

**Applied Term Paper**

Emma Glascock

Toronto Metropolitan University

SEM 101

Jamin Pelkey

April 19, 2024

## **Introduction: Contextual and Theoretical Overview**

This assignment is based on an Ikea advertisement released in September of 2020. This advertisement was chosen by me, based on its applicable attributes surrounding the study of semiotics. This will be a four-stage process, including a theoretical introduction, textual analysis, visual analysis, and interpretive synthesis. I will go through each while applying key theoretical concepts from the course. The paper will begin with a contextual and theoretical overview. This will be in the context of both the text and image. I will then do a diagram-style analysis of text on the image, pulling and annotating each as displayed. Below, I will dive deeper into each piece of text and find what each means. After analyzing the text, I will analyze the image. As I did a diagram analysis on the text, I will do the same for the image. I will do this by annotating the aspects of it. Then below, I will describe the analysis, and therefore, annotation. With both the image and text analysis, I will describe the textual interactions. I will then conclude the paper with a synthetic, and integrated interpretation. I will connect ideas and explain post full analysis, the connection, describe my findings, and discoveries, with a concluded overall message.

When this Ikea campaign came out in September of 2020, I had come across it and found it to be an interesting, captivating, advertisement. The fact that it was able to engage with so many people was due to it being spread over the media frequently. When a company has a well done advertisement, the media/society will cover it, instead of turn it down. The idea of selling items like pillows or duvets in relation to eye cream or melatonin was brilliant. When people saw the ad, they felt the semiotic background and wanted to purchase. The image is captivating. This image matters to me because of how influential it was to me when I was introduced to it at the time of its release. Because of this, I know from an audience member how influential it is to the public. This is with the use of semiotics. In relation, this image should matter to others. This is

due to Ikea's success at using semiotics to influence sales. Therefore, others should know how semiotics can influence sales through the capture of imagery metaphor. "Three ads spoof fad products like energy drinks, anti-aging creams and vitamin supplements—but with Ikea sleep products playfully inserted into the scenes. The point being that there really are no shortcuts to the physical benefits of a good night's sleep. The campaign "challenges sleep neglect by celebrating the truth that the more you sleep, the more you get out of life," according to press materials." (Nudd, 2020).

Within this paper, I will be discussing key terms and concepts learned and used in class. These terms and concepts will consist of icon, index, symbol, connotation, denotation, visual rhetoric, conceptual metaphors, and oppositional relations. The context in which I will refer to each, and their definition, is as follows. Icon, a sign of real resemblance, index, a sign of real connection, and symbol, a sign of real habitual, will be referred to when analyzing written texts and visuals. Connotation, the implicit meaning, and denotation, the explicit meaning, will be referred to when analyzing in ways that the advertisement has to be dissected but also seen for what it is. Visual rhetoric, the use of images to communicate, will then be connected through connotation and denotation. Further, it will be connected to what they are as visual and non-visual codes. With visual rhetoric, also comes the linguistic aspect. I will use and include this when speaking to the text given. All are interdependent. Structural relations, the idea of opposition, is referred to in the context of sleep. The opposition is between the natural and unnatural ways to get the benefits (anti-aging) of sleep. The natural way, sleep, versus the less natural way, anti-aging cream. Natural versus unnatural are opposites. This is a positive opposition. Positive opposition, (compatible) mutually defining pairs, may not get along well but are meant to be together. They are "contrary" relations.

This paper goes through stages of analysis. In the first part of the analysis, I will focus on the written text of the image. This part is extremely necessary when absorbing the full meaning wanted to be conveyed by the brand. Post analysis of the written text, I will analyze the visual image of the advertisement. The visual image is about interpretation. This is due to the viewer needing to visualize and understand quickly, the signifier and signify. This is easier and faster to grasp, as opposed to reading and dissecting a metaphor. The visual and textual aspects are analyzed separately, but one without the other would be dysfunctional. The two work together to be one signifying system. By having the two analyses, I will then be able to connect and reveal the meaning behind the ad. When doing so, I will conclude the paper. I will include my findings and concluding feelings.



Tomorrow starts tonight



THE WONDERFUL EVERYDAY



Tomorrow starts tonight



THE WONDERFUL EVERYDAY

### **Textual Analysis: Written Language**

This is the first analysis of the advertisement, the textual analysis. When looking at the advertisement, there are multiple areas of text. There is text on the bottle, as well as below the image on what is the literal poster. The first piece of text shown is “Sleep”. The text is meant to resemble the brand of the cream. This is clear through the boldness and central location on the bottle. The next piece of text is, “THE MOST NATURAL ANTI-AGEING REMEDY”. This is written on the bottle in resemblance to the description for the “cream”. It is in replacement of what a normal bottle would say towards the product's desirable feature(s). It describes that sleep, either in the context of the brand name or literal sleep, is the most natural way to decrease aging. While the bottle is supposed to contain cream, it is replaced with a duvet, in the shape/arrangement of whipped anti-aging cream. The third section of text on the container is “7.5 TOG”. TOG is the type of duvet (thermal overall grade). This is in replacement of the usual text regarding the amount of cream contained in the bottle (mL). The last section of text is on the literal ad. “Tomorrow starts tonight” is written at the bottom of the ad, below the image. This ad is a part of a campaign. In the campaign, two other images run along this one. One for melatonin, and the other for an energy drink. Both use the slogan "Tomorrow starts tonight.". A campaign positioning the home-goods retailer as sleep experts. This was the base of the advertisements signifier. (Nudd, 2020).

The sign relations apparent in the written text are a dyadic relationship, the signifier and signified. The signifier, which brings something else to mind based on the relationship of difference, is the bottle saying that it is the most natural way of decreasing aging. The signified, what something means for a given social group, is the meaning behind that message. This means that the duvet is a replacement for the anti-aging cream. This is why the bottle can say that it is

the most natural way of anti-aging. While it is not the product that decreases aging, it is what the product supports you in.

The type of opposition at work is a negative opposition. Negative opposition refers to something being incompatible. In the oppositional relationship, one term is primary. This opposition is based on the bottle saying that it is the most natural way of anti-aging. This is a contradiction due to it not being cream in the bottle but rather a duvet. A duvet is not found in a cream bottle. Cream/not cream is the opposition. The textual aspects are the text on the bottle and the text on the advertisement itself. The text on the literal advertisement is a slogan. This slogan is for a campaign. The text on the actual bottle is a group of descriptors. They describe what should be a bottle of cream, but is an Ikea duvet. Descriptors being a brand name, benefits, and amount. Each aspect of the text is either iconic (resemblance), symbolic (association), or indexical (connection). The “brand name” and “cream descriptor” are both symbolic. They are associated with what would typically be written on a facial cream bottle. The replacement of text being related to the duvet and sleep campaign is the only difference. Both the format and style are the same. This is why it is easy to make the association. The “amount of cream” (TOG) is iconic. This is due to it resembling mL. TOG is referring to the quality of thermal in the duvet. It is similar in appearance to mL; both are acronyms. Due to the visual similarities, the designers thought to replace mL with TOG to strengthen the campaign.

The connotative meaning, the cultural/implicit meaning, in this situation, is the understanding of duvets being related to sleep. Even further, is the understanding of duvets supporting sleep to then be a form of anti-aging. Unlike wearing anti-aging cream, you can have healthy, young, skin by getting proper sleep every night. Anti-aging cream could be considered, to the public, as a loophole for natural anti-aging. The idea of sleep being anti-aging is

connotative. This is because while it is true that it helps with your health, you can't "anti-age". The denotative meaning, the literal/explicit meaning, is that sleep is healthy. The text represents connotative and denotative both with the sense of labels and descriptions.

The conceptual metaphors and conceptual blends implied in the written text are represented strongly in the slogan, "Tomorrow starts tonight". "Tomorrow starts tonight" is a contradicting sentence. The conceptual metaphor is more specifically an orientational metaphor. The idea of time, and the use of spatial orientation towards time, (present and future), show the idea of the present highly influencing the future. Tomorrow is in the future but has already started. This is due to "tonight" influencing it. The spatial orientation of time conveys the abstract. It creates the urge to take charge of your present to benefit your future. This metaphor is done to sell duvets and pillows; both of which are for sleep, an action for health and future benefits. Concluding from this textual analysis, it has come clear to the first meaning behind the advertisement. The meaning that has been produced through these written textual interactions is that the duvet is in replacement of the anti-aging cream and because of this, the bottle can say that it is the most natural way for anti-aging. This means that sleep trumps any other form of anti-aging. The company is able to use the natural aspect that their man-made product influences to advertise sentences that no other company or product could use with factual evidence to support their claims. In summary, Ikea uses the fact that duvets, used for sleep, can take credit for sleep, which anti-ages you, to strengthen their average product.

### **Visual Analysis: Image Components**

The next analysis I will do is the visual analysis. When viewing the image, there is one image. It is of what seems to be a facial cream bottle opened. It visually resembles what looks to

be a facial cream ad such as a Neutrogena advertisement. The top of the container is behind the substance itself to create an illusion of the substance being larger than it is. The way that the photographers and designers center the object, and put it closely to the camera, allows the viewer/buyer to concentrate on the product. The ad is for a duvet from Ikea. Instead of the ad being of a plain square duvet, they took the creative, and semiotic route. In replacement of the cream in the bottle, is the advertised duvet. It is in the shape of a newly packaged skin cream. The duvet is twirled and positioned exactly as cream from a skincare brand ad would have. It is so visually close that it requires a second look to figure out why this ad could be from Ikea, a furniture and home decor store.

The sign relations apparent in the visual image are the signifier and signified. The signifier, which brings something else to mind based on the relationship of difference, is the fact that the duvet is in replacement of the cream. Looking at the “bottle of cream”, with the label of “sleep”, your mind goes right to anti-aging or sleep cream. The signified, what something means for a given social group, is what the real meaning is. The “bottle of cream” is a duvet in the bottle.

The type of opposition at work is a positive opposition. Positive oppositions are when the two aspects rely on each other to exist. They are compatible and meant to be together, despite not always getting along. The opposition is between the two terms, natural and unnatural. A natural way of anti-aging versus an unnatural way of anti-aging. Ikea, the brand of the ad, is selling the healthy way and therefore can hook the audience with that point. The visual aspects are the cream bottle consisting of a duvet as opposed to consisting of anti-aging cream. Each aspect of the image is either iconic (resemblance), symbolic (association), or indexical (connection). The duvet in the image is iconic. This is because the duvet is meant to resemble a skin cream.

Photographers and graphic designers put together the image so that the duvet is visually associated with what is supposed to look like cream. The bottle is indexical. This is due to it being the same item in either context of it containing cream or a duvet. It has a connection.

Visual rhetoric is the use of images to communicate. Using this, we can look into the connotative and denotative meanings. Connotative, the cultural/implicit meaning, is that sleep (duvet) and facial cream are great for anti-aging. In the visual analysis there are two properties of anti-aging, cream and sleep. They are opposites but have an appearance in common. The two have the same effect of helping with your physical appearance. The denotative meaning, the literal/explicit meaning, is that facial cream and sleep both help with anti-aging. They can both be used and shown in opposition. “Because in advertising the signification of the image is undoubtedly intentional; the signifieds of the advertising message are formed a priori by certain attributes of the product and these signifieds have to be transmitted as clearly as possible.” (Barthes, 1964)

From here, the ad can be seen for the conceptual metaphor that the visual is producing. The image is a representation of sleep, anti-aging, rejuvenation, and youth. The more specific type of metaphor it is, is an ontological metaphor. An ontological metaphor is where a concrete object represents or conveys an emotion. This is because the duvet resembles an anti-aging cream and therefore the qualities that come with it. It relates characteristics of a cream such as youthfulness, and health, to the product being sold, the duvet. From this, it is implied that the duvet will give you great sleep, resulting in youth and health.

Concluding from this visual analysis, the meaning produced through these interactions is that opposites can be the same. Sleep, natural, and anti-aging creams, unnatural, while opposites, can be visually the same. In skin care campaigns, companies make the cream visually appealing,

in ways of looking fresh and whipped. Ikea can not push the same feeling in their advertising if they just used their product of an average-looking, square duvet. That's why they took advantage of selling their product on the same level as a skin cream, a product associated with youth, in a marketable, aesthetic design.

### **Conclusion/Synthesis: Integrated Interpretation and Conclusion**

After finishing this analysis, I have developed a strong synthesis and integrated interpretation. I was able to dissect the image and then figure out the meanings through sign relations, oppositions, icons, symbols, indexes, rhetoric, connotation/denotation, and conceptual metaphors/blends. I have found that the meanings are both textual and visual. Through textual interaction, meaning has been found through the duvet being in replacement of anti-aging cream. That is why the bottle can say that it is the most natural way of anti-aging. Through visual interaction, it has become clear to me that the meaning is visual opposites can mean the same. Visual opposites, such as the cream and duvet, both represent sleep. They both can be positioned in the advertisement to mean the same thing, though diminishing one, the unnatural cream. It can be concluded that Ikea wants buyers to associate their specific product with anti-aging and/or skin creams that work well. They want buyers to know that these creams, and the feelings associated with them, can easily be replaced with the one-time purchase of their duvet.

The meanings produced by these two layers relate to each other because of how Ikea, the brand, wants buyers to think of their product as the best possible way to “anti-age”. The bottle isn’t filled with cream but rather with their product. That is because a cream brand couldn't claim to be the best way to anti-age. Ikea can take that claim because they are “selling sleep”. While

they can't sell physical sleep, they are selling you a product that will greatly assist with perfect sleep and has the same benefits as a skin cream. That's where brand marketing comes in.

While they use semiotics perfectly to convey opposites of unnatural and natural, cream and sleep, they are using these concepts to sell their products and increase sales. The products being sold aren't new or exclusive to their store; duvets are available at an abundance of stores. A consumer doesn't see any desire towards a specific duvet store. That is until they get hooked with good marketing. This is that. The two meanings are different in the ways they exist to show connection and disconnection. I wouldn't say that they conflict with each other because they support each other. They support the idea of increase in profit/sales. They are in harmony because of this.

In conclusion, the meanings produced by these two analyses relate to each other. This is done through image and text. I have discovered that semiotics is used in advertisements as a way to capture that side of buyers. As learned in class, we all have a semiotic forward brain. Whether or not we acknowledge it, semiotics are constantly being shown and interacted with us. To use this in support of a campaign, or selling a single product, makes so much sense. It clicks with a subconscious part of our brain. It convinces us that the product is a good choice, over another company selling the same product, with no semiotic support. This means that we are constantly being influenced, with and by, signs, and symbols without even realizing it. Not until this class did I analyze images, such as advertisements, so thoroughly. This goes along with others in society. We all get so easily influenced online, and in person, to buy items without realizing that the influence stems from semiotics itself. Overall, the image and text's message seem to be effective due to it connecting to the human's semiotics subconscious.

### References

Nudd, T. (2020, September 23). *Ikea Spoofs Fad Products in Print Ads About the Wonders of*

*Sleep*. Muse by Clio. Retrieved April 13, 2024, from

<https://musebycl.io/advertising/ikea-spoofs-fad-products-print-ads-about-wonders-sleep>

Barthes, R. (1964). *Rhetoric of the Image*. *Communications*, 4, 151-163.

[https://www.dropbox.com/s/f7rh5vfr095y46h/Week06\\_Barthes%20-%20Rhetoric-of-the-image.p  
df?e=3&dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/s/f7rh5vfr095y46h/Week06_Barthes%20-%20Rhetoric-of-the-image.pdf?e=3&dl=0)