

## VISUAL PERSUASION- A CREATIVE ASPECT IN COMMUNICATION

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### **ABSTRACT**

Ever since the inception of art in prehistoric times, images have been an integral part of it. In today's modern scenario, modes of advertising and communication have extensive use of images to persuade people for decision making. Computers and graphics techniques have made a sea change in the representation of images as per the desired requirement. We often identify the effectiveness of a persuasive image through its impact on viewer's behavioral pattern, consumer appeal, psychological attributes etc. This study thus demonstrates that how the emphasis on visual persuasion may lead to a new vision with media analysis, psychology, and visual communication. Images in TV commercials, magazine ads, or any other forms of advertising makes the idea or message very convenient to perceive and understand. Visual Persuasion simulates the appearance of the physical world by becoming surrogate objects of desire or other emotions associated with the products. The study will analyze the role of visual messages and explore how visual elements can modify, redefine or re-contextualize what is verbally communicated. It also employs the certain theories of visual communication to understand the inferences of visual elements. The paper concludes with the notion that appropriate use of visuals not only stimulates consumers perception but also motivates the desired behavior change in consumers.

**KEYWORDS:** *Consumer Behaviour, Mass Media, Persuasion, Psychology, Visual Communication*

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### **Article History**

**Received: 07 Mar 2018 | Revised: 19 Mar 2018 | Accepted: 07 Apr 2018**

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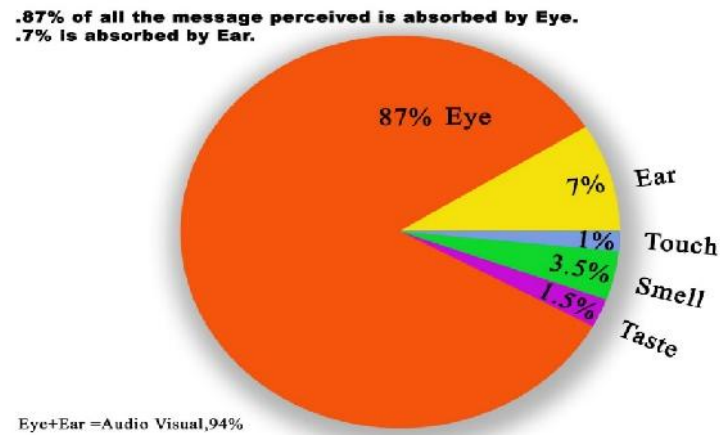
### **INTRODUCTION**

Visual communication can be better understood as the delivering information through pictorial references such as photographs, cartoons, drawings, images, gestures and other representations of people. Visuals empowers a design or a layout and enables quick attention of audiences.

John Debes was the first to bring the term Visual literacy into existence as an ability to understand and differentiate things prevailing in the environment, assimilate them for effective communication. Persuasion is a core function of communication, aimed at influencing audience beliefs, desires, and actions. A persuasive image has a primary motive to persuade the viewer and intend to have an emotional appeal resulting in higher persuasion rate since it strikes the cords of the consumers. This paper is aimed at understanding the underlying intents of persuasive images. Consumers tend to believe their own eyes.

Based on the viewers' belief that photography is directly related to reality, images turn to prove all advertising claims believable, which may have been unacceptable if they were spelled out verbally.

With the paradigm shift in technology, Visuals have paved their ways everywhere today, from electronic media, digital media to outdoor media.



**Figure 1**

### Visual Persuasion in Advertising

According to James Carey, a Communication educator ‘*Communication is fundamentally and essentially a matter of persuasion, attitude change, behavior modification and socialization through the transmission of information.*’

Persuasion depends upon elements of infotainment i.e. the factual information and emotional appeal required to change a consumer’s perception into the desired action. Persuasion, roots back to the ancient Greeks and was propagated by the famous Greek Philosopher Aristotle. According to him, a persuasive consumer must react according to the message being delivered to him through visuals and similarly, the visual communication should reach to its intended audience. So ,in short, it’s a vice-versa strategy. Even before the concept of advertising developed with mass media, Aristotle recognized the idea of segmented audiences and the value of catering the message to a target market. He strongly believed in 3 basic parameters (ethos, pathos and logos) to judge persuasion as successful or unsuccessful. To appeal to an audience, customized communication in forms of persuasion plays a major role. Ethos refers to the ethical appeal or proof of the author’s credibility while pathos means to persuade through emotional appeal. Logos, being the final judgment criteria for a persuasive message, is the appeal to logic or reasoning. Successful persuasion must possess a combination of all three to target to an audience and influence their behavior.

Visual rhetoric is the term given to study of visual images which also dates back to classical Greece. Douglas Ehninger (1972) explained rhetoric as “the ways in which humans may influence each other’s thinking and behavior through the strategic use of visuals.” Today Persuasion has become an integral part of advertising because marketers find it very easy to erode any functional advantage involved with a product. Companies are now finding new innovative methods of reaching the consumers. As known to all, “Persuasion is considered as a symbolic process to convince viewers to change their attitudes or behavior towards an issue through the transmission of a message, in an atmosphere of free choice.” As a very effective element for marketing, it allows a free flow of information in interpersonal relations thereby producing valuable results.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of literature underlines the experimental nature of visuals in advertising and promotional campaigns. It also highlights the change in consumer's attitude and mindset depending up on visual persuasion.

## AIM & OBJECTIVE

This study provides an overview of the aim and objectives of visual persuasion as a whole and in comparison with other aspects of communication.

## METHODOLOGY

The study engaged cognitive theories to explain the implications involved in visual communication. The cognitive theory presupposes that a viewer arrives at a conclusion after seeing an image through his mental operations. If an image looks similar to one that a viewer has seen before then he will rely on his memory to accurately perceive the image. This ,in turn, affects what they actually see. The expectation is another mental process that affects visual perception. We all have a preconceived expectation as for how certain things should appear and this can lead to a fake visual perception.

The data for my study was collected from advertisements aired on the Indian television. The data collected were based on the following television commercials:

### A 'Condom' Brand



Figure 2: Recent TVC of MOODS Condoms

### Lifebuoy Advertisement



Figure 3: Recent TVC of Lifebuoy

### Cigarette Smoking Ad Seen in Cinema Halls with a Kid



**Figure 4: A Commercial of No Smoking Extensively Shown in Theatres**

A small sample population of forty viewers was used to assess the viewers' responses to the advertisements. The sample consisted of ten school children, fifteen college going students and fifteen married men. While the sample cannot be said to completely be a perfect representative of the viewers, it represents a portion of the target audience for each of the advertisements. The respondents were asked certain questions to analyze and record their reactions after viewing of the above advertisements. They were to cite which visuals made a lasting impression on them? The visuals were also assessed on the basis of appeal, acceptability, persuasiveness, possible offensiveness and relevance.

The following questions guided in the interpretation of the visual messages-

- What are the dominant visual images in the adverts?
- Do the visual elements make a successful message to be delivered?
- What makes such advertisements view repeatedly by the audience?
- Do the images suggest a behavioral change for the audience?

### FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

Results comprise of detailed analysis of qualitative data derived of visual persuasion. The data collected was categorized into the visuals and the words used. All the data collected from the television adverts were in form of narratives and figural representation.

**Narrative 1:** The first advert (Figure 1) was seen with disinterest by the children group for being using the provocative or adult visualization which certainly was not there but the Indian mind-set tends to overpower all justifications. It was further focussed on youth and married groups to find out their reactions. Use of explicit image was able to capture their attention which reacted on the image of a girl being used as the most dominant one for the pack of condom. With a positive attitude almost half of them added that in India, it's a common perception that adult content cannot be telecast during prime time, which is also considered as 'family time' viewing. But the fact is that the Government regulatory body of National Family Planning Programme of India had widely accepted and introduced condom as one of the major family planning methods in late 1960s. Today ties have changed and with the revolution in consumer psychology, they are no more hesitant in viewing and getting acquainted with such products which ensure their protection against both unintended pregnancies as well as sexually transmitted diseases like HIV. Usage of Females as models for such advertisements may give trolls to the stereotype society but this fact cannot be ignored that such images

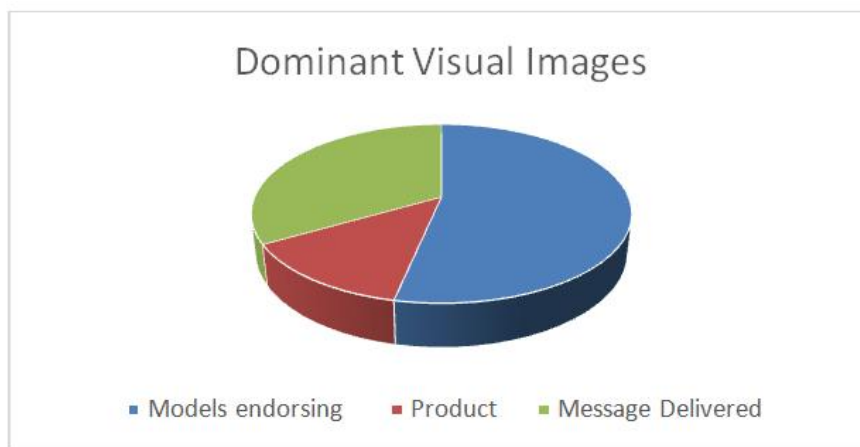
have a powerful audience appeal. The stronger the symbolism in terms of expressiveness or suggestiveness in a picture, the greater would be its power to impress or stimulate. If what the picture represents is symbolic, its power is still doubled. Symbolism can create mood and is thus one of the dominant factors in mood creation. Visuals create definite moods and stimulate feelings which may lead to acceptance or rejection on the part of the viewer. In this advertisement it is said “Play it right” using an image of a young attractive girl lying down semi-nude in a seductive position. The ad is symbolic and has meanings that the viewer has to interpret, but at the same time, it is representational because the product has been endorsed by an attractive body. The associations thus made with the product are related to the features presented by the visual (youth, sexuality, provocation). Therefore, by being open to new ways of thinking, the brand creates an image of itself which might be appealing to the target audience.

**Narrative 2:** In this advertisement (Figure 2) presence of a popular Bollywood celebrity Kajol endorsing the brand made a great impact in reaching the masses about the product. The advert was being seen by all the three age groups and further their reactions and feedbacks were counted. The objective of this commercial was to educate masses to adopt such practices which may lead to good 'health and hygiene'. The visual intended to spread awareness about germs and their adverse effects on health, and how proper 'health and hygiene' practices, such as bathing and washing hands with soap could prevent diseases like diarrhea. The sample viewers acknowledged the campaign and supported the cause. During the survey process, the viewers accepted the power of visual in bringing a behavioral change by convincing people to use soaps more frequently, thus creating more users for its brand. They further supported the notion of a simple act of washing the hands and maintaining hygiene.

**Narrative 3:** In the commercial (Figure 3) it is quite evident that public service ads are put together to remind us that life is a grim business. Addictions are hard to shake off. The emotional appeal of a father and daughter through this advert is powerful enough to convey the deliberate message of losing the loved ones with a bad habit of Smoking. Although some might not get affected and continue to smoke as a style statement, some might pay heed to the cause before their last moment falls. Visual Persuasion thus is capable enough to convey a public service message to masses which in turn may expect to get a positive revert.

**Further the Quantitative Analysis for the Survey Questions was-**

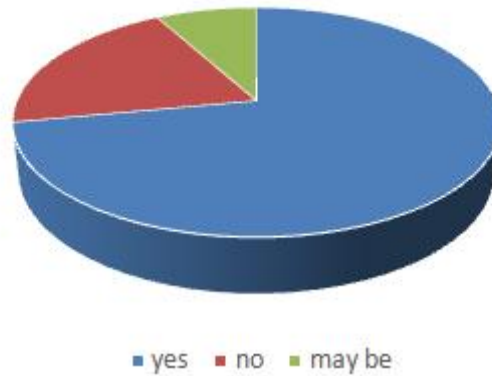
- What are the dominant visual images in the adverts?



**Figure 5**

- Do the visual elements make a successful message to be delivered?

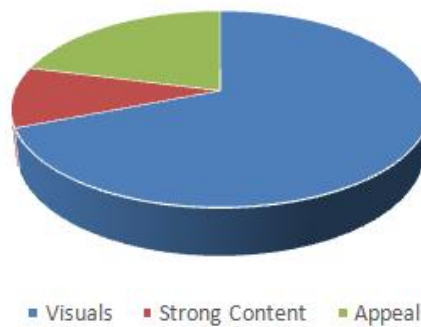
### Visual Element= Effective Message



**Figure 6**

- What makes such advertisements view repeatedly by the audience?

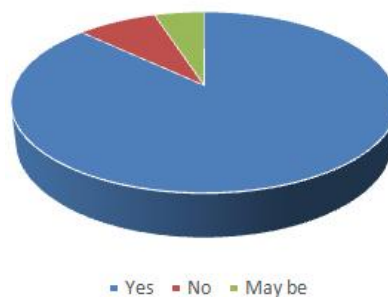
### Factors responsible for multiple viewing



**Figure 7**

- Do the images suggest a behavioral change for the audience?

### Change in Behaviour



**Figure 8**

## CONCLUSIONS

The paper concludes that Visual Persuasion is truly a power of convincing and communicating through visual as opposed to verbal and other means. The visual message easily grabs people’s attention and effectively acts on their emotion. Visual images have thus become a predominant means of transmitting information in this century.

Creating messages that have interesting visuals can go a long way in encouraging behavior change. The use of symbolic signs that have elements that can be identified and understood by the targeted viewers only are also appropriate for messages that do not have a wider societal acceptance such as the Condom Ads. It is believed that visual persuasion has the superiority in memory over words. The ability of a picture is to create mental images in the receiver's mind which further provide the basis for identification of the advertised product in the actual purchase situation. Visual images used in persuasive communication are widely and primarily associated with their uses in frivolous entertainment, slick advertisement and consumer manipulation. Consumers tend to have a naturally strong reaction to the images and its usage in advertising campaigns has further progressed throughout the years branching into new directions and embracing new technological developments. We live in an increasingly jaded and advertising-saturated world, where images have become a vital part and as prospective customers, we must adapt to the changing conditions and changing tastes. Visual Persuasion has thus become an inseparable tool as well as the basic necessity for the modern advertising world.

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