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Audience Response Analysis To The Visual And Verbal Elements Of The Shodair Reality Assessment Advertisement

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AUDIENCE RESPONSE ANALYSIS
TO THE
VISUAL AND VERBAL ELEMENTS
OF THE
SHODAIR REALITY ASSESSMENT
ADVERTISEMENT

AN HONORS THESIS
PRESENTED TO
THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES
CARROLL COLLEGE
HELENA, MONTANA

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation
with honors in Speech Communications.

by
PENNY ANDERSEN
MARCH 30, 1987
This thesis for honors recognition has been approved for the Department of Communication Studies.

[Signatures and dates]
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AUDIENCE RESPONSE ANALYSIS
TO THE
VISUAL AND VERBAL ELEMENTS
OF THE
SHODAIR REALITY ASSESSMENT ADVERTISEMENT

Part of the mystery of advertising comes from its speculativeness. Advertisers are gamblers betting they can create a demand for a supply. In that respect, advertising itself becomes a gamble. In turn, the uncertainty and risk of advertising makes studying advertising a game of chance. Advertising incorporates the expertise of marketing, retailing, psychology, sociology, statistics, communication, and more. Hugh Rank characterizes advertising research in this passage from The Pitch:

Randomness characterizes most discussions and books about advertising. If you've ever discussed advertising with friends at a party, or in school, you'll recall how frequently the conversation jumps around: from products and slogans, to actors and actresses; from expressions of personal likes and dislikes, to arguments about the morality, the legality, the honesty, or the effectiveness of advertising. It's very hard to carry on a sustained coherent conversation about advertising because of such side tracking and shifting premises... While it is perfectly valid to discuss
advertising from any number of ways, be aware of the approach used. Consider these basic questions: who is saying what, to whom, when and where, with what intent, with what result, and how (11:14).

The following pages contain an analysis of the Reality Assessment advertisement for Shodair Adolescent, a division of Shodair Children's Specialty Hospital (see Appendix A). The analysis takes data gathered from an original questionnaire directed to the Reality Assessment advertisement and interprets those findings using independent advertising research and study. As the analysis will support, advertisers manipulate visual and verbal elements within advertisements to create a message that will capture the attention of the audience and persuade them to buy the product.

The interplay that exists between the buyers and the sellers makes for intriguing research. Availability of examples is no problem, nor is interest in how the human psyche is affected by the advertisements it contacts. Advertising finds people everywhere. Billboards, brochures, bulletins and banners dictate the routines of daily living. Because advertising affects the economy by controlling the buying inclinations of the masses, advertising owns institutional status. Advertising's history reveals our culture's changes and
development. Advertising and society have continuously played off each other, so the natural course of curiosity leads to an inquiry that can shed some light on the mysterious business of advertising. Rank tells us that advertising runs through society, and researching advertisements not only tells us about the product or service, but also about society:

Ads are often the best composition of our age, skillful combinations of purposeful words and images. Furthermore, ads are easily available in great quantity and variety, are frequently interesting or entertaining, and are a common denominator in our society (11:13).

Shodair's Reality Assessment advertisement virtually says, in black and white, that our society suffers from chemical dependency.

MASS MEDIA SOCIETY

Our society is a mass media society, and theories of mass media society define several different perspectives of how communication styles and mediums influence people. All mass society theories agree, however, that the power lies with those who can manipulate the masses. The constituents of a society are affected by the communication technology and the communication medium. Two
theories that deal specifically with how information is diffused in society come from Marshall McLuhan and Jacques Ellul. Both authors use mass media as the basis for their explanation, but consider different media-to-society relationships.

The mass society concept was identified as the modern state became more complex and bureaucratic. The mass of people are malleable; the relationships are depersonalized; all members are equal. Within mass society advertising reigns as possibly the most effective vehicle for direct communication and motivation of the masses. Large and heterogenous mass communication audiences receive mostly one-way communications from organizations rather than individuals. Modern technology makes transmissions from the sender to the mass audience very rapid, and state-of-the-art equipment creates a "better-than-life" message. Advertisers bombard consumers daily with their messages proclaiming the undeniable benefits of products or services, persons or institutions. Consequently, consumers base their buying decisions on these claims and persuasions and continue to put advertising in a powerful position.
McLuhan

Critics have argued that Marshall McLuhan's works are more educated guesses than theories; however, McLuhan's writings bring out a systematic relationship between media and culture that deserves comment. McLuhan's most popular statement is "The Medium is the Message" (7:267). He asserts that the content of communication is less important than the medium of that communication. In other words, people are more likely to be influenced by the predominant media than by the content. Advertisers have capitalized on the assertion that form dominates content. They prepare ad campaigns of flashy pictures, celebrity personalities, and soothing background music. People often buy products without having any more information than Joe Montana's endorsement. Most ads say nothing about the product; they only present an appealing visual picture coupled with a catchy and preferably memorable phrase. Consumers fall for it; the product sells.

Advertisements, according to McLuhan, are made hot or cold (7:268). Hot media contains relatively complete sensory data and has
a redundancy of information. The perceiver has little need to become involved by filling in missing data. The Reality Assessment advertisement is a hot media product. The text presents the reader with complete information. In contrast, cool media requires individual participation to perceptually fill in the missing pieces, and advertisers depend on that audience involvement. Television is the finest example of cool media. The small television screen can provide only a sketch of whatever event it films. The viewers must mentally participate in what they are watching to complete the filmed message. Since we hear sounds and see images though, television gives the impression of being complete. Thus, people fill-in without actually being aware that they are plugging in the missing pieces of a sitcom, movie or advertisement.

People have become accustomed, not only to filling in for television, but for becoming actively involved in completing the advertisements they view in print as well. Advertisements requiring filling-in by the viewer sell products because people add the missing data themselves. When the advertisement agency has Brooke Shields tell why she uses a product (and look how rich and famous she is),
many consumers will subconsciously conclude that if they use the same product, they can enjoy some of the status of Miss Shields.

Ellul

Advertising portrays a world for the mass audience to buy into. Advertising, however, is not the only force working on society. Jacques Ellul tells us that propaganda reinforces mass society's norms and standards, "The vehicle through which the technological society perpetuates the mass society is propaganda" (7:269). Ellul combines mass communication and the media of communication with other social forces - political, economic, productive, etc. - for a holistic approach to mass media theory. The forces of society interact and create a giant mass system that the individual cannot escape. Propaganda is a sociological phenomenon that constrains individuals to accepted standards, but is necessary to society and fundamentally rooted in public sentiment and opinion (7:270). The propagandistic information individuals receive influences their emotions, thoughts and actions to fit society's expectations.

The propagandist must be familiar with the attitudes of the audience in order to time the influence-ability of peoples' emotions.
and thoughts. Whether they foster changes or not, propagandists pay close attention to any occurring alterations in society. Some changes will go against the propaganda of a society, and others will further the goals of that society's propaganda. Either way, changes in attitudes are recognized, because when changes occur, propaganda can manipulate facts to serve its needs. Fortunately, most propaganda tells the truth, and is rational more often than irrational (7:270). The government uses propaganda to run the state and inform the people. The individual comes to require propaganda too. Ellul takes the point of view that "propaganda is necessary, in fact essential, in modern societies" (7:270). Propaganda gives individuals psychological support for modern life and the security everyone yearns for. Similarly, advertising sells psychological support and security to consumers through products they advertise. Advertising messages promise the good life to those who buy their advertised products. Shodair sells security for concerned parents by offering the Reality Assessment.

SOCIAL COHESION

Both McLuhan and Ellul theorize about the effect of the mass media
on society, but McLuhan illustrates media being hot or cold, and Ellul shows propaganda being constant. An oversimplified theme of McLuhan and Ellul sets the public at the mercy of those who control the media (7:271). The advances in technological communication have furthered the flow and availability of information as well as the influence of advertising throughout that information. The world changes very rapidly in this age of the global village and every change has at least a minimal effect on every society. In *Mediamerica*, a technological communications textbook, Jay Edward Whetmore notes, "In the world of instantaneous communication everything we do affects everyone else all the time. And that is what mass culture is all about" (14:9). Advertising makes influencing people its business. Although advertisements are not propaganda, they work much the same way and are just as powerful. Most advertising professionals, ironically, have not deeply considered the extensive consequences of mass commercial persuasion. Recently, Daniel Boorstin articulated a theory that had only been hinted at in the past:
Mass consumption is the greatest democratizing force in modern America...Advertising has become the herald of democracy. Abundance allows us to choose what kind of person we want to be; advertising displays the alternatives before us and imbues them with meanings (9:11).

When Shodair presents the Reality Assessment, the hospital offers the service to everyone and defines the Assessment as providing peace of mind.

DESIRE AND DEMAND

For advertisements to be successful, they must persuade people to buy. To this end, what works is used and reused again and again. What doesn't work is discarded. With so much money involved and no formula for success available, advertising studies abound. Research in the marketplace puts the methods to test. Daniel Pope's book, The Making of Modern Advertising, tells that "most importantly the purpose of advertising research is almost always to create more effective advertising" (9:10). Advertising persuasively speaks to the population, and says, "Buy this!" In 1980 the ten leading national advertisers spent three and three quarter billions of dollars to persuade consumers to buy from them. Although these numbers are seven years old, one can easily predict that the dollar amount has only
increased. Here are the statistics:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Total Ad Dollars in Millions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proctor &amp; Gamble</td>
<td>$649.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sears, Roebuck &amp; Co.</td>
<td>$599.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Foods Corp.</td>
<td>$410.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philip Morris Inc.</td>
<td>$364.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K Mart Corp.</td>
<td>$319.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Motors Corp.</td>
<td>$316.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R. J. Reynolds Industries</td>
<td>$298.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ford Motor Co.</td>
<td>$280.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Telephone &amp; Telegraph</td>
<td>$259.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warner-Lambert Co.</td>
<td>$235.2 (10:200)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Advertising appeals to the mass society by centering a campaign on a person, a product, a need, or a vision of the "good life". If the advertiser's technique is effective the message will reach people, get their attention, and stimulate a response in support of the message.

In *The Great American Blow Up: Puffery in Advertising and Selling*, Ivan L. Preston asserts, "Advertisers do not develop techniques which persuade only a few people; that is not how mass communication works, techniques must be successful with vast audiences or be discarded" (10:29).

Mass communication is primarily one way from a source (in this case, the advertiser) to society (in this case, the consumer), but the advertisers consider the reactions of society as they strive for that
winning message. In a variation of the double interact (advertisers and consumers influencing one another simultaneously), the advertisers will change or continue their strategy according to the results of an advertising campaign. Advertising is powerful; it can manipulate and mold mass society's desires, demands, and purchases as it diffuses information.

Competition is stiff for both advertisers and retailers. Consequently, both must be one step ahead of mass society at all times to stay in control of consumer buying. Advertisers use many inducements to make people want to buy a lifestyle, a social trend, or even a new personality. Wilson Bryan Key's book, *Subliminal Seduction*, explains the media's planned attack on consumers: "The media perform a superb job of hammering relentlessly at our psyches, increasing tension to and beyond the breaking point, forcing reality into deeper and deeper depths of repression" (5:84). The onslaught of information obviously cannot be completely taken in for conscious evaluation, so the filtered data operates below the threshold of consciousness carrying on the marketing of the product. The repressed reality influences the appeal of a product for consumers.
By the same token, audiences are often unaware of what they might be seeing but not processing consciously. The persuasion of advertising is a more transcendental communicator than first suspected. Advertisers can reach their audiences through the aura projected from the advertisements. Ernest Dichter, who conducts research into people's motivations for desires and demands, states, "Whatever your attitude toward modern psychology or psychoanalysis, it has proved beyond any doubt that many of our daily decisions are governed by motivations over which we have no control and of which we are not aware" (3:50).

As the masses receive advertising information it filters to every part of every day life. The strategy behind every advertisement remains the same: control the wants and needs of the consumer and compel them to act. Hugh Duncan, a social communication theorist, tells us that all communication has the power to mold social opinion, thereby giving society a mass cohesiveness:

The specific social end of all communication [including advertising] is the consensus that is reached through the establishment and
maintenance of attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge as these are expressed in roles whose successful performance guarantees social order (4:240).

Duncan's point is well taken, advertisements introduce and then sell products that fit the roles advertising and other mass media communications assign consumers. Furthermore, each message is geared toward a particular audience. Buying the products, then, dictates the acting out of those roles. In the case of the Reality Assessment, Shodair sells peace of mind and/or treatment to the audience. The advertisement puts parents in a position of wondering about their child's chemical experimentation, and then requests parents to contact Shodair Adolescent. Shodair's message tries to establish parental concern and initiate the proper action for handling possible problems with children, drugs, and alcohol.

Advertising pervades all society, not as a passive variable, but rather as an active force. Advertising is in the business of changing things. Advertisers are the movers and shakers of the marketplace. However, advertisers depend on their readers to do some moving and shaking too, say Vestergaard and Schroder, by bringing their "socially created needs" with them as they encounter an advertisement
Advertisements and society share a kind of symbiotic arrangement whereby each influences and depends on the other. When society decides on a value; advertisers use that value to sell a product. Society ranks individualism high on its list, so advertisers sell a product in a way that suggests that buying the product will make one special. Likewise, the fight against drug and alcohol dependencies rages from the White House, to the court house, so Shodair sells an adolescent review that can identify problems of chemical experimentation. The meaning people get from the advertisement corresponds to the attitudes those people possess. Vestergaard and Schroder have recognized the celebration of common experiences that mass media validates for the mass society:

Nowadays most big advertising agencies employ both psychologists and sociologists who, equipped with the most recent readership surveys, try to determine, which values and images are most likely to appeal to the audience of a given publication. One of the assumptions underlying their strategic work is that advertisements should work on each reader's need for an identity, on the individual's need to expose himself/herself to lifestyles and values which confirm the validity of his/her own lifestyles and values, thereby making sense of the world and his/her place in it. What
we are faced with here is a signification process whereby a certain commodity is made the expression of a certain content (the lifestyle and values). Evidently, the ultimate objective of this signification process is to attach the desired identity to a specific commodity, so that the need for an identity is transformed into a need for the commodity (13:73).

Advertisements, therefore, are decoded individually, but according to the specific codes generated by societal standards. So advertisers must be familiar with the values, beliefs, and dreams of their audiences. Audiences receive advertised messages, and are persuaded to believe that buying a product is necessary, states Dana Woolfolk Cross in *Mediaspeak* (3:27). If there is no need for a product, she adds, one is created to convince consumers that life would be a risk without it. The Reality Assessment advertisement appeals to the risk parents could be taking with their children if they do not contact Shodair.

Advertisers do one thing: sell. First, they create a need, and then they create a demand. The Reality Assessment ad works from the standpoint that Helena parents need the peace of mind the assessment can provide. Needs, whether actual or imposed, can stimulate the greatest demand of all. When an ad provides the means to solving a
problem, buying the advertised product meets a need. That's what Shodair's advertisement attempts to do. Cross continues: "The overriding message is that the solution to all our problems, our ailments, our guilts, our fears, our social failures, is some corporate-produced thing" (3:40). Parents worry about their childrens' drinking and drug experimentation. Accordingly, parental concern forges a need for reassurance and peace of mind. Shodair's ad sells a solution to a problem by offering the Reality Assessment to parents, and by persuading them that they really cannot afford to pass up this free service.
ANALYZING VISUAL AND VERBAL ELEMENTS

Advertisements persuade consumers to buy; that fact we have already established. While some ads work, some do not. The success of an advertisement depends on how effectively the visual and verbal elements are manipulated to proclaim the advertised message.

The Shodair Reality Assessment advertisement attractively merges visual and verbal elements to create its service. Because the layout of the ad permitted easy separation of the visual and verbal elements, each element was studied separately as well as in combination to analyze audience response to the ad. Specific response information was provided by a questionnaire and incorporated with independent research. By using these two resources together, Shodair Adolescent's Reality Assessment ad could be analyzed from a holistic point of view.

Advertisements (and their creators) always seek some kind of response. Consequently, knowing how visuals and verbals function individually and collectively allows them to be effectively maneuvered for inducing the advertisement's required response.
Study of questionnaire results and the research findings indicated five areas of advertisement manipulation for audience response:

1) Visual and verbal elements together motivate action.
2) Verbal elements determine meaning
3) Word choice influences reactions.
4) Facial expressions influence reactions.
5) Verbal elements inspire emotion.

Visual and verbal elements have strong independent functions, yet each is affected by each other, and in combination the elements make up more than the sum of their parts. The voluntary dependence of visual and verbal elements allows a successful advertisement the ability to communicate its message to the audience. Visual and verbal elements are adaptable to a number of specific advertising compositions. Charles O'Neill wrote an essay entitled The Language of Advertising, he discusses how advertising language involves more than just verbal elements; it also involves nonverbal elements, "advertisements derive their power from a purposeful, directed combination of two elements: visual images and words. The precise balance of words (either spoken or printed) and pictures is determined by the creative concept and the medium used; but that combination of images and words makes up the language of
advertising” (8:117). Words are coined, borrowed, and imaginatively used. Colors are selected with care while layout is designed for ultimate attractiveness and human appeal. The time and the place for the ad are also determined. All of these factors, and many others, are crucial to the advertising agencies as they all make up the form of the message. Each individual is reached visually and verbally by the advertisement’s language. Shodair has verbally and non-verbally structured their advertisement to convince the audience to "buy" the Reality Assessment -- free of charge. Both text and picture were given ample space to communicate to the audience.

Although visual and verbal elements in advertising have been studied, investigation into the visual and verbal elements combined in advertisements represents a contemporary approach to advertising research. Torben Vestergaard and Kim Schroder have written their book *The Language of Advertising* based on the premise that the combination of verbal text and visual representation has become increasingly important to our culture. They propose that the increase in importance has given the text and picture combination a power yet to be analyzed in print advertisements and yet to be understood by
print advertisers. Visual and verbal elements in combination are the
domain of an expanding frontier of adventure and discovery in
advertising research, study, and analysis:

Whereas on the one hand there is a large and
reasonably well-groomed body of linguistic
technique for the study of verbal texts to
proceed from, and on the other there is a
long and venerable tradition for the study of
pictures in isolation, research into
mass-communicated industrially produced
texts combining verbal and visual elements
is still only beginning to emerge (13:33).

METHODOLOGY

The methodology for the results of this analysis was based on a
questionnaire given to ninety Carroll College students. Three groups
of thirty people answered the questions with one group using the
visual half of the ad, another group using the verbal half of the ad, and
a third group using the visual/verbal combination of the ad. The
questions were answered by referencing the Shodair Reality
Assessment advertisement. The questionnaire, it should be noted,
was directed to a photcopy of the actual advertisement alone. The
analysis does not take into account the advertisement's space order
instructions for newspaper printing and layout.
THE VISUAL AND VERBAL COMBINATION MOTIVATES ACTION

Attention-getting is the cardinal first step in any communication encounter, certainly for any advertisement. If an ad goes unnoticed, it cannot persuade. After an ad gets the audience's attention, it must command a response. Successful advertising motivates people to take some kind of affirmative action towards a product. Rank believes that making the response easy is the most crucial aspect of an advertisement (11:42). He goes on to say that calling for a simple response increases the likelihood of its completion. Rank notes that most advertisements contain commands to buy, send for, shop at, go to, mail, call, or see your dealer. In a similar manner, Shodair's Reality Assessment advertisement invites people to contact Shodair Adolescent treatment center. By specifically stating the desired response and providing the address and phone number, the audience knows exactly what to do.

Part of the questionnaire dealt with how clear the ad indicated to its audience what to do. The results of the questionnaire showed that the visual/verbal combination is more effective in motivating action than either visuals or verbals alone (see Figure 1). Separately visuals
and verbals cannot garner attention, give information, and motivate action, only in combination are they truly effective. The visual/verbal combination works well because it persuades both intellectually (with words) and perceptually (with pictures). Shodair has tried to capture this concept in their Reality Assessment advertisement by using both words and pictures to introduce its service and to invite inquiries.

**Figure 1.** Question #5: To what degree do you feel motivated to take a specific action?

![Figure 1]
Arranging visual and verbal elements in advertisements should not be taken casually. Marshall McLuhan has said that "the ad is the meeting place for all the arts, skill, and all the media of the American environment" (14:270). Advertisers are master persuaders who masterfully manipulate visual and verbal elements to carry out their strategy. Messages are made to convince the consumer to notice what is being presented to them, like it, and buy it. Ads, therefore, must not only look good, but be good enough to influence consumer taste. Key has thoroughly researched advertising's single aim and puts that goal into simple terms, "The motive behind advertising is pure and singular: sell and sell and sell" (5:89). Similarly, Shodair wants to sell its Reality Assessment, and has created an advertisement to motivate contacts from the public.

Advertisements are meticulously well planned. Since millions of dollars are at stake, the message has to be planned to the minutest detail. Advertising agencies or individuals research the product and the company; they evaluate the target audience, the times and places when and where the ad can be most effective; and the most appealing means of presenting their message. When all of this information is
put together, the advertisement should be so good that no one can pass it up. As Key tells us, advertising is the most prepared of all media (5:80). The audience reaction is incredible; they believe, and the product is sold.

AURA

Advertising techniques project a sort of aura. In a sense, advertisers market fantasies and ideals. The aura of advertisements convinces million of Americans that "Wind Song stays on his mind," "you deserve a break today at McDonalds," "times like these were made for Tasters Choice," "and weekends were made for Michelob." Convince they do. These advertisements and the products they promote sell, and sell well. Whetmore explains the relationship of consumer to product as a reaction to advertising, "Consumers tend to act toward a product as if it had a soul or personality all its own. The function of advertising is therefore to suggest or even create this soul in the minds of the consumers" (14:273).

Most of the time people are totally unaware of how their behavior is altered by an advertisement. Yet when time is taken to investigate, the situation is very clear. Would a man buy Virginia
Slims cigarettes for himself? Would a woman buy Marlboros? People buy the product as much for the image it portrays as for the product itself. The woman who buys Virginia Slims is opting for the sleek, svelte look with a touch of chic liberation. The man who buys Marlboros has chosen them for their macho ruggedness and charisma. Of course, once the ad sells the image, the consumer really only gets the product. Consumers will then internalize the essence of the ad and associate it to the product.

People are buying the products because they want to buy the image the ad sells, and thus, the image they believe can belong to them too. Products are often sold with advertisements that do little more than identify the product against the background of a positive and pleasing environment. Many aspects of advertisements are simply there to supply the styles of communication audiences are demanding. Advertising the product, without advertising the product, is becoming very popular and very successful, though advertisers are only beginning to explore this direction (12:28). At the Stanford Research Institute, Brooke Warwick, marketing director, says that we will be seeing more commercials that "wrap the product in an ambiance"
(12:28). He continues to add that some of the most successful ads today seem to have very little to do with the product, but appeal to consumer desire and ignite consumer demand. In a similar view of ad messages that ignore the product, Advertising Age, a prominent trade journal, has dubbed this "latest ad gimmick: non-advertising" (10:279).

FORM AND CONTENT

When ads are created, Whetmore stresses, "form is the important thing; content is secondary" (14:274). The creators of the Shodair advertisement have tried to effectively merge form and content by giving space for each element. The written message and the space around the ad possesses a connotative meaning all its own. The form of the ad is the vehicle for the content. Audiences assimilate the form (visual and the subconscious aspects) before processing the content (the product and the factual information of the advertisement). Many ads almost hide what they are really promoting. Whetmore offers his understanding of the form vs. content struggle, "Visual space is given over to a scene that has a minimal 'logical' connection with the product. The theory is that by surrounding the
product with a pleasant environment, the medium can entice the consumer to try it" (14:275). The content of the ad is separately considered. A person may see an ad in a magazine and comment on the model's dress, yet not even mention the product being presented. Unconsciously, however, the message has reached its target and been received. The advertisement has done its job. Someone may see the Shodair ad, notice the photograph of the woman, and turn the page. Whether the person has realized it or not, the Shodair name probably reached the subconscious and is waiting for a stimulus to call it to attention.

Whatever means or techniques advertisers use to persuade consumers, the method is enticement. Make the product appealing enough and everyone will want to buy it to try it. That's what advertisers theorize anyway. Shodair's advertisement presents the Reality Assessment as a most appealing solution to parental concern about drug and alcohol experimentation.

MOTIVATING PURCHASES

The advertiser's motivations for a selling campaign are quite obvious. What is equally important to realize is that the masses want
to buy. They want to believe the advertisers "sell". "Advertising has created and preserved the all important belief," writes Dana Woolfolk Cross in *Mediaspeak*, "that the 'good life' consists of having better products and more of them than our neighbors" (3:55). Advertising defines the good life and sells it to consumers. Shodair's message says that the Reality Assessment can bring the peace of mind through its Reality Assessment service.

Motivation is the lifeline of persuasion. Without the motivation to buy (or in Shodair's case, contact) no amount of enticement can sell a product. And there is no better way to convince someone to buy something than to make them want that product and show them how much they need that product. One way to persuade audiences to buy is to make the audience feel good about themselves and whatever is being advertised. Another way to persuade audiences to buy is to use public sentiment and opinion. Shodair can take advantage of the present national publicity concerning drug and alcohol problems, and ensure parents that they hold the answer to their concerns. Receivers of an ad may not realize exactly why they feel compelled to buy what an ad is selling, but they are motivated just the same. In the words
Both conscious and unconscious motives lie behind every human communication situation. Motives are implied in every message. . . No form of human communication can be understood or reasonably evaluated without some consideration of both conscious and unconscious motives of the communicator (5:73).

Advertising's influential messages creep into the unconsciousness and tap into the motivations of people without their ever realizing what is happening. Advertisements are not only selling products; they are selling lifestyles and personalities that significantly influence audience psyches, personalities, and perceptions. Audiences remain extremely vulnerable to the pulse of persuasion and its compelling rhythm.
VISUAL AND VERBAL ELEMENTS SINGULARLY MOTIVATE RESPONSES

THE VERBAL ELEMENT INSPIRES EMOTION

Pictures and words share an intimate relationship in any advertisement; these elements communicate alone and in conjunction with each other. Visual elements communicate nonverbally and elementally, while verbals rationally communicate the information an advertiser wants the audience to know. Words do not just inform, though; words communicate emotionally. One of Judith Wilson's principles in *Decoding Advertisements* is that the overt meaning in a advertisement plays a role in the creation of another less obvious meaning (15:19). The unambiguousness of words guide the ambiguity of color, layout, etc., to unite in a persuasional strategy.

The verbal half of the Reality Assessment ad inspires more emotional response than the visual alone or the visual/verbal combination (see Figure 2). The words that make up the text of the ad possess an emotional connotation as well as a denotative meaning. An advertisement's words convey emotional associations for the audiences that become part of the Reality Assessment persuasion.
Figure 2. Question #1: What degree of emotional response do you feel when you view the ad?

WORDS INFLUENCE REACTION

An advertisement means something in particular because language expresses that meaning. Language must be used in an ad, except in special circumstances that rely on pictorial elements alone, but the mode of language or style of word usage must be considered. Wilson discusses ads using language similar or dissimilar to the average speaker (15:85). Different effects can be produced, Wilson maintains, when different language styles are used to produce
different meanings. Advertisers choose their words carefully so that language may work for them as a tool of persuasion.

The questionnaire polled the respondents about the influence the Reality Assessment copy had on each of them individually. Only the verbal and visual/verbal combination groups could be asked to rate the degree word choice in the ad influenced them. Both groups indicated that word choice had a moderately high degree of influence on their reaction to the advertisement (see Figure 3). Two word clusters were chosen more than any others as having the most influence: *non-threatening* and *peace of mind* (see Appendix C). The decision to use those words and the others in the ad was a wise one. The fact that *non-threatening* and *peace of mind* were singled out suggests that the advertisement is effectively communicating (that is, selling) why the Reality Assessment (the product) should be bought.

**Figure 3.** Question #2: To what degree does the choice of words used in the ad influence your reaction?
Advertising relies on prejudged and accepted images and impressions to sell products. Image and impression are abstract terms representing abstract ideas. But in order to create an advertisement that audiences will interpret in accordance with the advertiser's intent, words must be used. Linguistic symbols guide the readers in their decoding process. Pictures can stir emotions, feelings, ideas, and thoughts, but words give an identity that is vital for creating a clear message of persuasion. Vestergaard and Schroder report that "...as a means of communication pictures are much more
ambiguous than language and that therefore they often have to be anchored by means of a verbal text..." (13:42).

When people with only the visual half of the Shodair ad were asked what the ad meant to them, most could only answer that they felt some kind of feeling or emotion. The other two groups used the verbal half of the ad or the visual/verbal combination; almost all of these respondents answered that the ad was a solution to a problem (see Appendix B). Furthermore, those people who had the verbal half of the ad or the visual/verbal combination indicated that their understanding of the advertisement was twice as complete as those with only the visual half of the ad (see Figure 4). Word usage in advertisements is the foundation of understanding the intended message. Without language the Shodair advertisement would lack the precision and clarity essential for persuading Helena parents to contact Shodair Adolescent treatment center.

**Figure 4.** Question #7: To what degree do you think your understanding of the ad is complete?
Unfortunately, verbal tactics can be taken to the extreme when puffery is practiced. Agency organizations like the American Association of Advertising Agencies encourage standards and strategies that are beyond reproach (See Appendix D). A.A.A.A. objectives promote open and honest relations with government, consumers, and advertisers. Like all professions though, advertising is neither understood nor viewed in the same light by those who work on the inside of the business as those who question advertising's tactics from outside the business. Throughout history there have
been at least two sides to every issue. Preston offers the philosophies of two successful ad men as a means of revealing their position on advertising's treatment of the truth:

One of David Ogilvy's "confessions" is that he has been guilty of supresso veri, as he calls it, suppressing the truth. "Surely it is asking too much," he wrote, "to expect the advertiser to describe the shortcomings of his product? One must be forgiven for putting one's best foot forward." A bit less diplomatic expression of the same philosophy was made by Ogilvy's coworker, Andrew Kershaw, who insisted that advertising "can tell the truth, can tell nothing but the truth, but should not be required to tell the whole truth" (10:281).

Critics and advocates alike are realizing that puffed-up advertisements are becoming a mainstay of Madison Avenue. Preston wrote his book about puffery to educate the public on this aspect of mass media communication. He believed that the public needed to understand the history and usage of puffery in order to make competent buying decisions today.

Some advertisements do not give the information needed to logically and rationally sell a product, instead the advertisement totally relies upon puffed exaggerations to do the job. Advertisers
claim puffery does not really work, but the advertisers are using it and the FTC is regulating it. Here, Preston presents the advertising community's response to the regulation of puffery:

At the FTC's special general hearing on modern advertising practices, representatives of the advertising community defended puffing as unpersuasive to consumers, generally meaningless, and unworthy of government attention (10:279).

Puffery is obviously a misunderstood and tricky strategy. Preston calls it the "pretentious opinion of salesmen and advertisers exaggerating their wares, magnifying value, quality, and attractiveness to the limits of plausability and beyond" (10:13). Cable Value Network stands out as a prime example of Preston's puffery. The sales personnel unabashadly peddle their merchandise, and insist that it's the best deal around.

One has to wonder, if puffery is as inconsequential as advertisers claim, why so much money is invested into producing it. Advertisers do not own a standard formula for success instead they use and reuse what effectively motivates consumer buying habits. So Preston has concluded that puffery does work, that puffery does manipulate the minds of consumers to believe the message or slogan, and hence
believe in the product (10:289). Advertisers, he continues, are now caught between the FTC and the people:

That's the ad man's catch 22. If the consumer rejects puffery there is no reason for using it. If the consumer believes it, the law's reason for excusing it disappears. The advertiser defends puffery because it's legal, but it can only be legal because it doesn't work. The Advertiser thus is supporting it for a reason that tells him there's no point in supporting it. A sensible reason for using puffery could only be that it works, which would make it illegal. Whether puffery is illegal or not may be important, but the result seems dismal for the advertiser in either case. If it is, he's in trouble with the law. If it isn't he is asking for trouble with the public, encouraging distrust and contributing to a potential credibility gap that could spoil the effectiveness of his true factual claims as well as his puffs (10:289).

Of course every advertiser wants to create the most favorable impression possible for the product being advertised, and like any proud and over-zealous presenter, the ad person can be guilty of euphemistic communication that would make even the worst product sound the best. After all, advertising's goal is to sell products for the clients, and second-best does not invite much purchase power in the marketplace. Perhaps the Reality Assessment borders on puffery
while presenting its message. Certainly Shodair paints a perfect picture of their treatment. Some puffery does get taken to far, but other messages are simply proactive. We must realize that puffery is not a new evil of modern advertising. Puffery is almost an American tradition. Certainly we have all enjoyed the following slogan that Preston will name in his explanation and discussion of puffing:

By legal definition, puffery is advertising or other sales representations which praise the item to be sold with subjective opinions, superlatives, or exaggerations, vaguely and generally, stating no specific facts. It appears in various verbal and pictorial forms, the best known being slogans which are used repeatedly, sometimes for years, on behalf of a throng of nationally advertised products and services. Perhaps the oldest of these still activley used is P.T. Barnum's "The Greatest Show on Earth." One might call it the king of them all, which would be puffing about puffing (10:17).

Preston humorously approaches puffery in the above quotation, but at the same time he realizes puffery is a serious matter for discussion. Since words have the power to motivate people's responses, exploiting that power also exploits the people who receive a puffed
message. We have long been familiar with the power of the written word, advertisers need to be cautious about abusing the influence their copywriting exerts over the consumer. A fine line separates praises and promises from puffery.

FACIAL EXPRESSION INFLUENCES REACTION

Nonverbals - gestures and expressions, for example - enhance the language used in advertisements to augment meaning, information, and persuasion. In an advertisement, the words persuade explicitly while the nonverbals persuade implicitly. Body language speaks to everyone in a basic way; author of Winning Connections, Lise Liepmann, tells us that body language "...is an elemental form of communication that reaches us on a very deep level, like a drum beat" (6:80). People trust nonverbals. In any communication exchange, the nonverbals carry as much or more weight than the verbals. If there is a contradiction in what verbals are saying and what nonverbals are revealing, the nonverbals almost always win. Advertisements, thus, use nonverbals to add credibility to their persuasional pitch.

The woman used in Shodairs's advertisement has a concerned look
on her face. People answering the visual and visual/verbal combination rated the facial expression as a moderately high influence on their reaction to the ads (see Figure 5). The facial expression of the woman in the ad works with the text of the ad to create a non-threatening appraisal intended to give peace of mind.

**Figure 5.** Question #4: To what degree do the facial expressions used in the ad influence your reaction?
SUMMARY: ADVERTISING EQUALS PERSUASION

Advertising is a profession, a trade of its own. Businessmen and entrepreneurs require advertising assistance to sell their merchandise; they cannot risk settling for any old blurb or declaration in the daily newspaper. Businesses require advertising campaigns that will effectively promote their product. Competition among companies and corporations is stiff, and yet people demand quality products and services. Clients hire advertising agencies to prepare the advertising needed to sell products. Agency professionals devise ingenious ways to get consumer attention, convince them a product is the best, and then compell consumers to buy it. Vestergaard and Schroder describe advertising's impact on consumer desire and demand a century ago, but the market description fits today's supply and demand dynamics as well:

The great breakthrough for advertising only came in the late nineteenth century. Technology and mass-production techniques were now sufficiently developed for more firms to be able to turn out products of roughly the same quality and at roughly the same price. This was accompanied by overproduction and underdemand which
meant that the market had to be stimulated, so advertising technique changed from proclamation to persuasion (13:4).

Through the years, advertising has matured and established itself as the profession of persuasion. Compared to today’s consumer research, product surveys, and computer generated graphics, advertising methods at the turn of the century were primitive. Nevertheless, those methods worked remarkably well at the time and were updated regularly to meet the requirements of the market.

Advertising and the advertising professionals possess a position of control over the buying decisions of consumers. To stay in power it is vital that the advertiser stay one step ahead of the consumer. Advertisers motivate consumers to buy products before the consumers have a chance to make their own decisions about what they want. Advertising’s stimulation of market demands is not a new technique of the 1980’s, in 1897, Harpers Weekly ran an article that summarized the persuasive influence over the public advertisements had already garnered, "Once we skipped advertisements unless some want compelled us to read, while now we read to find out what we really want" (9:5). Since 1897, at least, advertising has held a relationship intimate with the American public as advertisers
predicted how to sell what to sell.

Successful advertising depends on the successful manipulation of the visual and verbal elements. The Shodair advertisement uses words and picture to sell the Reality Assessment. First, the ad gets attention, then it tries to get action. In The Language of Graphics, Edward Booth-Clibborn and Daniele Baroni write about the persuasion of advertising and its place in our society, "In a last step, communication shifts from espousing a point of view to persuading people to support this or that action, getting them to behave in a particular way. In a commercial culture the most obvious example of persuasion is advertising" (2:65). Advertising is persuasion, and it successful when advertisers manipulate the visual and verbal elements within advertisements in a such a manner that people feel compelled to buy a product.

Shodair's advertisement for the Reality Assessment effectively merges the visual and verbal elements. People questioned about the ad answered affirmatively that they would 1) use the reality assessment if they suspected a drug or alcohol problem, 2) understood what the ad was selling, and 3) emotionally involved themselves with
the Shodair's message. The Reality Assessment advertisement persuades the audience --albeit a control population of Carroll College students -- to contact Shodair Adolescent treatment center.
AUTHOR'S END NOTE

The results of the questionnaire are in, the responses have been tallied, and the Shodair ad for the Reality Assessment seems to be a winner. Ironically, when the Reality Assessment ad ran in the newspapers it bombed. People did not respond to the ad because they did not attend to it. O'Neill penned, "Ads have to earn the right to be seen, read and heard" (8:121). Outside the controls of this study, the Shodair ad did not earn its way. O'Neill then refers to Jerry Della Femina, a successful advertising businessman, who sums up the problem:

There are a lot of copywriters who get mixed up and think they're Faulkner or Hemingway. They sit there and they mold and they play and when it's over they've written something that's absolutely beautiful but they forgot one thing. It's within the confines of a page...what kills most copywriters is that people don't buy Life magazine to read their ads. People don't buy Gourmet to read their ad for Bombay Gin. People are buying Gourmet to read the recipes, and the ads are just an intrusion on people's time. That is why our job is to get more attention than anything else (8:121)

Getting the attention of readers and keeping that attention long
enough for product recognition and product desire to take hold remains paramount to an advertisement's success. The Shodair advertisement followed a strategy that balanced visual and verbal elements within the ad and was received well by those people who participated in the questionnaire. Unfortunately, when the Reality Assessment ad appeared in the Helena, Montana, Independent Record it failed to garner more attention than anything else on the page. O'Neill writes in his essay, "Advertisements - no matter how carefully "engineered" and packed with information - cannot succeed unless they capture our attention in the first place" (8:119). Tom Behan, the creator of the Shodair Reality Assessment advertisement, said that the conflict between the findings of the questionnaire and the actual running of the ad proves that any advertisement can be great in analysis, but if the audience does not pay attention to the ad, it cannot do the job of selling the product (1).

Hugh Rank clearly states the essence of advertising in his book The Pitch: "...the greatest sin in advertising is not to be noticed" (11:19).


APPENDIX A

The combination of words and pictures in advertisements has become increasingly important in our culture. Although the verbal and nonverbal aspects of advertisements have been studied separately, research into mass-communicated, industrially produced texts combining verbal and nonverbal elements is still only beginning to emerge.

The results of this questionnaire will be used to analyze audience response to the verbal elements, the visual elements, and the verbal and visual combination of elements in advertisements.
INTRODUCING

—NO COST—

THE

REALITY

ASSESSMENT.

This can be the best first step for every Helena parent wondering about the seriousness of their child's social drinking or drug experimentation.

The Reality Assessment™ is a short, to-the-point, non-threatening review of an adolescent's behavior by a team of chemical dependency professionals. If there's no abuse or dependency problems, you'll have that peace of mind.

If there is, we'll recommend appropriate treatment procedures.

All inquiries for this free consultation are handled in confidence, at Montana's only treatment center exclusively for adolescents. Contact:

Shodair

Adolescent

a division of

Shodair Children's

Specialty Hospital

P.O. Box 5539, Helena, Montana 59604
449-7630

Our goal is a life free from drugs and alcohol.
Please answer each question as indicated, either by circling your response or by writing in your response. All questionnaires are completely confidential. Thank you!

1. What degree of emotional response do you feel when you view the ad?
   none 1 2 3 4 5 very much

2. To what degree does the choice of words used in the ad influence your reaction?
   none 1 2 3 4 5 very much

3. List the words (if any) that influence you most.

4. To what degree do the facial expressions used in the ad influence your reaction?
   none 1 2 3 4 5 very much

5. To what degree do you feel motivated to take a specific action?
   none 1 2 3 4 5 very much

6. What does this advertisement mean to you?

7. To what degree do you think that your understanding of the advertisement is complete?
   do not understand 1 2 3 4 5 fully understand
Question #6: What does this advertisement mean to you?

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<th>VERBAL</th>
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APPENDIX C

**QUESTION #6:** List the words (if any) that influence you most.

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APPENDIX D

OBJECTIVES
AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF ADVERTISING AGENCIES
The A.A.A.A. is the national association of the advertising agency business, through which member agencies work toward the following objectives:

1. To promote and further the interest of advertising agencies by increasing their usefulness to advertisers, to media and to the public.

2. To collect and disseminate information and ideas affecting advertising and advertising agencies among members of the Association and others interested.

3. To cooperate with governmental, consumer and other bodies on matters affecting advertising.

4. To aid in the continued improvement in the efficiency and value of advertising by fostering and stimulating scientific research and investigation in connection with advertising.

5. To advocate informative and constructive appeals in advertising copy and, in this connection, to maintain and safeguard honesty, fairness and good taste.

6. To advise with and maintain friendly relations with associations representing advertisers, media, suppliers and consumers with or related to advertising.

7. To promote and foster the continued recognition of the social responsibilities of advertising and of advertising agencies; to further efforts to lower the costs of distribution; and to cooperate with organizations marshalling advertising forces on behalf of government and patriotic activities.

8. To promote friendly relations among all advertising agencies and seek such cooperation as will promote the highest standards of service.