product to their needs. This can allow consumers to develop their own differentiation and puts them in the position of co-creating their own value (Han & Han, 2001; Hunt, 2006; Liechty, 2001; Sela, 2010). With a visual metaphor, the fact that the user is able to create their own meaning is similar to the idea of user generated content or customization. But, instead of a product or service being customized it is the ad itself. As previously stated, past research on customer value has suggested that customization of a product can increase value in the eyes of the consumer. So, why wouldn't the customization of an advertisement do the same? This concept might seem strange because the image itself is static, it's not going to change for each person who views it, but the meaning will and that may be a strong benefit of the visual metaphor.

It is important to keep in mind, however, that the image cannot be completely random. The connection has to make sense in some way or you risk confusing the viewer. A logical connection between the suggested comparison must be possible (Hamburg, 2005; Sullivan, 2008). But, the comparison can still be slightly far-fetched. After all, if advertisements were thought to portray reality, they would all be misrepresentations since they are not in fact reality. Scott (1994) states that "Once we let go of the notion that advertising images must be understood as reflections (or distortions) of reality, we can work with them as a symbolic system employed for the purpose of persuasion" (p. 265). Scott (1994) does a good job of illustrating how advertisements can be used as a form of visual rhetoric. That is, they can be used to give a deeper meaning and are capable of portraying an abstract concept or idea (Phillips, 1997; Scott, 1994). When this rhetoric involves incongruities and/or deviates from expectations, the viewer will

assume that there is a figurative meaning behind the visual and will automatically seek to identify it (Phillips, 1997). Such images will have different meanings to different people since interpretations are based on personal or cultural experiences (Scott, 1994).

### **Types of Visual Metaphors**

Researchers have identified two modes of representation for the visual metaphor: synthesis and juxtaposition (Gkiouzepas & Hogg, 2011). Lagerwerf and Meijers (2008) offer a comprehensive explanation of a synthesized metaphor: “Only one of the elements is visible; the interpretation of the image refers to the other element” (p.21). In other words, a synthesized visual metaphor only contains one of the two items that are being compared. A reference to the missing element is made through the context in which the present element is displayed. In this way, the two items are compared. When a synthesized visual metaphor is used, a greater processing time might be required of the viewer in order to make the association to the missing element and really “get” the metaphor. However, some argue that this higher level of involvement required of the viewer may increase the effectiveness of the advertisement by allowing them to be further in control of the interpreted meaning (Gkiouzepas & Hogg, 2011).

When considering the elaboration likelihood model (ELM), a popular theory used when examining the principles of persuasion, one can see how this approach may be beneficial to advertisers. Simply put, this model suggests that we view stimuli in one of two ways: central and/or peripheral. When the stimuli are central, this theory suggests the viewers’ involvement is high. That is, they are more willing to think about and consider what that stimuli is trying to convey or there is “...effortful cognitive activity whereby the person draws upon prior experience and knowledge in order to carefully scrutinize all of the information relevant to determining the meaning of a given message” (Bryant & Oliver, 2009, p. 132). According to Bryant and Oliver

(2009), when the message processed is central to the viewer, the persuasion and the likelihood of an attitude change is much higher. On the other hand, while a peripheral approach may have some persuasive effects, it does not seem to provide a long-term attitude change that is seen with the high involvement of a central approach (Bryant & Oliver, 2009). The fact that the use of a visual metaphor is said to require a greater processing time or cognitive effort from the viewer suggests that it adopts a central approach, increasing the persuasive power of the advertisement.

A juxtaposed visual metaphor, on the other hand, is one in which both items that are being compared are present in the image. Here, the metaphor is being displayed in full, often with the two items side-by-side (Gkiouzepas & Hogg, 2011; Lagerwerf & Meijers, 2008). The importance of this mode of representation in a visual metaphor is demonstrated in the statement, “The objects mode of representation dimension... answers the question about what is being related” (Gkiouzepas & Hogg, 2011, p. 105). In other words, either by making the necessary associations to determine what outside object is being referred to in a synthesized image, or by clearly seeing what two objects are being compared in a juxtaposed image, the mode of representation helps the viewer to determine to what object/item the advertiser is suggesting their product is equivalent.

Beyond the mode of representation, Gkiouzepas and Hogg (2011) have further broken down the types of visual metaphor into three separate visual scenarios: *realistic symbiosis*, *replacement*, and *artificial symbiosis*. The realistic symbiosis category includes visuals which make metaphorical comparisons between objects by capturing them together or individually in scenarios which may be possible in real life. Although the image may present the object(s) in an unusual scene or from an uncommon angle, the image still has the possibility of occurring in real life scenarios without any digital alteration (Gkiouzepas & Hogg, 2011). This visual scenario has

the possibility of being portrayed in both modes of representation previously discussed. For a juxtaposed artificial symbiosis, the item may merely be captured in a somewhat odd, but still realistically possible shot with another item. For synthesized realistic symbiosis, an unusual camera angle or position may give an uncommon view of an object in its natural state so that it resembles or represents another (Gkiouzepas & Hogg, 2011).

The replacement visual scenario is one in which an object in a seemingly everyday scene has been replaced by another that does not seem to belong or is incongruent with the overall schema (Gkiouzepas & Hogg, 2011; Lagerwerf & Meijers, 2008). Again, this scenario is possible for both a juxtaposed and synthesized mode of representation. For example, a juxtaposed image in this category may portray a group of many of the same object with only one being substituted by another which does not seem to belong. On the other hand, in a synthesized replacement scenario the incongruent object stands alone as a fill in for what should be there in reality (Gkiouzepas & Hogg, 2011; Lagerwerf & Meijer, 2008).

Finally, the artificial symbiosis scenario is exactly that: artificial. The two items may be placed together in an unrealistic space (like a simple black backdrop) without anything like context, size, or positioning given as reference points. This would be a juxtaposed artificial symbiosis. Or, the image may represent a hybrid of the two objects that have been greatly edited/alterd through the use of technologies like Photoshop (Gkiouzepas & Hogg, 2011). Although Lagerwerf and Meijers (2008) use the term *fusion* for this category the general idea is the same. Two dissimilar objects are fused together to form one. With the only item present being a “freakish” hybrid, this mode would be an example of synthesized artificial symbiosis.

### **Semiotics and Visual Communication**

As previously mentioned, the concepts of visual semiotics will be utilized in the present study for examining the possible meanings portrayed by the selected visual metaphors. Before moving on to the analysis of these images, it may first be helpful to explore the concepts underlying visual semiotics and how this approach can be an appropriate technique for the analysis of an advertising image.

Moriarty (2002) defines semiotics as the “study of signs and signals, sign systems, and sign processes” (p. 20). In semiotic theory, she suggests that a sign is anything that stands for something else, an object or a concept. In communication research, there are two different traditional semiotic theories, Saussurian and Peircian semiotics.

Saussurian semiotics stems from the research of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure whose focus lays on the relationship between an image or sound (the *signifier*) and the meaning or concept that signifier represents, or the *signified*. Saussure argued that the relationship between the signifier and signified is arbitrary and would be understood by convention. However, as Moriarty (2002) points out, this is mainly true for spoken or written language, but visual communication merits a different approach. Instead, she turns to the work of C. S. Peirce, thought to be the founder of American semiotics and the theory of Peircian semiotics.

Peirce is more focused on the interpretation of meaning and the modes of cognition. He adds a third element to Saussure’s signifier and signified, the *interpretant*, or the “stands for” element (Moriarty, 2002). To Peirce, a sign is “something that stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity” (Moriarty, 2002, p. 21). It is not limited to arbitrary meaning. Peirce proposed three types of signs: *iconic*, *indexical*, and *symbolic*. The iconic sign is something that looks like what it is intended to represent. This is sometimes referred to as mimetic representation. With an indexical sign, there is a physical relationship between the signifier and



signified. Moriarty (2002) suggests that with this type of sign, there is some type of evidence that connects the two. She uses the example of a footprint suggesting that someone has walked by. Finally, the symbolic sign is the only type of sign in which the meaning is arbitrary, like colors or abstract images.

According to Moriarty (2002), Peircian semiotics is a better approach to studying the meaning behind a visual image because, "... besides the arbitrary, it allows for other systems of signifying, such as mimesis and evidence (clues and cues), which are fundamental to visuals" (p. 21). The focus of Peircian semiotics on the concept of interpretation is another feature making it the most appropriate method for analyzing a visual image. As Moriarty (2002) suggests, this interpretation is the key to decoding visual meaning.

One problem with analyzing visual communication is that, historically, scholars have seen a lack of structure or theory for decoding visual meaning. However, Moriarty and Sayre (2005) argue that semiotics is an appropriate approach. It seeks to discover the way meaning is produced and transmitted through a given message. In visual semiotics, this meaning can be discovered by applying the analytical tools of Peirce previously described: the signifier, signified, and interpretant. To Moriarty (2002) it is the final concept of the interpretant that is most important when applying semiotics to visual communication. She suggests that the process in which we discover meaning relies heavily on our interpretation of signs.

This process of interpretation involves the consideration of the meaning of a sign in terms of all possible signification possibilities a sign can be, a signal, or an iconic, indexical, or symbolic sign, all at the same time. Interpretation is done by puzzling out the inferences from these multiple levels of signification. (Moriarty, 2002, p. 24)

When considering this process and the possibility that each sign can be viewed on multiple levels, one can see how meaning is a dynamic concept. It is never concrete, because the audience draws conclusions through chains of inference which can easily vary by individual. Moriarty (2002) claims that the reason the concept of the interpretant is so vital when applying semiotics to visual communication is that this form of communication is often more open to interpretation than verbal communication. The search for meaning in a visual image requires that the audience be actively involved in the search for meaning.

### **Applying Semiotics to Advertising Visuals**

When considering the appropriateness of applying a semiotic approach in the interpretation of an advertising image, it is important to consider that the viewer does not need to be a communication scholar to take part in the steps involved with semiotics. Moriarty and Sayre (2005) state “we are all semiotic scholars in that we respond to the common sign systems that make up our environment without even thinking about the process of interpretation” (p. 244). In their study “An Intended-Perceived Study Using Visual Semiotics,” Moriarty and Sayre (2005) examine Apple’s well known television advertisement 1984. They discovered that the advertisement carried a variety of visual message elements such as characters, sounds, and colors, which carried different levels of semiotic meaning. The results of their study, comparing the intended meaning of the advertisement versus the interpreted meaning, showed that the viewers were able to understand the intended signs of the advertisement. These points are important when considering the current study as a semiotic approach will be used to analyze the selected print advertisements.

Harrison (2008) shows support for the use of visual semiotics for analyzing advertising images in the study, “Real Men Do Wear Mascara: Advertising Discourse and Masculine

Identity.” Harrison’s (2008) focus is on the multimodal discourse of media, and the way in which system functional linguistics and visual social semiotics work together to create meaning. Although the majority of messages we see today are forms of multimodal communication, Harrison (2008) makes it a point to illustrate how it has become “...increasingly clear that studying verbal texts alone is not sufficient” (p. 58). The visual element in multimodal forms of communication can be very dominant, and can play a big role in the interpretations of meaning drawn by the viewer of a given advertisement.

When considering visual semiotics, Harrison (2008) suggests that the practice involves the examination of what can be “...said and done with images and how the things people say and do with images can be interpreted” (p. 58). Like Moriarty, Harrison (2008) seems to place an emphasis on the interpretant. She points out that although what is interpreted may vary from person to person, the general intended message will still get across because visual semiotics ultimately stems from grammar. That is, there is still a set of cultural rules and conventions that gives some structure to how an image will be interpreted, allowing the sender to create a coherent discourse.

This concept described above is often referred to as *visual grammar*. According to communication scholars Theo Van Leeuwen and Gunther Kress (2002), the presence of grammar is possible in a visual image, stemming from the structural nature of composition and layout. These authors suggest that “grammar” in the verbal sense, is a set of rules and conventions established and followed by a group of people within a society. Based on the idea that “some discourses of design are taught in art and design colleges across the world...” they suggest that there are rules and conventions surrounding the way people interpret visual images as well as the written word (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2002, p. 345). In their study, Kress and Van Leeuwen

(2002) focus on the grammar surrounding the use of color. Relating to Halliday's metafunctional theory, the authors identify the three key functions which language fulfills (*ideational function*, *interpersonal function*, and *textual function*) and suggest that the visual aspect of color could arguably be classified into all three subgroups.

Ideational function, for example, deals with the function of constructing a representation of the world. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2002), this task can be easily accomplished through the use of color. They claim that the color of flags can be used to denote specific nations around the world, or the color blue on a map can be used to indicate water. The interpersonal function of Halliday's theory deals with the illustration of specific social meaning or purposes. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2002) also claim that this can be done through the use of color. For example, color can be used to warn of danger or hazards. What is important here is not just that color can be interpreted to mean "warning" or "danger," but that it is used specifically for that purpose. Finally, textual function is "...the function of marshalling communicative acts into larger wholes, into the communicative events or texts that realize specific social practices, such as conversations, lectures, reports, etc." (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2002, p. 346). In other words, this function serves as a sort of organization or structure which interactions should follow. Again, color can be said to serve the purposes of this function as well. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2002) suggest that this can be seen in a child's text book, for example, where a specific color may be used on a page to indicate the beginning of a new chapter or section.

The concepts of visual grammar will not be examined too closely, but for the purposes of this study, it will be assumed a visual element meets all the criteria or functions of language identified by the metafunctional theory. This suggests that a visual image can have the same communicative capabilities and purposes as a written statement.

Harrison (2008) also suggests that some assumptions are made in the methodology of visual semiotics, that is, that "...discourse simultaneously represents the producer's world, is designed to engage its audience, and is organized in a coherent way" (p.59). The statement provides further support for the use of semiotics when analyzing an advertising image. An advertisement is created with one key goal: to sell a product. The producer's world in this case would be that product or company. The image is purposefully designed to engage the viewer by providing a coherent message to rationalize why the viewer should purchase a given product. Therefore, one can see that advertising meets all the assumptions revolving around this particular methodology. When analyzing an image, Harrison (2008) examines visual elements such as color, shape, subject, and perspective, and explores the possible meanings of a message through these visual cues.

These are just some examples of how the elements of an image can be examined with a semiotic approach. One may also choose to read into the setting of the image or the colors used as a way of identifying possible meaning. Having examined the concepts of visual semiotics and its application in the research discussed above, this approach seems the most appropriate for examining the following research question of the current study:

R1. What rhetorical themes appear among advertisements which utilize visual metaphors of food and cosmetics?

### **Image Selection**

Twelve advertisements from campaigns featured in *Cosmopolitan* magazine were chosen for this study. *Cosmopolitan* was chosen for a number of reasons, the main one being the impact it has had on the world. Launched in the 1960s, *Cosmopolitan* magazine, a publication of the Hearst Company, originated as a general interest magazine and was transformed into what it is

today through the works of writer Helen Gurley Brown (Hearst Company, 2012). At a time when feminism was an emerging issue and the role of women in the US was changing, Brown recognized that there was a real market for a publication which would seek to empower women (Hearst Company, 2012).

The Hearst Company, recognizing that their general interest magazine *Cosmopolitan* was failing, chose to give Brown the opportunity to re-invent the publication. The first issue of the “new” *Cosmo* came out in September 1965. From the start, *Cosmo* displayed risqué headlines and edgy articles. Laurie Ouellette (1999) examined the cultural impact of *Cosmopolitan*. She found, what made it so appealing was that it offered a vision and even advice for American women to have careers of their own and to lead their own lives.

These concepts were still so new at the time *Cosmopolitan* was released that few had chosen to bring them into the spotlight, making *Cosmo* unique in its own right.

As stated, all the advertisements chosen for the current study had campaigns featured in *Cosmopolitan* magazine. It seems appropriate in a magazine founded on the concepts of women taking control of their own lives that the advertising approach of the visual metaphor would be so heavily utilized, an approach which allows the viewer to take control and draw their own conclusions on the intended meaning of the advertisement. Because *Cosmo* is a magazine that has focused on women leading their life on their own terms, it is an appropriate choice for the current study. Visual metaphors seem to align well with this view in the sense that they give the viewer the freedom to draw their own conclusions regarding the meaning of the ad, rather than being told the meaning through text or body copy. With a magazine that advocates such a lifestyle, the viewers may be more open to the idea of thinking critically about an image to infer their own meaning.

## EOS

The first advertising campaign chosen for the current study is for the company EOS (Evolution of Smooth) lip balm. As a relatively new company started in 2009, EOS faced the challenge of entering a highly competitive market (Effie Awards, 2011). Knowing they would need to fight hard to gain a solid footing in this category, EOS focused on offering a truly unique product. With a lip balm that is 100% natural and 95% organic, EOS seems to have accomplished its goal. However, the “true attention grabber” of this product does not seem to be its all natural appeal, but its unique spherical and brightly colored design (Effie Awards, 2011).

After establishing their unique product, EOS faced the next challenge of being noticed by their target market: women 25-35 years of age who are both stylish and curious. EOS had a goal of offering these women a product that is both “purposeful and delightful,” a characteristic reflected heavily in the design and shape of the product (Effie Awards, 2011). The round, smooth, and brightly colored appearance is not only designed to bring joy, but to be found easily in the bottom of a women’s handbag.

This unique shape and coloring was what EOS had chosen to focus on in their advertising campaigns. They began taking approaches like “...replacing apples in trees and eggs in nests to showcase EOS’s design sensibility” (Effie Awards 2011, p n/a). There are many other ads from the same campaign which use similar techniques, all replacing something that is natural and edible with an EOS lip balm. This use of the visual metaphor has proven to be very effective for EOS because, coupled with their social media efforts, it has led the company to a 2.5% share of a \$400 million market, surpassing their initial goal of 2% (Effie Awards, 2011).

This success, coupled with the fact that this was the first campaign for the young company, makes it a good example for the current study. What was it about this approach that led to such an up rise? And, what is the power behind these visual metaphors? This is what the researcher hopes to find out.

### **DKNY**

Started in 1989 by fashion designer Donna Karan, DKNY experienced rapid success in the fashion industry. While Karan's original designs were targeted to an elite market, ranging in price from \$500-\$1000 or more, her DKNY collection was focused on a more relaxed, stylish, and less elite market (International Directory of Company Histories, 2004). The line experienced rapid success reaching \$115 million within the first year. By joining forces with Estee Lauder, DKNY launched its first fragrance line in 1999: DKNY Women and DKNY Men. The perfume bottle was originally designed to resemble a woman's back, presumably Donna Karan herself (International Directory of Company Histories, 2004). It is interesting that from the very start DKNY's perfume line embraced the concept of the visual metaphor, and with their "Be Delicious" campaign, in which the bottles are designed to resemble apples, they've continued this approach. With a company utilizing the same technique nearly 20 years later, one can assume this has been a successful approach which may merit further analysis.

### **Essie**

The third advertising campaign chosen for this study is that of Essie nail polish. Started in 1981, Essie nail polish is targeted at both professionals and average consumers. From the start, Essie has claimed to have "unconventional nail polish," mainly due to its bright, bold colors and iconic square bottle (Essie.com, 2012). Essie Weingarten, the company's founder, herself has expressed a love for standing out and dares her customers to do the same (Essie.com, 2012).



Weingarten has also stood out with her philanthropic work, donating 5000 bottles of nail polish to those who choose to support “One Day Without Shoes,” a charity started by TOMS shoes to ensure children in need have proper footwear (Essie.com, 2012). Clearly, Essie is a company that strives to be bold in everything it does, and this approach has earned them some positive attention. In 2012, the company was the recipient of the “Best Nail Polish” award from Health and Beauty, O-Magazine, Redbook MVP, and Siempre Mujer. In addition to this, the company has been featured in several fashion magazines and is available at a number of major retail outlets, including Walmart, Target, and Wegmans (Essie.com, 2012). With yet another successful, well recognized company utilizing the approach of the visual metaphor in their advertisements, this technique merits further investigation to identify what its contributions may be to such success.

### **Clinique**

The final campaign chosen is that of Clinique “Chubby Stick” eye shadow and lip gloss. As the most profitable division of Estee Lauder, Clinique has enjoyed a great amount of success since its initial launch in 1968 (Clinique Confidential, 2007). Unlike other companies in the study, Clinique has not built its brand image on being edgy or bold. Instead, the company has prided itself on offering “high quality, prestige products” (Clinique Confidential, 2007, p. 6). Offering a full line of skin care products that are fragrance and allergy free, Clinique has built an image of offering safe, classic, and reliable products. The company has furthered this sophisticated image by targeting consumers of the upper middle class and utilizing a limited distribution channel. Offering the products only at upscale department stores and specialty retailers has further developed Clinique’s high class image (Clinique Confidential, 2007).

The Clinique “Chubby Stick” campaign has been chosen for analysis in the current study based on the way the company image seems to contradict those of EOS, DKNY, and Essie. It is interesting to see a company with an entirely different brand image utilizing the same technique as the others chosen for this study. Again, this raises the question of what the visual metaphor has to offer all of these companies, especially when their overall goals seem to differ. As an industry leader for nearly 30 years, Clinique has no doubt experienced great success, which warrants an analysis of this campaign (Clinique Confidential, 2007).

### **Assessment of Advertisements**

In this section, three advertisements from each of four companies (DKNY, Essie, EOS, and Clinique) will be analyzed using principles of semiotics. Each advertisement makes use of the visual metaphor by portraying cosmetic/beauty products as some kind of food. The terms and types of visual metaphors previously discussed will be introduced to help make sense out of the images and identify what messages the advertisers are trying to send through this approach.

#### **DKNY Be Delicious Advertisements**

In semiotic terms, the sign is the advertisement image as a whole. By breaking down the image and identifying the individual signifiers or markers contained within that image, one can determine the intended meaning of the advertisement, or the signified. Table 1 in Appendix A is a visual representation of this process.

In the first DKNY advertisement (see Figure 1B) we see an example of a juxtaposed replacement visual. One apple from the bushel in front of the model is replaced by the product, whose size and shape resembles the rest of the apples. By placing the perfume right next to the apples as if it belongs there, the advertisers are making use of a visual metaphor by implying that the perfume is just another apple in the bushel. The model doesn't seem to notice this

replacement as her gaze is directed back at the viewer. This further suggests that the product is an apple and does not stand out from the rest.

So what is the message being sent about the product through the use of this visual metaphor? To start, apples are “of the earth” or natural, perhaps suggesting that the product has all natural ingredients. The rest of the image has some additional elements that appear to give a natural “vibe” as well. The model appears to have very little make-up on and her hair is windblown, and apparently not styled. This may be suggesting that she is naturally beautiful. Even the gap between the model’s front teeth portrays a naturalness as it suggests the absence of any cosmetic alterations. The only element of this image that seems to move away from this “all natural” theme is the reflection of city skyscrapers in the product itself. This suggests that this natural/peaceful setting is occurring in a big city. It’s as if the ad tells a story, stating that the perfume is so natural that it has given the model an escape from the busyness of city life.

The portrayal of the product as a fruit in general may be significant as well. Since fruits contain seeds which have the potential to then grow more fruit, it can be considered a sign of rebirth or as “the culmination of a plant’s productive powers.” (Wilkinson et al., 2008, p. 51). In other words, the fruit is a symbol of a plant’s eternal life. This use of symbolism in the ad suggests that using the perfume is a way to renew yourself, or to refresh your day or life as a whole.

A common association in our culture with this particular fruit, the apple, is with the biblical story of Adam and Eve in which Eve eats the forbidden fruit. In the advertisement, the model is eating an apple, suggesting that she is Eve. This connection may cause the viewer to determine that she is breaking a rule or is “naughty,” something often associated with sexiness and therefore desirable. For example, famous Pop singer Beyonce Knowles even has a song entitled

*Naughty Girl* on her 2003 album “Dangerously In Love” in which lyrics like “...you got me feeling n-a-s-t-y, I just might take you home with me...” certainly have underlying sexual references. If eating the apple makes you naughty, and the perfume is an apple, then one might conclude that the product can give its user this same image of being bad, naughty, or sexy.

In addition to this, there are the sexual references in the biblical story of Adam and Eve. When Eve bites into the apple in this story, it marks the moment of the initiation into sexual knowledge and sin, and transgression from God’s prohibition against their consumption. Eve then gets Adam to eat the apple, which may represent Adam eating or consuming her body in a sexual manner. Here we can begin to make sense of why the products in these advertisements are being compared to fruit or food. A woman’s body may be thought of as a consumable item, something to be eaten up by a man or lover. This point of view is clearly sexually explicit, something seen very often within the advertising world. The model also holds the apple in front of her body, almost as if she is making a comparison between the edible fruit and her body. The fact that the apple has been bitten may suggest that she herself may have also been consumed or has found a lover as a result of using the product. The pose in which the model is presented in the advertisement is very reminiscent of Medieval and Renaissance portrayals of Eve. In many paintings, Eve holds the apple very close to her breasts making the comparison unavoidable. It is interesting that this pose is consistent through all of the ads from this campaign chosen for analysis. It’s almost as if the company is utilizing this iconic image of Eve to make a direct comparison between their product and the apple in the story, suggesting their product will or can have as big of an impact on the user or world as the apple in the Bible.

Finally, apples come in a number of colors, such as red, yellow/golden, and green. The advertisers’ choice of the green apple may hold some deeper meaning as well. According to

Wilkinson et al. (2008) the color green has numerous associated meanings, including jealousy or envy. The advertiser's color choice of the green apple may be a way of saying that using the product will make others envious of you. When looking at traffic laws, green means go. This perhaps suggests to the viewer that they should "go" to the store to purchase the product. More recently, embracing the "go green" movement has become very popular in our culture. Large companies are often putting forth an effort to show consumers they are reducing their carbon footprint. For example, major grocery chains like Wegmans are encouraging shoppers to make use of their reusable grocery bags to reduce waste. The use of the color green in the ad may also be a reference to this trend. Suggesting that the product is all natural and will not have any negative impact on the environment may reduce any buyer's remorse the consumer may face. Clearly the use of the visual metaphor in this ad speaks volumes about the product, something that if put into words would take up the entire page.

The second advertisement from the DKNY Be Delicious campaign (see Figure 2B) is also a juxtaposed replacement visual in which the product is placed among cartons of apples. A visual representation of the image's analysis can be seen in Table 2A. Again, this placement seems to suggest that this product is, in fact, an apple. Although the model's gaze, the reflection of the city, the bitten apple, and natural setting of the advertisement are all very similar to the previous image, there are a few differences that may be important to note.

First, the coloring of the apples in this image is slightly different. While the apples are mostly green, signifying envy or jealousy, there is a slight red color there too, which is often utilized to portray love or passion (Wilkinson et al., 2008). This use of color in the advertisement may be suggesting that a jealousy exists of love the model has found, possibly through use of the product. Even the flowers behind the model and the light color of her dress seem to say that love

is in the air. For example, a woman in a lightly colored dress surrounded by flowers is a scene most often seen at a wedding. By referencing a bride or wedding, the message may be suggesting that the model is married to or devoted to the product or perhaps that someone has chosen to marry and devote themselves to her based on the use of the product. This reference to a wedding or bride in the ad may also be an attempt to speak to the viewers' inner child. Many girls dream of their wedding day from the time they are young and this approach could be an attempt by the advertisers to become part of that life-long fantasy.

Finally, it is again difficult to ignore the reference to Adam and Eve in this advertisement. The model again has taken a bite out of the apple and her pose is the same as the model in the advertisement previously discussed. When examining the ad from this point of view, one may consider the flowers to represent the Garden of Eden. It is interesting that 'Eve' is placed in the Garden of Eden in this portrayal since eating the apple was the cause of her and Adam being banished from this paradise. It's as if the ad is suggesting that the product is so good or the user will become so delicious or desirable that indulging oneself will *seem* sinful, but is still within the social norms of acceptable behavior.

The final ad to be analyzed from DKNY is also a juxtaposed replacement metaphor (see a visual representation of analysis in Table 3A and image in Figure 3B). Here, the product has been placed among cupcakes on a shelf, suggesting certain similarities. To start, cupcakes are sweet and often reserved for birthdays or other special events. If we consider the product to be a cupcake, then we may denote that the perfume has a sweet smell and can be used to help celebrate important moments in our lives. It may also be important to note the colors in this advertisement. They are light colors, which often bring to mind the colors of spring. Spring is a

time for new life, flowers emerge, and baby animals are born. This may be suggesting that the product can bring about a new beginning for the user.

Again, the model's gaze is directed back at the viewer, suggesting that the product bears so many similarities to cupcakes that she doesn't even notice the replacement. What is interesting, however, is that the model is still biting an apple, even though the comparison is being made with cupcakes. But, there is likely further meaning behind this. Cupcakes are often served to children at birthday parties, a setting and age group that we often associate with innocence. However, the model biting an apple, the way Eve does in the Bible, seems to be suggesting a corruption of this innocence. In a way, it's like the ad is suggesting that the product can take us out of our sinful, complicated adult lives, and back to the carefree innocent life of a child.

### **EOS All Natural Lip Balm**

The next set of ads to be examined is from EOS for their all natural lip balm (see Table 4A and Figure 4B for visual representation of analysis and image). This ad is another example of a synthesized replacement visual. The familiar packaging and leaves suggest that the lip balm is intended to be viewed as a basket of strawberries. Again, we can return to Wilkinson et al.'s (2008) suggestion that fruit represents renewal because of the seeds' capability to create new life. This choice to portray the lip balm as fruit may be an attempt at saying that the product can offer the user a renewal by nourishing their lips. The advertiser's choice of strawberries in particular is interesting here. Unlike many fruits or berries, strawberries bear their seeds on the outside, which makes them seem somewhat vulnerable. When looked at from this angle, one may conclude that the lip balm can offer protection for your vulnerable skin/lips.

One important feature of the product that this ad seems to boast is the naturalness of the product, claiming that the ingredients are 95% organic. The visuals used in this ad seem to add

support to this claim. To start, suggesting that the lip balm is a strawberry, something that grows from the earth, helps to illustrate the naturalness of the product. In addition to this, the “strawberries” are in a container made of wood, which is different from their usual plastic container seen in grocery stores. The fact that the advertisers chose to go with a basket that is not man-made may be significant to the product’s claim of being “all natural.” Finally, the container is placed on wooden boards which do not seem to be chemically treated in anyway. This absence of manufactured objects helps to further get the point across that the product is organic and adds to the natural “vibe” of the image.

The technique in this ad of using an image of one thing that appears at first to be something else is often referred to as “verisimilitude.” Although this term may prove to be equivalent to the concept of the replacement metaphor, it is clear that this approach can be used to send a powerful message about a product. In addition to this, it may also be a good way to capture the attention of the viewer and to stand out amongst the clutter. At first glance, this image may actually appear to be a basket of strawberries, but upon closer examination the viewer sees that their eyes have been deceived. The advertiser then hopes to further draw them in as they attempt to make sense of the image.

The second ad from the EOS campaign is an example of a synthesized replacement metaphor, in which the product has replaced lemons in a pitcher of lemonade (see Table 5A and Figure 5B). This approach seems to help highlight the all-natural appeal of the product. With the lip balm boasting all natural ingredients, suggesting it is comparable to the naturalness of a lemon itself is an effective way to accent that unique product feature. The product is also placed in an all-natural setting on an unfinished wood picnic table outside. This seems to further tie the product and its ingredients to nature.



Another feature of this advertisement that is interesting to note is the fact that the product is displayed as lemons in a pitcher of lemonade, and not some other lemon-flavored treat. This brings to mind the common saying “when life gives you lemons, make lemonade.” This saying is about having a positive outlook on life and making the best out of what you have. Making the lemonade out of the product itself seems to be suggesting that using the product will make the best of things or will help the user to stay positive and be more optimistic.

In addition to this, the pitcher of lemonade is full of ice and seems to be sitting outside on a bright sunny day. This lighting seems to be suggesting that it is warm or even hot outside and the lemonade can be a refreshing option to cool off. Since this product from EOS is offering SPF protection, this seems to highlight this feature of being used as relief from the hot sun.

The final ad from EOS is another example of a synthesized replacement metaphor in which the lip gloss replaces a scoop of ice cream on top of an ice cream cone (see Table 6A and Figure 6B). To start, this approach seems to be accenting the unique round shape of the product. Round is not a common design for lip balm by any means, and this design alone may be trying to suggest something about the product. This shape is often used to suggest a cycle, or complete rotation through a process. Choosing to accent this design in the ad may be suggesting that the product can or should be a part of our daily cycles or processes. One may also take the placement of the product to be suggesting that the lip gloss is ice cream, which may suggest several things about the product itself. For example, ice cream is often eaten in warm weather and on special occasions, often tying the behavior to happy memories. By suggesting that the product is in fact ice cream, the image seems to be saying that the product can also be a part of and help to create happy memories in our lives, thus, making it more desirable to consumers.

On the other hand, pop culture often presents ice cream as a comfort food, or something to be consumed in mass quantities after a bad break-up. When looking at the image from this point of view, the ad seems to suggest that a consumer could turn to this product for comfort or as something that could make them feel better.

It might also be important to note the background setting in this ad. The ice cream cone is set on a silver stand with shiny, silver ice cream scoops set behind. This setting and unique display of the cone itself suggests a fancy ice cream parlor, rather than just a corner store. This may be trying to communicate the high quality and natural ingredients of the lip gloss, since, although not necessarily a health food, ice cream from an upscale ice cream parlor is often homemade with all natural ingredients.

### **Essie Nail Polish**

The next set of advertisements to be examined is for Essie nail polish. The ad in Figure 7B is an example of a synthesized replacement visual, in which the nail polish is replacing chocolate sauce and therefore is being compared to it (A visual representation of the analysis for this image can be seen in Table 7A). The viewer can denote that the nail polish is chocolate sauce because it is being drizzled over ice cream and is brown in color. These added visual cues allow the viewer to make the necessary associations to “get” the intention of the metaphor that Essie nail polish is chocolate sauce.

Again, the use of this visual metaphor gives a deeper meaning to the product itself. Wilkinson et al. (2008) point out that chocolate is often thought to be an aphrodisiac. It symbolizes sensuality and sexuality in many cultures. Associating the product with chocolate seems to suggest that the nail polish will make whoever wears it “sexy” or an object of desire.

It is also important to note that the majority of the image is white in color. Even the ice cream that the chocolate (nail polish) is being drizzled over is pure white. In western culture, white is often thought to symbolize innocence or purity (Wilkinson et al., 2008). The nail polish chosen for this particular ad is very dark in color. While this may be so it more closely resembles chocolate, there may be another meaning here as well. Dark colors in general according to Wilkinson et al. (2008) are said to represent evil or secrecy. The fact that this dark nail polish is being drizzled over something so purely white might represent the corruption of innocence. In terms of the product, this association may suggest that wearing the nail polish will turn a “good girl” bad, and therefore, sexually desirable.

Finally, a common joke in pop culture is that pregnant women crave ice cream. Sitcoms also tend to make the claim that women on their menstrual cycle will crave chocolate. The ice cream and chocolate together then are something that a woman may strongly desire. The advertisers may be trying to suggest that the product is something that should be strongly desired as well. Again we can see that through a single image, there can be so much said about a product. Others with different cultural backgrounds may find additional or alternative meanings behind this visual. Never the less, we can see how a visual metaphor can be a useful tool when attempting to send a strong, perhaps complicated, message.

The second advertisement from Essie is also an example of a synthesized replacement visual in which the nail polish is replacing the candy on a candy apple (see Table 8A and Figure 8B). Again we see the use of an apple in a visual metaphor. However, this apple has not had a bite taken out of it. Instead, it is almost like the apple is protected by the candy shell, or in this case the nail polish. When considering the biblical story of Adam and Eve, it seems as if the candy is preventing the triumph of evil. In this sense, it’s like the ad is suggesting that the nail

polish can offer the user the same sort of protection: keeping them young and innocent. The fact that it is a candy apple in this image may also be a reference to youth, as it is a treat often given to children on Halloween. By suggesting that the nail polish is the candy on the apple, it seems as if the ad is trying to say the product itself is like a treat and something that can keep the user young, or at least take them back to their childhood memories.

The final advertisement from Essie is also an example of a synthesized replacement visual (see Table 9A and Figure 9B). In this image, the nail polish is being poured over the cherry as if it were chocolate. Although the nail polish is not the color of chocolate in this image, one may be able to see the connection when considering that chocolate was once used as a form of currency in Aztec cultures, much the way gold is used today (Wilkinson et al., 2008). In a way, this seems to suggest that the product is valuable or something to be desired.

There are also a number of sexual references in our culture connected to the symbol of the cherry. The use of this particular fruit in the advertisement seems to be suggesting that the product will make the user sexually desirable. Since the color of the nail polish chosen for this image is gold, rather than resembling chocolate or some other topping commonly added to fruit, there may be some further meaning here as well. For example, in many cultures gold is considered a symbol of corruption, like in the Greek myth of Midas in which everything he touches turns to gold (Wilkinson et al., 2008). This seems to be suggesting that the product has the same power of corruption, possibly giving the user some sort of power or control over others by appearing so desirable.

### **Clinique Chubby Stick**

The next set of advertisements to be analyzed is from the Clinique Chubby Stick campaign. The first ad shown in Figure 10B for Chubby Stick eye make-up is an example of a synthesized

replacement metaphor. A visual representation of the analysis for this advertisement is shown in Table 10A. In this visual, the product is wrapped in see-through, brightly colored, cellophane wrappers twisted on both ends. Since this is a common way of packaging candy or other sweets, it seems as if the advertisement is suggesting that the product is candy. Because candy is not considered an essential part of a healthy diet, it is often looked upon as a treat or something reserved for a special occasion. By wrapping the product like a piece of candy, the ad may be suggesting that the product itself is special and can be purchased as a way to treat oneself.

The composition of this visual may also be noted as contributing to the metaphor. The product is not neatly lined up or arranged in any specific manner, it is strewn across the page. This is similar to the way in which one may place candy in a candy dish, or the way it may fall when thrown to children at a parade. This may suggest a fun and carefree attitude, something which may be obtained through the use of this product. The product also bears similarities to candy in its coloring. Instead of neutrals, the ad presents the product with bright and vibrant hues, similar to the way a candy store is often decorated. This may be an attempt to make the product appear fun and exciting, the way a candy store would appear to a child.

It is also interesting to note that the cellophane wrapping on the product is translucent. This choice may have something to do with the fact that this ad is for the chubby stick eye liner and not the lip color. It is a common saying in our culture that the eyes are the windows to the soul. So, it is appropriate that the wrapper is translucent like a window, allowing the viewer to see in. One interpretation of this may be that the product can become part of the consumer's identity since it is applied to the eyes, and one can see the true self by gazing into another's eyes.

The next ad to be analyzed from Clinique is an example of a juxtaposed replacement visual, in which the chubby stick lip color is placed among cubes of jello (see Table 11A and

Figure 11B). This placement suggests that the product and jello have similarities or belong together in some way. To start, the coloring of the product and the jello in this ad are very similar. Jello is known for having vibrant colors and anyone who has ever tried to wash it out of clothing or carpeting knows it is a near impossible task. This characteristic, however, is seen as a desirable trait in lip color. Women often seek products that won't fade or have to be re-applied throughout the day. By placing the product with jello the ad seems to be suggesting that the product can offer long lasting color.

In addition to this, in our culture, jello is often thought of as hospital food or something you give a sick person to help them get well. When considering this view, one may infer that the ad is suggesting that the product can make you feel better as well. The colors used in this ad may also be viewed in the same way as the vibrant colors bring to mind the saying "brighten up your day".

The final ad from Clinique is another example of a juxtaposed replacement visual (see Table 12A and Figure 12B). In this image the product is displayed with brightly colored cookies, suggesting some similarities. To start, these cookies have very vibrant colors, something you don't see that often with baked goods. In this sense, the ad seems to be suggesting that the product is unique or special amongst others in its category, just like the cookies.

It may also be important to note that a bite has been taken out of one of the cookies. It is interesting that the bitten cookie is the lightest colored object in the image, even in comparison to the product itself. Since the tops have been removed from the lip color, it may be assumed that it has been recently applied, most likely by the same person who took a bite out of the cookie. Yet, there is no color transfer onto the light pink of the cookie. As already noted, this is a desirable feature in lip color. Finally, the background of this ad is bright white. This seems to accent the brightly colored product even more.

### Discussion

After analyzing the selected advertisements, it is clear that the use of the visual metaphor has the potential to be a valuable technique in the advertising world by offering a way to deliver detailed consumer messages through the use of an image alone. When considering the research question, the results of the image analysis suggest that the use of visual metaphors featuring fruit and food can deliver very involved rhetorical messages to the viewer and, while each message may differ, there are some common themes which have emerged.

The current study supports the idea that visual metaphors do in fact have the capability of relaying a marketing or product-related message to a potential consumer. Their nature of seeming out of place makes them eye-catching, allowing the ad to stand out from the clutter and to draw the viewer in (Gkiouzepas & Hogg, 2011; McQuarrie & Philips, 2005; Sullivan, 2008). In terms of the elaboration likelihood model, once attention is gained, the audience processes the stimuli in a central manner due to the fact that visual metaphors on the whole, require greater involvement from the viewer in order to cognitively process and make sense of the intended message (Lagerwerf & Meijers, 2008).

From the analysis above and the possible meanings inferred from the images, one can see that deep meaning and numerous references can be made through the use of a single image, something that may take pages of text to get across. This could prove to be a very useful feature to advertisers when trying to communicate messages to targets in various markets. If their target audiences are people from different socio-economic or ethnic groups, varying messages may be required. Using an image rather than text, allows the message to be left open to interpretation. The advertiser can choose to imbed multiple messages in one image, allowing them to communicate with just one image to an audience which may be fragmented into numerous

sections. Each image from the above analysis has been found to communicate important product features and benefits to the target audience through the use of a visual metaphor alone. Since ads face the burden of having a limited time to gain the viewer's attention, this feature of the visual metaphor proves to be especially helpful. In some cases, the ads even seem to tell a story about the subject or model, incorporating the product into the subject's daily life. Take advertisement 2 from DKNY's Be Delicious campaign for example (see Figure 2B). If one views the model as a bride on her wedding day, they may infer that the bride has taken a moment to step away from the stress of upcoming nuptials to perhaps freshen up with a spray of perfume (the featured product). Here we can see the effective use of a visual metaphor to communicate a marketing message.

However, it is important to note that the interpretation above is just one of many possible inferences that may be drawn when analyzing this image. This is true of all the images chosen for the above analysis and is something that marketers must note when choosing to use this approach. As previously stated, images will have different meanings to different people since interpretations are based on personal or cultural experiences. Visual metaphors rely heavily on the connotative meaning which may be found by the viewer rather than just the denotative representation. For example, if you look at the denotative or realistic representation of the DKNY advertisement in Figure 1B it is simply a bottle of perfume in a bushel of apples. This approach on its own really doesn't say much. In semiotic theory, it is the connotative inferences or the associations, attitudes, and emotions about this placement that begin to convey the deeper meaning of the message. This is where the viewer starts to ask why is the perfume with the apples? The association with the story of Adam and Eve may then arise, hinting at certain characteristics that may be possessed by the product and/or its user.



Although these associations and meanings may not be as concrete as the written word, there are cultural norms and mythologies that can be relied upon to guide possible interpretations. As Moriarty (2002) puts it; “The link between the sign and what it stands for is understood by convention” (p. 21). In other words, within a given culture there is a set of beliefs or ideals which will guide the way an individual within that culture will act and think. Some communication scholars refer to these ideologies as myths, suggesting that they are the product of combining denotative and connotative meaning and are an inherent part of semiotic interpretation (O’Sullivan et al., 1994). In this sense, it may be very likely that a viewer will associate the ad with the story of Adam and Eve, when considering the prominence of Christian ideologies within western culture.

### **Emerging Themes**

**Becoming part of the self.** Next, the analysis of the images above also gives evidence that common themes do in fact emerge amongst advertisements which feature fruit or food in visual metaphors. At the beginning of this study it was pointed out that food is ingested, thus becoming a part of the self. This is a common theme that seemed to emerge in many of the advertisements analyzed above. The images present the products in visual metaphors in which they are suggesting that the items are similar to, or even are, food items. Each ad seems to suggest that the product should become part of the consumer’s self, perhaps not to be ingested the way food would be, but to be absorbed into the daily lives of consumers.

For example, the second advertisement from EOS (see Figure 5B) displays the product in a pitcher as if it is a lemon in lemonade. It’s as if the ad is trying to say that the product can become a part of an everyday routine, used as a refreshing midday break. The first two advertisements from DKNY seem to be sending a similar message. The reflection of the city

skyline in the product suggests that the product could be used as a break from the everyday stresses of big city life.

Furthermore, food is important in all societies. All cultures partake in ritualistic behavior surrounding food, and often holidays and other special occasions center around culinary traditions. The strongest theme found to emerge in the analysis of the images in this study centralizes around this concept. Many of the advertisements suggest that the product can be a part of a special occasion or celebration in the consumer's life or can be used to remind us of our childhood and happy memories.

**The biblical reference to Adam and Eve.** Another theme which emerged upon analysis of these advertisements is the story of Adam and Eve. The DKNY campaign in particular seems to revolve around the iconic representation of Eve holding a bitten apple in front of her body. As previously mentioned this pose can be seen throughout history in artistic portrayals of Eve. By comparing their model to Eve, the company brings thoughts of original sin, self-awareness, and shame. At first, it seemed that relating their product to original sin would not be good for the company image. However, with further consideration, the company does not appear to be saying their product is sinful; In Figure 2B the model even appears to be in a garden, possibly a representation of the Garden of Eden. Instead, the advertisements seem to be playing on temptation or the immediate satisfaction that can be gained through sinful acts.

The cardinal sin brought to mind from these advertisements is that of lust, often defined as excessive want, often in a sexual manner. The ads seem to be suggesting that the viewer should/will desire the apple or be tempted by it the way Eve was in the Bible. But, even though they will get the same satisfaction of giving in to temptation, it is okay to indulge because this, of course, is not the forbidden fruit. The model or user may also be the object of this desire or lust,

making her so tempting it would be almost sinful to indulge. Overall, this reoccurring theme seems to be playing on our desires to act out or to break the rules. Doing something wrong can give a person a “rush,” or the feeling of a natural high. By associating a product with sin the company is able to offer the consumer this outlet to “sin” without facing any of the consequences. By suggesting that we even need such an outlet may have meaning in itself. The ads seem to be suggesting that we are too regulated or structured in our society and need some sort of channel for rebellion.

**The theme of indulgence.** Another theme that emerged upon analysis of the advertisement images was somewhat unexpected based on past research, but still rather apparent. All of the ads seem to present an idea of indulging oneself. This indulgence concept emerged in different ways, but still seems to be present in all of the ads. For example it can be found through the suggestion that a product could be used as a relaxation tool or something to make the user feel better (see Figures 1B, 2B, 4B, 5B, and 11B). The idea of indulgence was also seen through the concept of treating oneself to something sweet and childish (see Figures 3B, 6B, 8B, 10B, and 12B). This point is interesting when considering what it may say about our society. It suggests we place a certain value on, or are even envious of, the playfulness and freedoms of a child, something which other cultures or even people from an earlier generation may find petty and unprofessional. Lastly, the remaining ads (see Figures 7B and 9B) presented the concept of indulgence through the idea of embracing one’s sexuality.

**The theme of naturalness.** The last theme found upon analysis is the promotion of being “all natural.” This is especially prevalent in the advertisements from DKNY and EOS. As previously mentioned, “going green” or sticking with practices that are kind to our environment is growing in popularity. By bringing an all-natural theme into their promotions or highlighting

all natural ingredients, these companies can appeal to this concern and show consumers that they have a place or will fit in with this life style. The use of the visual metaphor in these ads has been a useful tool, allowing EOS in particular not only to claim all natural ingredients, but to go so far as to suggest that the product is so natural, it can even be mistaken for the fruit itself.

### **Food and Cosmetics**

Finally, it is also relevant to discuss the possible relationship that may exist between cosmetics and food, perhaps giving some reasoning for the reoccurrence of their pairing in visual metaphors. In the beauty industry as a whole, both food and cosmetics are often brought to the forefront. This may be due to the fact that being physically fit or thin is considered to be an important quality to possess in order to be considered beautiful in our culture. Part of obtaining this sort of physique is through dieting and watching what one eats. Another part of being beautiful is through the use of cosmetics to hide flaws and to accent one's best qualities. From this point of view, the approach of presenting cosmetic products as food or fruit in visual metaphor advertisements may not seem so farfetched after all. It brings to mind the saying "true beauty is on the inside," referring to a person's soul, ideals, and personality. Although watching what you eat may have positive benefits to your insides, the pairings of food and cosmetics in these advertisements seem to be suggesting that what is more important is what the right foods and cosmetics can do for the outside appearance. This idea seems most prominent in Figure 3B in which the product in the visual metaphor is being compared to cupcakes, but the model is still biting into an apple because, of course, this would be better for her physical appearance. It's as if the ads are suggesting that cosmetics or things that can make us more beautiful or more desirable can offer the same nourishment as food. But instead this nourishment is not sustaining the body, it is sustaining the ego.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, through the analysis of the images above, it is clear that a visual metaphor can indeed be used to communicate a complicated, detailed message to an audience. Metaphors can communicate product features and benefits, as well as company or even cultural ideals. The emerging theme of indulgence and the connections made between cosmetics and food speak volumes about the ideals and visions of beauty in our culture and how the product offering can tie into these values. The use of the visual metaphor allows the advertiser to communicate these messages through one image alone saving on space and money. The marketers provide the viewer with the tools, or in this case the image, and then it is up to the viewer to derive the meaning. The possible meanings found in the examples above are those found by one researcher alone. They are drawn by one person with one set of experiences and one background, developed based on the visual cues provided by the advertisers. It is very important to note that other viewers may find slightly different or additional meanings in these images. However, all conclusions will be guided by the norms and mythologies of our culture, providing a loose framework for interpreted meaning. The important takeaway here is that when done properly, any type of visual metaphor can prove to be a form of visual rhetoric, capable of communicating deep meaning and abstract concepts, offering vast opportunities to marketing companies. By utilizing the process of visual semiotics, viewers are better able to break down the complexities of an image and understand the underlying advertising message.

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## Appendix A

## Tables

Table 1

*DKNY Analysis Advertisement 1*

Signifier (Marker)	Type of Sign	Element	Signified (Meaning)
The color green	Symbolic	Color	Jealousy/envy, permission to go or move forward.
Apples/fruit	symbolic	Object	Natural, good health, rebirth/life.
Gaze of the model	Indexical	Character	Connection with the viewer, ignorance to the replacement of an apple with the product.
Product placement	Indexical	Space/Setting	The product belongs with the apples or <i>is</i> an apple.
Apparent lack of cosmetic alterations	Symbolic	Character	Natural beauty, calm or peaceful setting.
A bite taken out of the apple	Symbolic	Object	A biblical reference to the story of Adam and Eve, breaking the rules.
Reflection of a big city	Iconic	Space/Setting	Cities are busy, crowded, and hectic. Because it is just a reflection in the image, it suggests that the product can bring a natural, peaceful setting or feeling, even in the midst of city life.

Table 2

*DKNY Analysis Advertisement 2*

Signifier (Marker)	Type of Sign	Element	Signified (Meaning)
Product Placement	Indexical	Space/Setting	The product belongs with the apples or <i>is</i> an apple.
The color green	Symbolic	Color	Envy and/or jealousy.
The color red	Symbolic	Color	Love and/or passion.
Flowers	Symbolic	Object	Wedding or celebration of love, Garden of Eden.
Gaze of Model	Indexical	Character	Connection with the viewer, ignorance to the replacement of an apple with the product.
A bite take out of the apple	Symbolic	object	A biblical reference to the story of Adam and Eve, breaking the rules.
Reflection of a big city	Iconic	Space/Setting	Cities are busy, crowded, and hectic. Because it is just a reflection in the image, it suggests that the product can bring a natural, peaceful setting or feeling, even in the midst of city life.
The light shade of the models dress	Iconic	Character	The model is a bride on her wedding day.

Table 3

*DKNY Analysis Advertisement 3*

Signifier (Marker)	Type of Sign	Element	Signified (Meaning)
Product Placement	Indexical	Space/setting	The product belongs with the cupcakes or <i>is</i> a cupcake.
Cupcakes	Symbolic	Object	The perfume smells sweet and, like cake, can be used to celebrate special occasions.
Pastel colors	Symbolic	Color	Light colors suggest spring or new beginnings.
Gaze of Model	Indexical	Character	Connection with the viewer, ignorance to the replacement of the cupcakes with the product.
A bite take out of the apple	Symbolic	Object	Even though the comparison is being made with cupcakes, the model still biting an apple suggests corruption of innocence.

Table 4

*EOS Analysis Advertisement 1*

Signifier (Marker)	Type of Sign	Element	Signified (Meaning)
Product placement	Iconic	Space/setting	The familiar packaging suggests that the product <i>is</i> a strawberry.
Fruit	Symbolic	Object	Natural, good health, new life.
Strawberries	Symbolic	Object	Vulnerability

Signifier (Marker)	Type of Sign	Element	Signified (Meaning)
Wood	Indexical	Space/setting	The natural setting and wooden planks suggest an organic appeal.

Table 5

*EOS Analysis Advertisement 2*

Signifier (Marker)	Type of Sign	Element	Signified (Meaning)
Product Placement	Indexical	Space/setting	Placing the product in a pitcher with water and ice suggests similarities to lemons. Making the best out of life.
Wood	Indexical	Space/setting	The natural setting and wooden planks suggest an organic appeal.
Lighting	Indexical	Space/setting	Hot, sunny day. Product offers relief or protection from the heat.

Table 6

*EOS Analysis Advertisement 3*

Signifier (Marker)	Type of Sign	Element	Signified (Meaning)
Round product	Symbolic	Shape	Placement highlights the unique shape of product. Item should be a part of our process or circle of life.
Product placement	Indexical	Space/setting	Setting the product on top of an ice cream cone suggests that it <i>is</i> ice cream.
Ice cream	Symbolic	Object	Happy memories, celebrations, comfort food.

Signifier (Marker)	Type of Sign	Element	Signified (Meaning)
Ice cream parlor	Indexical	Space/setting	High quality, homemade, or natural.

Table 7

*Essie Analysis Advertisement 1*

Signifier (Marker)	Type of Sign	Element	Signified (Meaning)
Product placement	Indexical	Space/setting	The nail polish replaces chocolate on ice cream and therefore is being compared to it.
The color brown	Symbolic	Color	Color of product adds to comparison with chocolate.
Chocolate	Symbolic	Object	Aphrodisiac, sexuality, sensual.
Contrast of colors	Symbolic	Value	Dark nail polish/chocolate poured over pure white ice cream-the corruption of innocence.
Ice cream	Symbolic	Object	Ice cream is often craved by women-the product is or should be craved or wanted.

Table 8

*Essie Analysis Advertisement 2*

Signifier (Marker)	Type of Sign	Element	Signified (Meaning)
Product placement	Indexical	Space/setting	Product is coating an apple, suggesting that it is a candy coating.

Signifier (Marker)	Type of Sign	Element	Signified (Meaning)
Unbitten apple	Symbolic	Object	The whole apple suggests that there is no corruption. The candy (or product) is protecting innocence.
The candy apple	Symbolic	Object	A reference to youth, something to treat oneself.

Table 9

*Essie Analysis Advertisement 3*

Signifier (Marker)	Type of Sign	Element	Signified (Meaning)
Product placement	Indexical	Space/setting	Covering the cherry with the nail polish suggests that it is chocolate.
The color gold	Symbolic	Color	Suggests value, desire, and corruption. Aztecs used chocolate as currency thus adding to the connection for the chocolate metaphor.
Cherry	Symbolic	Object	Sexual reference, making the user desirable.

Table 10

*Clinique Analysis Advertisement 1*

Signifier (Marker)	Type of Sign	Element	Signified (Meaning)
Product Placement	Indexical	Space/setting	Wrapping the product in cellophane suggests that it is candy.
Candy	Iconic	Object	A treat, something special.

Signifier (Marker)	Type of Sign	Element	Signified (Meaning)
Composition	Symbolic	Space/Setting	The haphazard way the product is laid out is similar to the way someone may drop a handful of candy- fun and carefree.
Bright colors	Symbolic	Color	Furtheres the similarities to candy, suggests fun and excitement.
Clear cellophane	Symbolic	Object	See through, allows you to see product the way the eyes can be a window to the soul. The product is applied to the eye, becomes part of identity.

Table 11

*Clinique Analysis Advertisement 2*

Signifier (Marker)	Type of Sign	Element	Signified (Meaning)
Product placement	Indexical	Space/setting	The proximity of the product to cubes of jello suggests similarities.
Vibrant colors	Symbolic	Color	Bright colors are similar to jello, suggests the color of the product will stay put the way jello will stain.
Jello	Symbolic	Object	Jello is given as a "hospital food" - suggests the product can make you feel better.

Table 12

*Clinique Analysis Advertisement 3*

Signifier (Marker)	Type of Sign	Element	Signified (Meaning)
Product placement	Indexical	Space/setting	Proximity to the cookies, suggests similarities.



Signifier (Marker)	Type of Sign	Element	Signified (Meaning)
Bright colors	Symbolic	Color	The coloring is unique for baked goods, suggests that the product is unique.
The lack of caps on product	Symbolic	Object	The missing caps suggest the product has recently been used.
The bite out of the cookie	Symbolic	Object	The same person who has applied the product to their lips has taken a bite of the cookie but there is no color transfer.
White background	Symbolic	Value	The white background accents the product's bright colors.

#### Appendix B

#### Figures

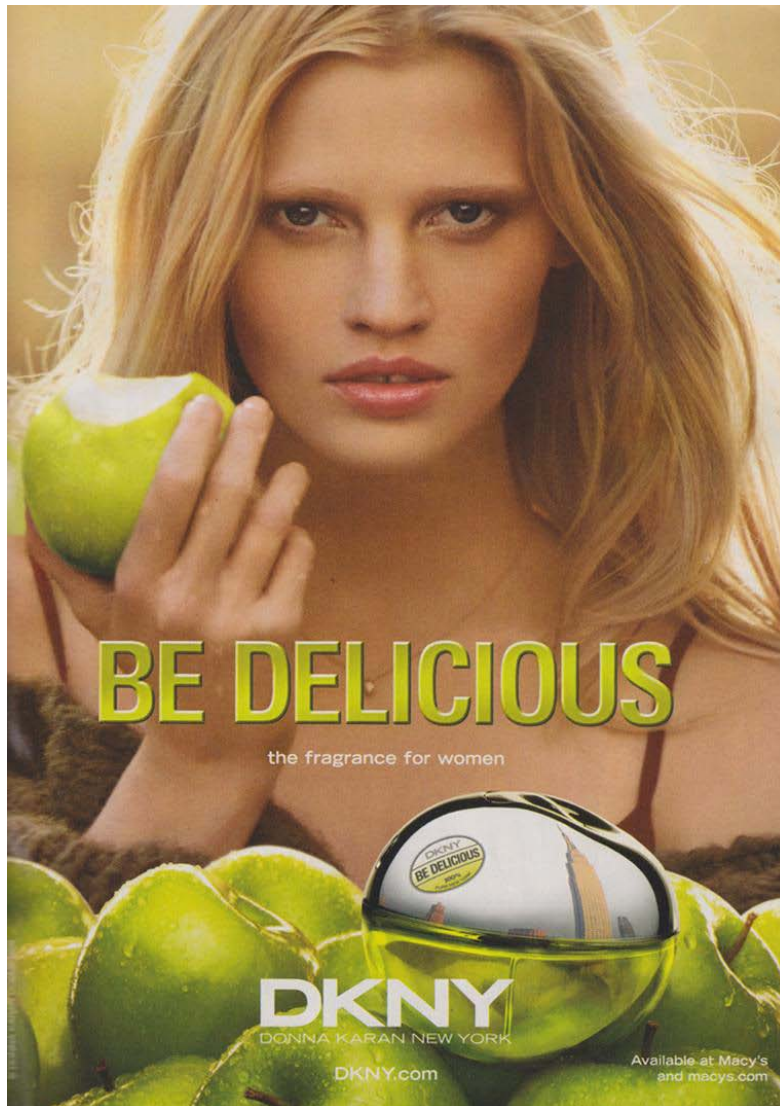


Figure 1. DKNY advertisement 1



Figure 2. DKNY advertisement 2



Figure 3. DKNY advertisement 3

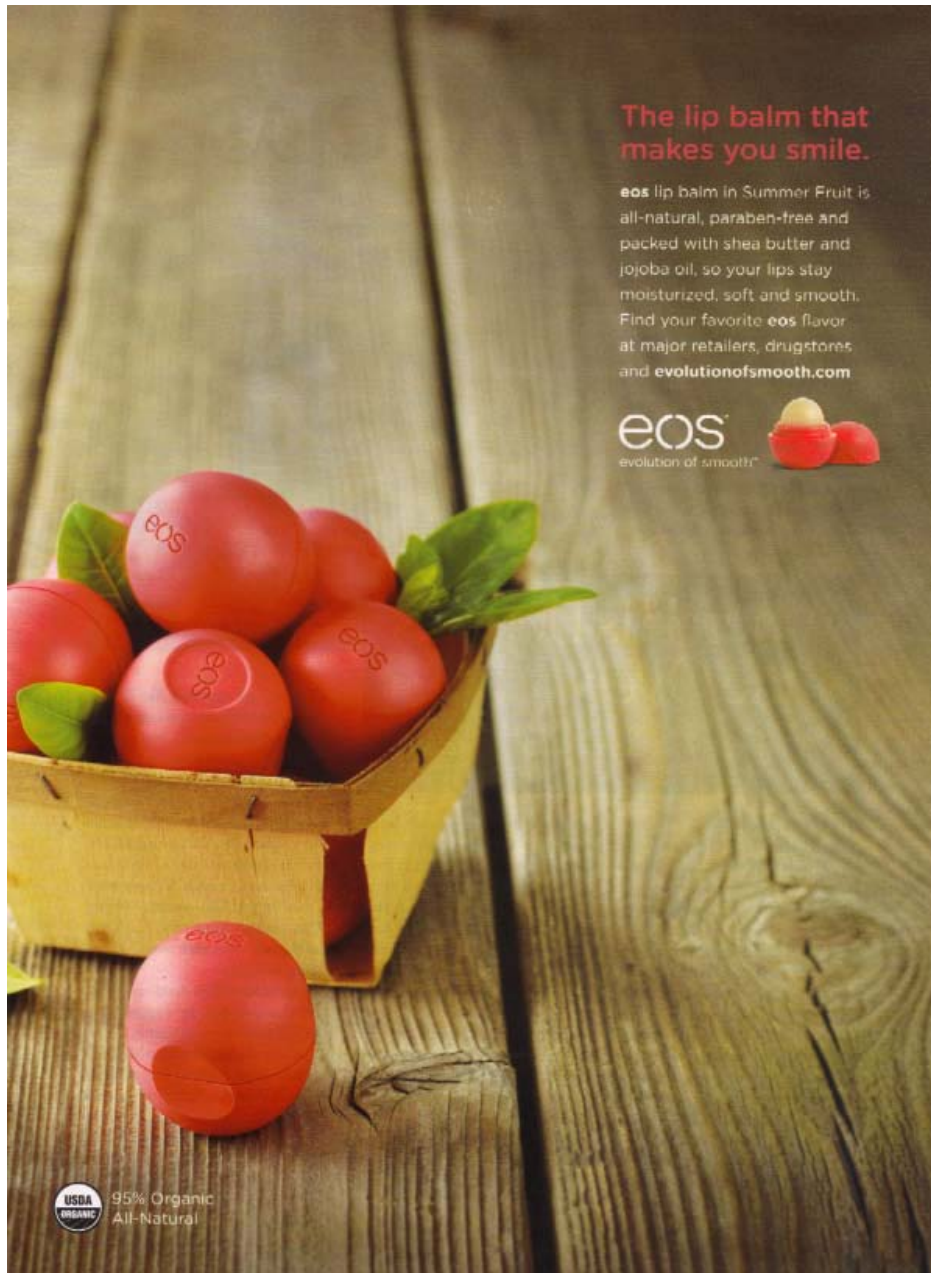


Figure 4. EOS advertisement 1



The advertisement features a clear glass pitcher filled with ice, lemon slices, and fresh mint leaves, resting on a rustic wooden plank surface. Several EOS lip balm balls, which are yellow and shaped like lemons, are scattered around the pitcher. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting an outdoor setting. The text is positioned in the upper right corner of the image.

**The lip balm that makes you smile.**

eos lip balm in Lemon Drop with SPF 15 is naturally flavored, paraben-free and packed with natural conditioning oils, so your lips stay moisturized and protected from the sun. Find your favorite eos flavor at major retailers, drugstores and [evolutionofsmooth.com](http://evolutionofsmooth.com)

eos™  
evolution of smooth™

Figure 5. EOS advertisement 2



Figure 6. EOS advertisement 3



every now & then I indulge in something **wicked.**”

When I feel naughty but want to look nice, I pull out my plums. I've got bushels of shades, so you can be "wicked" one day, meet your "soul mate" the next. Now, for the first time, my gorgeous salon colors can be found in stores everywhere. Pick just one...or go plum crazy.

*Essie*

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**wicked**  
get one of my provocative shades.  
That's wicked? is more than.

Figure 7. Essie advertisement 1





*Figure 8. Essie advertisement 2*



Figure 9. Essie advertisement 3



Figure 10. Clinique advertisement 1



Figure 11. Clinique advertisement 2



Figure 12. Clinique advertisement 3