Analyzing Visual Effects in Ads

Has a television commercial ever made you say, “Wow, did you see that?” Perhaps a three-dimensional object seemed to hurtle out of the screen. A dog might have dunked a basketball like a pro. Advertisers will do anything they can to keep potential customers from turning the page or changing the channel when an advertisement appears. One of their most powerful weapons is the visual effect. Visual effects are ways of changing an image to add to its message or create a certain impression in a viewer’s mind.

The Purpose of Visual Effects

Not only are visual effects fun and interesting, but they also keep viewers looking at an advertisement. The longer a viewer looks at an ad, the more likely the product or service being advertised will stick in the viewer’s mind. Visual effects naturally hold our attention because they combine reality with the fantastic. Which image would be more likely to grab your attention: a giant bug invading a house or a real bug walking across a kitchen floor?

Visual effects also help shape a viewer’s feelings about the product or service in the ad. For example, if an ad shows the giant bug retreating and finally dying after being sprayed with bug spray, the viewer might feel confident that the product can get rid of any insect. After all, the bug spray successfully killed the giant bug.

Types of Visual Effects

Print advertisements and television commercials each use unique visual effects. These effects make an ad more interesting so it can attract the most readers or viewers possible.
A print ad can include a collage of images and text—words and pictures that, when combined, create an overall effect on the readers. Unless a print ad runs for several pages, it usually focuses on one image which creates an unfinished story. Important information about what happened before the product was used or what happened afterward is missing. The readers become involved because they must fill in the blanks to finish the story.

Television commercials contain movement. They can fade in and out or dissolve from one scene to another. Instead of one primary image to develop, a television commercial has many. Action sequences can tell a story.

While some effects are limited to either television or print advertisements, most of the visual effects advertisers use are available to both. Visual effects can be divided into two categories: photographic (made with a camera) or digital (made with a computer).

### Common Visual Effects

#### Photographic Effects

**Camera Angle** (point of view)
- Tilting the camera up makes the subject seem large and dominating.
- Tilting the camera down makes the subject seem small.

**Lighting**
- Dark, shadowy lighting can add mystery or gloom.
- Bright lighting can create a shiny, happy appearance.
- Soft lighting suggests pleasant feelings.

**Filters**
- Filters alter the image as it gets to the camera, making it fuzzy, sharp, dull, or sparkling.

#### Digital Effects

**Digital Editing**
- Images can be converted to digital computer versions and then altered.

**Digital Reality**
- Images such as babies that dance and animals that talk can be made completely by computer animation.

### Both

**Miniaturization**
- Small models of props or settings can be used to make a subject a giant in comparison.

**Superimposing**
- Two images can be cut or digitally placed on top of each other, making people look as if they are in a jungle or in the air, for example.
Analyze Visual Effects in Advertisements

As a viewer of print ads and commercials, you should know that visual effects are used to capture your attention and to convince you to think a certain way. Just flip through any magazine or watch a TV commercial, and see how advertisers use visual effects. When you create your own advertisements, you should know that visual effects are a valuable tool to help you persuade a target market. Whether you are a viewer or a creator of advertisements, you can become more aware of visual effects by analyzing the different ways they are used.

The following print ad and the television commercial storyboard on the next page use the same visual effect. As you read these ads, identify the visual effect and determine how the effect is used differently in the two different media.

Are you going to tell him you bought a generic lotion for his itchy bug bites? Use Dr. Shay’s Anti-Itch Lotion to tame the toughest itch.
The visual effect used in both of these ads is **camera angle**. Notice that in the print ad and in the first TV storyboard, the boy looks large and imposing because the camera looks up into his face, making him seem huge. However, the print ad could only hint that the lotion would bring the boy back down to size, but the television ad was able to tell the whole story. In the storyboard, you can see the boy getting the lotion and then returning to a more normal size through the use of a different camera angle.

**TIP**

Some commercials deliberately omit information so that you become involved filling in the rest of the story. Can you think of a commercial for which you have to fill in the missing action?

**Analyzing Print and Television Ads**

Find a print ad and a television commercial that both use at least one of the following visual effects. You may choose an ad and a commercial that use the same visual effects or different effects. The effects are explained in the chart on page 262.

- camera angle
- digital editing
- (point of view)
- digital reality
- lighting
- miniaturization
- filters
- superimposing

Record the commercial, if possible, or draw a storyboard for it. Cut out the print advertisement if you have permission. Then, identify the visual effect used in each advertisement and explain what message or impression the effect communicates. Finally, compare the overall effectiveness of both ads.