

Avery Petrie

Dr. Bryan Lutz

Rhetorical Theory

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L'Oréal's Male Targeted Print Advert

Artifact Selection

The artifact I am choosing to analyze is an advertising campaign from L'Oréal Paris Cosmetics. This campaign was titled "This is an ad for men" and was released in Germany in 2019. The campaign was released with the supposed purpose of convincing men to consider expanding diversity in their companies and hiring more women in leadership roles. It consisted of 3 installments, each of which outlined a different advantage of having women in leadership positions. Through this analysis, I hope to answer the research question "is this advertisement *really* meant for men?".

Literature Review

Visual Analyses

In her work, "A Semiotic Analysis of L'ORÉAL Advertisement: *This is an Ad for Men Campaign*", Ni Made Ariani discusses the visual layout and verbal signs of the print advertisement. She uses semiotic theory to dissect the "nail polish" installment of the campaign into 5 pieces: Headline, Illustration, Body Copy, Signature Line, and Standing Details. She also identifies 3 distinct verbal signs, or repeated sentences with a significant meaning: "This is an Ad for Men", "Hire More Women in Leadership Roles", and "We're All Worth it". Lastly, she discusses the three visual signs of the advertisement: the Red Ruby Nail Polish, the Red Background, and the Illustrated Chart. Generally, the findings from this semiotic analysis

identify the repetitive use of red to symbolize power and passion, both in a woman's personal and professional life, and the use of blunt wording in the headings to strategically draw in viewers.

Similarly, in *Cycle of Discourse*, Dara Gading Andari and Nita Sekar Arum use Discourse Analysis to analyze the relationship between the visual and literary elements of the campaign. They use Discourse Analysis to identify 3 functions of the language used: the ideational function (what the text is about), the interpersonal function (relationship between participants), and the textual meaning (how the message is organized). The ideational function is the stating of the benefits of hiring female leaders in corporate settings, with the makeup imagery intending to give the impression that a woman is stating the facts. The interpersonal function is to combine the ideas of women and business to encourage female empowerment, as well as tie the L'Oréal brand to the cause. Lastly, the textual meaning identifies that the headline was used to grab readers attention, and that the red and yellow coloring of the ads was very intentional to invoke feelings of power and hope.

Feminist Critiques

In the article "Postfeminist Discourses Presented in Women-Oriented Advertising (Femvertising): Semiotic Analysis of L'Oréal Paris – 'This is an ad for men' Advertising Posters", Aydan Ünlükaya uses semiotic analysis to determine whether postfeminist discourses coexist with feminist doctrines within these ads to perpetuate male-dominate ideology. This study determines that, while there are feminist undertones in the emphasis of the data for female success in business, these undertones are undermined by the two prominent postfeminist ideas found in the ad. Firstly, the use of makeup products in the campaign does not advertise for L'Oréal as much as it does draw a correlation between a woman's success in the business world

with her adherence to traditional beauty standards. Secondly, the wording used in the headline and taglines throughout the campaign “highlights the necessity for men to accept women’s success, thus approving the dominating patriarchy in the public sphere” (Ünlükaya). This promotes the idea that a woman will always need a man to *allow* her to be successful.

Similarly, Joel Gwynne discusses the idea of “femvertising” and the harm it can cause in his book, *The Cultural Politics of Femvertising: Selling Empowerment*. Gwynne defines “femvertising” as female oriented advertisement, hence the name. While he applauds the spike in women-focused marketing, he warns that “femvertising” often just appropriates feminist ideology, without actually believing or following through with said ideas. He rightfully claims that the visibility of women in the media does not mean equality for the sexes. Gwynne also states that brands follow “femvertising” strategies “have been positioned as self-serving, as having no real desire to enact structural change and are instead motivated solely by profit accumulation” (Gwynne). In essence, brands want to follow trends in their marketing strategies, in order to appeal to a mass market. As long as female empowerment is “in season”, brands will use it to their advantage as a way to profit, without doing anything to actually further the cause.

Methodology

For this analysis, I am choosing to follow the Generic Criticism method. In her book, *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice*, Sonja Foss states that “Generic criticism is rooted in the assumption that certain types of situations provoke similar needs and expectations in audiences and thus call for particular kinds of rhetoric.” Generic criticism allows an artifact to be examined within its intended realm, analyzing aspects that are key in that genre. This particular campaign, in some ways, creates its own unique genre of advertisement. However, I plan to use this method to compare and contrast the elements of this campaign with elements of

well-established, pre-existing advertisement genres: cosmetics and business. In a generic criticism, it is important to outline what aspects of an artifact are required to be considered part of the genre. For a visually heavy, marketing-based artifact, I would consider the most important factors to be visual appeal, aesthetics, language, target audiences, and the content being presented. Firstly, I will define both of the previously mentioned genres using the listed factors, drawing from specific examples of print advertisements within each genre. After doing this, I will outline where this particular campaign fits in and stands out from these genres and speculate why the choices to include or exclude certain elements of each genre were made by the creators of the advertisement.

One strength of this type of rhetorical criticism is its ability to highlight the unexpected. In the realm of marketing, potential customers grow to expect a certain style of advertisements from companies they are familiar with; we expect Nike to use predominantly black and white sports imagery with “Just Do It” displayed in large block letters. We expect Marlboro to exemplify the idea of the American Cowboy, using vintage, western imagery and language. Each of these styles of advertisement falls into a “genre”, or category. Generic criticism allows us to take an artifact and hold it up to some kind of predetermined standard to analyze what is different about that artifact and why that might be. With a company producing a campaign as far off from their typical target as L’Oréal did with “This is an ad for men ”, generic criticism will highlight those differences the most clearly and effectively.

Analysis

To analyze this campaign, I will display and analyze specific examples of typical business-statistic infographics and establish that genre; for the purpose of this analysis, we will refer to this genre as the Business genre. Similarly, I will display and analyze specific examples

of typical L'Oréal cosmetic print advertisements and establish that genre; we will refer to this genre as the Cosmetic genre. Lastly, I will display the L'Oréal "This is an ad for men" campaign and establish it as its own genre, drawing from both the Business and Cosmetic genres.



Figure 1: Ketchum Leadership Communication Monitor

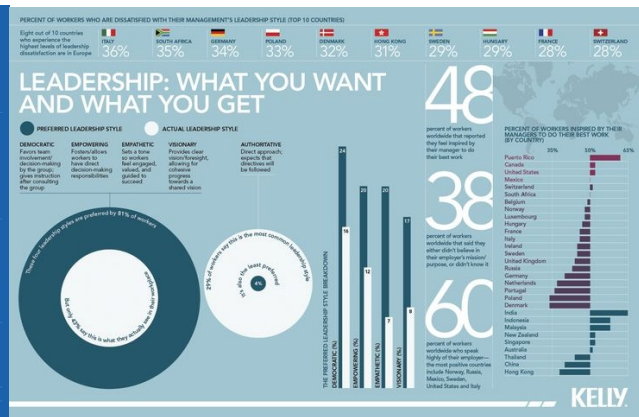


Figure 2: The Leadership Disconnect, Kelly Services

Defining the Business Genre

Pictured above are two examples of a typical business statistic infographic. The infographic on the left was released as part of a study on leadership in 2013 by Ketchum Inc., a global public relations consultancy. The infographic on the right was released in the 2012 Kelly Global Workforce Index (KGWI), entitled "The Leadership Disconnect", by Kelly Services, a global employment agency.

Visually, these graphics are very cluttered and packed full of information. The primary purpose of these graphics is simply to display as much relevant data as possible to the reader. The graphics do use some small images and icons, and these correlate directly with the data presented (Ex. The Ketchum graphic pictures a shopping cart image where it discusses consumer buying habits). The coloring of this genre of infographics is typically very light and cool-toned, using blues, whites, and grays. These colors are typically interpreted as being professional, clean, and trustworthy. The fonts are very easily legible, with important text or numbers having an increased size for easy recognition. There is little room for artistic creativity or any kind of

artwork in this genre. There is no ulterior motive or underlying message; it simply presents the information to its audience. This genre typically markets itself toward middle-aged, white collar men in leadership, management, or executive positions within a company. This is not to say that people outside of this demographic cannot and do not benefit from the information presented in this genre of infographic, but this is the target demographic that is kept in mind when developing this genre of graphic.



Defining the Cosmetic Genre

Pictured above are three examples of a typical cosmetic advertisement from L'Oréal Cosmetics. Each advertisement focuses on a specific product that L'Oréal has put on the market. These ads are typically found in magazines, but also span television and social media for a wider reach. These ads are targeted toward young adult, middle-aged, and aging women, depending on the product being marketed (makeup products tend to be marketed toward younger audiences, skincare products toward aging audiences). The purpose of this type of advertisement is to sell a specific product.

These ads tend to follow a simple formula: beautiful, “ideal” woman + the product that will help you look like her. These ads, at their core, play off of women’s insecurities to encourage them to purchase their product. Despite L'Oréal’s tagline being “Because You’re

Worth It” and the brand’s overall message of female empowerment, one cannot deny the underlying superficiality found within these advertisements. Whether this common thread is a choice made by L’Oréal when creating their ads, or if it is just an intricacy of the industry is somewhat of a question. For the purpose of this analysis, this aspect will be defined as part of the Cosmetic Genre.

Visually, these advertisements are somewhat simplistic. They tend to display one woman, as discussed earlier, typically a close-up portrait. The woman is usually wearing minimal visible clothing or revealing clothing. There is a very minimal amount of information and almost no data in the ads, only an image of the product, its name, and occasionally a small description of the benefits of usage. Only one product is advertised as a time, differing from the Business Genre where the goal is to display as much information as possible. Imagery in the Cosmetic Genre is typically kept very simple, being mostly black and white with accents of red and gold. Red is perceived to be a very sensual and attractive color, and gold is perceived to be expensive and luxurious, making them ideal for advertisements about beauty products.



Contrasting “This is an ad for men”

Pictured above are the three infographics released as part of L’Oréal’s 2019 ad campaign entitled “This is an ad for men”. This campaign was released after research was conducted in Germany uncovering that 91.4% of management and executive boards in the country were actively being controlled by men. The leftmost image features a mascara wand painting a graph displaying data about the increase of employee satisfaction with the presence of female leaders and mentors. This data was collected by a 2016 multinational study from Korn Ferry Hay Group entitled “New Research Shows Women Are Better at Using Soft Skills Crucial for Effective Leadership and Superior Business Performance”. The center image features 4 tubes of lipstick in the shape of a graph displaying the increase of revenue with the presence of female leaders. This data was collected from the Peterson Institute for International Economics in a 2016 study entitled “Is Gender Diversity Profitable? Evidence from a Global Survey”. The rightmost image features a spilled nail polish bottle in the shape of a graph displaying the increase of patents over time when female leaders are appointed. This data was collected from the University of Arizona Eller College of Management in a 2018 Analysis of Fortune 500 companies.

Visually, this campaign falls into a unique category, drawing from certain aspects of both genres. First, it is noticeably similar to the typical Cosmetic genre artifacts in a number of ways. First, these infographics are very simplistic, with only one piece of data and makeup product in each graphic. The coloring is primarily red, black, and gold, all sensual, attractive colors that are common in cosmetic advertisements. It differs from the typical Cosmetic genre in several ways as well. Most noticeably, there is no specific product being advertised. While they do display beauty products that L’Oréal does sell, there are no listed product names, prices, sales or

discounts, or anything that could be tied to a specific product offered by L'Oréal. The primary purpose of this campaign seems to simply be to share unbiased information to a primarily male audience in an effective manner, a key element of the Business Genre, though the graphs presented in the L'Oréal ads are not as clearly displayed as in a typical business statistic release.

Critical Reflection

One source claims that this marketing campaign received over 5 million “total reaches”, or views, across social media platforms (Li), though this number has not been confirmed. Assuming its accuracy, this statistic may seem to imply overwhelming success and support for the campaign. However, this is far from the truth. The current United States population falls around 326.7 million people. According to a study in 2023 concerning haircare users in the United States and their familiarity with L'Oréal found that 19% of respondents actively use L'Oréal products in their routines (Kunst). So, according to this study, roughly 61.9 million people in the United States alone use L'Oréal haircare products. However, this survey had an incredibly small sample size relative to the total population. But, assuming even a 99.99% confidence rate (i.e. any given statistic will fall into this range 99.99% of the time), the margin of error of this study is only $\pm 4.514\%$. This means that, using the data in this study, at most 23.514% of Americans (76 million people) use L'Oréal in their hair care routines and at least 14.486% of Americans (47 million people) use L'Oréal in their hair care routines. Additionally, this survey found that 86% of people are simply familiar with L'Oréal as a brand, roughly 280 million people. The 5 million social media accounts reached by this particular ad campaign simply pales in comparison to the typical reach that L'Oréal has by name alone, especially when considering that this was a multinational campaign and these given statistics come solely from US residents.

Despite its generally low visibility across its intended audience, has this campaign affected the industry of women in business in the 5 years since it has been released? All signs point to no. But clearly, it will take more than one print advertisement to systematically change the business industry. However, this leads us to question what the actual purpose of this campaign was. Early, we assumed that the *supposed* purpose of this campaign was to share unbiased business statistics aimed toward men, encouraging men to hire and utilize women in leadership roles. This is clearly supported by the title of the campaign, “This is an ad for men”. However, this is not the true, primary purpose of the campaign.

Firstly, if this ad truly was created to target men, it is visually inconsistent with that audience. As earlier defined, this campaign visually aligns much more closely with the Cosmetic Genre than it does with the Business Genre, meaning it caters to a female audience. This ad was meant to stand out. Women, who are generally more familiar with typical cosmetic advertisements, will see this ad and immediately recognize that there is something different about it. They will realize that no product is being sold, that there is no product description, and no image of an idealistic woman. They can recognize these differences due to their familiarity with the genre. Men, who generally have very little familiarity with cosmetic advertisements, will not be able to glance at this ad and see these differences because they have no predetermined expectations when dealing with the Cosmetic Genre. Therefore, men will likely glance at this ad, see that it falls into a field that they have no interest in, and immediately move on without taking in the information. It is for this reason that this campaign likely had more female interactions than male.

Secondly, this campaign offers no direct support to the cause it claims to be advocating for. It does not claim to contribute financially to related organizations, nor does it help give

visibility or encouragement to any women in business or any female-owned/operated/managed businesses. If this advertisement was truly a campaign, advocating for or pushing a cause, it is missing its *quo vadimus*, the “so what?”. Without some kind of call to action, these infographics fall short of being a successful campaign. And if these infographics are not intended to inform men, due to the inconsistent rhetoric that is completely inapplicable to a male audience, are not intended to call viewers to action in some way, then the primary purpose of this ad campaign is to simply place L’Oréal, as a brand, on the “right” side of history in order to increase net profitability by merely claiming to support women in business. While this evaluation may seem harsh, it is notable to add that every member of the team that created and produced this ad was male (Stych).

Conclusion

This series of advertisements was very visually creative and aesthetically well done. However, data shows that it was generally unsuccessful in spreading the idea of promoting women in business. When analyzed under the scope generic criticism, we can see why it was so unsuccessful. L’Oréal created a new genre of advertisement, drawing from two previously established genres. These two genres, however, have virtually opposite purposes, audiences, and modes of displaying information. The combining of these genres causes a huge grey area of who these ads are targeting, and who they are actually reaching. Had the creators of this ad campaign understood the genres they were trying to join or combine before releasing the campaign, they would have been able to identify their target audience and purpose more clearly and would have likely had much more success. Additionally, analyzing this campaign through generic criticism allowed for greater understanding of this campaign and its assets, which could be useful for any potential future advertisements of this type.

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