

## **Intertextuality in Drug and Dietary Supplement Ads: Maximizing Relevance**

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines the use of visuals and discourse features of advertisements for drugs and dietary supplements in four different monthly health magazines. Drawing on Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory, the present study compared the form and organization of linguistic and visual elements in the ads through a discourse analysis approach. The findings show that drug ads depended more on visuals to reconstruct contexts that the potential consumers could relate to than ads for dietary supplements. This contextual effect thus maximized the relevance of products to the magazine readers. Three discourse features that reflect intertextuality were identified in the data, including adopting discourse representation or speech reportage, mixing discourse types, and recycling. Both visuals and linguistics/discourse devices were used strategically to a certain extent in order to reinforce the contextual implicature and relevance between products and potential consumers.

Key words: discourse analysis, drug ads, dietary supplement ads, intertextuality, visual analysis

## **INTRODUCTION**

This study examines the advertisements for dietary supplements and drugs in four monthly magazines that target different groups of readers. The purpose was to investigate the use of visuals and discourse features of the ads and examine how the use of such features creates or maximizes the products' relevance to potential consumers. Although both drug and dietary supplement advertisements belong to the same genre of media discourse and can be considered as a type of medical discourse due to the nature of the products, the strategies ad copywriters resort to can vary to some extent because different products tend to target different groups of consumers. Both the form and the organization of linguistic and visual elements in the two kinds of ads will be analyzed and compared. The notion of intertextuality and Sperber and Wilson's (1995) relevance theory will be used as analytical frameworks in this study.

In her discussion of relevance theory and the language of advertising, Byrne (1992) notes, "[advertising] is an exercise in communication economics in which the communicator endeavors to utilize scarce resources in the best and most effective

combination to bring the desired return” (p. 1). It is a genre of media discourse with persuasive intent. Whether it is used to inform the public of or to promote a certain product or idea, advertising falls into the category of persuasive communication that can be found in various genres of media discourse (e.g., TV, radio, magazines, newspapers, posters, and commercial websites) (Rotzoll, 1985). Most often, the main purpose of advertisers is to alter viewers’ behavior, level of awareness, knowledge, and attitudes “in a manner that would be beneficial to them” (Rotzoll, 1985, p. 94).

Rotzoll (1985) defines advertisements as a “symbol package” with several characteristics (p. 99). First, advertisements lack immediate feedback. The feedback is usually inferred from the increase or decrease of product sales. Second, repetition of the same message can usually be observed in most advertisements, whether it’s through verbal or visual enhancement. Third, ads commonly involve hyperbole, “‘puffing,’ exaggeration, [and] fancy” (p. 99). They usually serve as “a form of alleviating imagery...offering a world far more interesting, glamorous, sinful, alluring, clean, better ordered, and exciting than that we found around us” ( Rotzoll, 1985, p. 99).

## **ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK**

Researchers have suggested that the linguistic-pragmatic effectiveness of advertising text determines whether certain ads achieve what advertisers intend to do (Bryne, 1992). Factors that can influence the degree of such effectiveness include “the interaction between the text, the reader/hearer’s context (cognitive environment), and the effort [s/he] is prepared to make to interpret the message and its implications” (Bryne, 1992, p. 1). Because ads can involve a high degree of creative language use, Bryne argues that a linguistic-pragmatic study would be helpful in examining the effectiveness of such creative device. Sperber and Wilson’s relevance theory, according to Bryne (1992), is a useful framework for such a study since it “accounts for the recovery of both the explicature of an utterance and its implicatures, the semantic and pragmatic elements, what is said and what is implied” (p. 2). Although relevance theory is usually used in the analysis of semantic elements (e.g., pictorial metaphors), Bryne contends that it is “essentially” a theory of pragmatics that takes into accounts the “contextual and occasion factors in the interpretation of an utterance” (pp. 2-3). Sperber and Wilson also note that pragmatic process should be “used to bridge the gap between the semantic representations of the sentences and the interpretation of utterances in context” (1995, p. 167).

Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory aims to explain "how the hearer infers the speaker's meaning on the basis of the evidence provided" (qtd. in Ward & Horn, 2004, p. 607). They argue that "humans tend to pay attention to the most relevant phenomena and to process them in a context that maximizes their relevance" (1995, p.9). Although in many cases, advertisements are usually designed to convey certain messages, either explicitly or implicitly, to potential consumers, whether the ads serve this purpose depends on how relevant the reader perceives it is to his/her situation.

In terms of communication, Sperber and Wilson (1995) identify 'informative intention' and 'communicative intention.' While 'informative intention' refers to a person's wish to communicate a certain message, 'communicative intention' is his or her wish to have readers/hearers' attention. In the case of advertising, the advertiser is the communicator whose intention to inform the public of a certain product or idea is always embedded in the ad that "in itself embodies a bid for attention" (Forceville, 1996, p. 98). Based on the relevance theory, which focuses on "speaker meaning and hearer interpretation by means of contextual implication," the ads will not have an impact on readers/hearers unless they find the advertising messages relevant to them (Forceville, 1996, p. 99). Quoted in Bryne (1992), Day (1984) notes:

If the product is not perceived as being sufficiently relevant to enough people, the product dies [...]. The product must be seen to be 'relevant' to the way people live, which means the communication must start from a common point of reference.

Sperber and Wilson note that linguistic styles "[arise] in pursuit of relevance and that the degree of responsibility the hearer has to take for the interpretation of an utterance varies according to poeticness of the style used" (qtd. in Bryne, 1992, p. 6). Although Sperber and Wilson focus mainly on spoken discourse, their theory can also be applied to the language used in ads because ads usually comprise "written-to-be-spoken" (scripted) language and ad copywriters tend to "reproduce the spontaneous everyday language of the target audience" (Bryne, 1992, p. 6; Leech, 1966). Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory is thus useful in analyzing ads that promote products with a narrowly-defined group of consumers. Because not everyone who views the ads will find the products relevant to them, the advertisers need to manipulate texts, both verbal and visual, to maximize their relevance.

In addition to the relevance theory, Bakhtin's idea on intertextuality will be used in the analysis of the ads collected. In media discourse analysis, Fairclough suggests that one also adopt intertextual analysis since it "has an important mediating role in

linking text to context” (1995, p. 211). This notion is supported by a three-dimensional view of discourse analysis (i.e., analysis of context, analysis of processes of text production and interpretation, and analysis of text) (Fairclough, 1995). It is argued that most texts are “linguistically heterogeneous, i.e., made up of elements which have varying and sometimes contradictory stylistic and semantic values,” and a certain text may draw upon a plurality of prior genres, discourses or narratives” (Bakhtin 1986; Fairclough, 1995, p. 189; Kristeva, 1986). Since advertisements are a genre of media discourse, an intertextual analysis can provide us with a better understanding of persuasive advertising messages.

Drawing on Sperber and Wilson’s relevance framework, Bryne suggests that when analyzing ads, one also look at the linguistic styles that increase contextual implications. These linguistic styles include phonetic effects, length of texts, metaphors, and various linguistic devices (e.g., use of imperatives, cohesive devices, hyperboles, rhetorical questions). Many studies have looked at different linguistic devices and persuasive strategies in different kinds of written ads (Bruthiaux, 1994, 2000; Gramberg, 1998; Marley, 2002; Oh, 2001; Schaffer, 1998). For example, Marley (2002) analyzed the use of questions and modality in written dating advertisements. Text-initial, text-final, and wh- questions were three major types of questions used in dating ads and were primarily used to “enact and project speech-like interactional roles” for advertisers and readers (2002, p. 75). The use of modality, on the other hand, was to “engage potential partners and negotiate mutual suitability” (2002, p.75). Oh (2001) examined the function and use of demonstratives or deictic terms in product-selling advertisements appearing in popular magazines such as *TIME*, *People*, *Elle*, *Sports Illustrated*, and so on. The results are in line with the common beliefs that the degree of focus determines one’s demonstrative choices. The demonstratives, *this*, *that*, and *it*, signaling high, mid, and low focus, share a major function of directing readers’ attention to the product. For example, *this* usually imposes main focus on the advertised product, “associating its inherent meanings of newness and importance with” it. (2001, p. 143). Oh concludes that the use of demonstratives reflects “the genre-specific characteristics of written advertisements” because the usage is usually adapted to suit the primary purpose of advertising discourse, that is, “persuasion or selling” (Oh, 2001, p. 144).

Bruthiaux (1994) investigated functional variation in the language of four different types of classified ads (i.e., job, auto, housing, and personal ads) by looking at the use and frequency of function words, including definite and indefinite articles, pronouns, copulas, and prepositions. The frequency of the function words was used as a measure of syntactic elaboration. His findings indicates a “significant variation in degrees of syntactic elaboration across ad categories” (1994, p. 21). Personal and job

ads, in general, showed a greater lexical variety and higher frequency of function words than auto and housing ads. For example, compared to auto and housing ads, more indefinite articles were found in job and personal ads, which featured “great involvement in participant roles” (1994, p. 31). Also, job and personal ad writers tended to “make explicit less predictable referential links between entities in their texts or between their texts and the outside world” (Bruthiaux, 1994. p. 35). Bruthiaux thus concludes that the need for greater explicitness in certain ads (e.g., job and personal ads) significantly contributes to functional variation in ad genre.

Although several studies have examined the linguistic features of different kinds of advertisements, few studies focused on intertextuality and examined the relationship between visuals and written texts in the health product ads that target different groups of consumers. This study examines intertextuality in the advertising language in written ads for drugs and dietary supplements. The linguistic devices such as the use of rhetorical questions and imperatives will be analyzed. The use of visuals will also be looked at to better understand how it might help create a contextual implicature embedded in the ads.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The data for this study were drawn from four different monthly magazines on health-related topics: *Vegetarian Times* (Sep. 2004 issue), *Life Extension* (Sep. 2004), *Prevention* (Jul., Aug., Sep., and Oct. 2004), and *Health* (Sep., and Oct. 2004). While *Vegetarian Times* and *Life Extension* tend to target a specific audience (i.e., vegetarians, the elderly, and people who are concerned about aging), *Prevention* and *Health* are geared toward anyone who is concerned about health related issues. Only two kinds of ads were chosen for analysis: 1) ads for dietary supplements and 2) ads for drugs that treat common health problems (e.g., allergy, heartburn, migraine, and arthritis). Because there were many kinds of dietary supplements in the chosen magazines, only ads for more commonly known dietary supplements such as vitamins, enzymes, weight controls, and those that promote healthy bones or joints (e.g., calcium and glucosamine) were included for analysis. No drugs ads were found in *Life Extension* and *Vegetarian*; therefore, all the drug ads in this study were collected from *Prevention* and *Health*. Due to the sporadic appearance of drug ads, more than one issue of the two magazines was searched for the ads. A total of 41 ads were collected for analysis. Tables 1 and 2 summarize the number of ads collected from each magazine. It is interesting that no drugs ads were found in *Life Extension* (LE)

and *Vegetarian Times* (VT). The reason might be that the readership of both magazines is more narrowly-defined and specific than that of *Health* and *Prevention*, which are geared toward the general public that care about health in general.

Table 1 *Dietary Supplement Ads*

	Life Extension	Vegetarian Times	Prevention	Health
Vitamins	2	5	5	2
Calcium/Glucosamine	2	0	4	0
Weight Control	1	2	3	0
Enzyme	1	1	0	0
Sub-total	6	8	12	2

The total number of ads for dietary supplements: 28

Table 2 *Drug Ads*

	Life Extension	Vegetarian Times	Prevention	Health
Allergy	0	0	3	2
Arthritis	0	0	2	1
Heartburn	0	0	2	1
Migraine	0	0	1	1
Sub-total	0	0	8	5

The total number of drug ads: 13

## RESULTS

This section describes the analysis of visuals and shared discourse features of written texts in the data collected. The analysis shows that visuals were mainly used to increase relevance between products and potential customers even though the use of images and frequency of appearance varied to some extent across the two ad categories. The use of a headline or lead and “written-to-be-spoken” language were commonly found in both drug and dietary supplement ads. The “written-to-be-spoken” language demonstrates three intertextual features: discourse representation or speech reportage, mixing discourse types, and recycling. The following analysis begins with an examination of visuals.

### Visuals as a Strategy of Maximizing Relevance

Although both ads for dietary supplements and drugs all resorted to similar linguistic devices (e.g., the use of rhetorical questions or imperatives) to create a

buying incentive, one major difference between the ads was the use of visuals. Before I turn to the analysis of linguistic devices, I will focus on the differences between the use of visuals here. The results of analysis show that drug ads depended more on visuals to “reconstruct” a context that the consumers could relate to than the ads of dietary supplements. To better understand the context created in the ads, I specifically examined the appearance of human and non-human characters in the ads. The gender and role of human figures were also compared.

It was found that while human images/characters appeared in 86 percent of the total drug ads, only 42 percent of the ads for dietary supplements included human images. Interestingly, the ads for drugs treating allergy or migraine tended to include young female characters and non-human characters (e.g., an embodiment of germs or a monster attacking the female character’s head with a hammer). The three ads for arthritis medicine all included images of middle-aged or old males or females. Non-human objects such as pizza often appeared in the ad of a drug treating heartburn. Overall, the visuals in the drug ads were highly relevant to the nature of the products and the target consumers.

It was found that human and non-human images/characters were included in the drug ads to create a situation or context in which the human character was either suffering from or alleviating from a health problem such as arthritis or allergy. By using the visuals, ad copywriters were able to create/enhance the “contextual effects” on the viewers, which included “contextual implication, strengthening of existing assumptions, [and] contradiction of existing assumptions” (Bryne, 1992, p. 34; Sperber and Wilson, 1995). These contextual effects thus maximized the relevance. For example, Figure 1, retrieved from an ad on *Allegra-D*, a medication for allergy, includes two contrasting pictures of the same female character in two different situations--suffering from or getting rid of allergy symptoms. The use of the contrasting images (one with watery eyes and the other holding flowers with a big smile) can strengthen the contextual implication that taking the drug makes one experience “allergy-free” life the way the female character does.



**CAN'T TAKE THE CONGESTION?**

**TAKE ALLEGRA-D.**

Side effects with Allegra-D were similar to Allegra alone and may include headache, insomnia, and nausea. Due to the decongestant (pseudoephedrine) component in Allegra-D, this product must not be used if you are taking an MAO inhibitor (a medication for depression) or have stopped taking an MAO inhibitor within 14 days; retain urine; have narrow-angle glaucoma; have severe high blood pressure or severe heart disease. You should also tell your doctor if you have high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, glaucoma, thyroid disease, impaired kidney function, or symptoms of an enlarged prostate such as difficulty urinating. Allegra-D is for people 12 and older.

**ALLEGRA-D RELIEVES YOUR MOST FRUSTRATING ALLERGY SYMPTOM: CONGESTION.**

Why take an allergy decongestant that may not last as long as you want? One dose of Allegra-D lasts twice as long as one dose of the leading over-the-counter decongestant.\* Talk to your doctor about Allegra-D. And don't let allergy congestion frustrate you another day.

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**allegra-D**  
fexofenadine HCl 60 mg/pseudoephedrine HCl 120 mg  
Extended-Release Tablets  
**FINALLY, D-CONGESTED.**

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\*Based on label directions. IRI data as of 5/23/04 Sudafed Maximum Strength Nasal Decongestant (4-6 hour dosage).

Figure 1. Allegra-D.

Source: *Health*, September 2004

In addition, the visuals that include human images/characters tend to reflect celebrity endorsement. Most often the image of a famous figure in sports or entertainment industry was used with direct quotes from him or her to create contextual implications. Figure 2 shows an example of how the ad copywriter of *OSCAL*, a calcium supplement, used an image showing a former Olympic Gold Medalist, Peggy Fleming in her late 50s, playing with her little grandson by carrying him on her back. The image, involving a famous figure, not only conveys a contextual implication that taking OsCal makes one feel as energetic and active as Peggy Fleming does, but it may also contradict most viewers' existing assumption that a person at Fleming's age is less able to play with children like Peggy Fleming does. The image thus enhances the product's relevance with potential customers, especially those in Fleming's age group.



Think Young.  
Take Os-Cal.<sup>®</sup>

Help Keep Your  
Bones "Younger"  
With Os-Cal.

Peggy Fleming  
Olympic Gold Medalist  
with granddaughter Miles

We can't stop aging. But we can do something about our bones aging. It's true. You could see the proof in your next bone density test. The highly absorbable calcium in both *Os-Cal-D* and *Os-Cal Ultra* can help slow the aging process of your bones at the cellular level.

With regular use you can help slow down bone deterioration. And help keep your bone structure healthy so your bones can be "younger" than you are. For me, that means I can think young and be a fun grandma to my two grandsons.

Choose whichever calcium formula suits you best - *Os-Cal-D* or *Os-Cal Ultra with D and 7 key nutrients*. That's more than any leading brand. And it's the only one with the antioxidants C and E.

Don't take chances. Take Os-Cal  
or Os-CAL ULTRA.

Figure 2. OsCal.

Source: *Prevention*, September, 2004

The ads for dietary supplements included fewer human images than drug ads. In the ads that included human images, female characters appeared more often than male characters. Among the few drug ads that showed human images, while 83 percent included female characters (aged between 20s and 50s), only 41 percent showed male characters. Most often male characters appeared together with a female character or in an image that portrays family life. This shows that ads for dietary supplements seem to target female consumers, although further research with a larger sample size might be needed to confirm this finding. Interestingly, despite the fact that the ads for dietary supplements included fewer human images/characters, 88 percent of the ads for dietary supplements contained the images of actual products, in addition to brand names and logos. This was different from drug ads since only 36 percent of the drug ads included an image of actual products.

The differences in the use of visuals between drug ads and ads for dietary supplements might depend on the purposes of the products themselves and their target consumers. While drug ads promote products that can treat or alleviate certain illnesses or health problems, dietary supplement ads seem to promote an idea of disease prevention. Since it is more difficult to visualize the idea or the advantages that come along with disease prevention (except for showing a female/male with a

perfect body figure or an old couple smiling together), the images of actual products tend to be used to enhance viewers' background knowledge about the products. In addition to product images, images of fruits were often shown in dietary supplement ads. The image thus creates a feeling that the products are equal to fruits that are rich in vitamins. In sum, visuals were used differently in the ads to create different contextual meanings based on the nature of products and target consumers with a purpose of maximizing relevance.

### Shared Features of Written Texts in Ads

The use of a headline or a lead is common in all the ads collected for this study. The grammatical construction of headlines in the data falls into one of the five categories: noun phrases/prepositional phrases, statements, imperatives, statements followed by imperatives, and rhetorical questions followed by imperatives. Table 3 illustrates some examples of each category.

Table 3 *Grammatical Categories of Headlines*

	Examples
Phrases (NP; PP)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. New Ester-E. The Next Generation of Vitamin E.</li> <li>2. The pill that limits carbohydrate absorption.</li> <li>3. Innovative Formulas. 30 years of experience. Rigorous Testing.</li> <li>4. For John's head. For John's shoulders. For John's heartburn.</li> </ol>
Statements	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Initially you might feel guilty having so many nutrients all to yourself.</li> <li>2. We've charted a masterpiece.</li> <li>3. You need something strong to keep you at your best. Double espressos don't count.</li> </ol>
Imperatives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Challenge the American Epidemic!</li> <li>2. Get whistles from construction workers. And nutritionists.</li> <li>3. Feel great while you lose weight!</li> </ol>
Statements + Imperatives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Life's tough. Fight back.</li> <li>2. Ordinary multivitamins are a waste of vital nutrients, and money. FIGHT BACK.</li> </ol>
Rhetorical questions + Imperatives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Focused on carbs? Intercepts them.</li> <li>2. To bend or not to bend? Don't let arthritis joint pain decide for you.</li> <li>3. Can't take the congestions? Take Allegra-D.</li> </ol>

(NP: noun phrases; PP: prepositional phrases)

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It should be noted that some of the leads or headlines were constructed by using texts that involved two different linguistic categories as in “Life’s tough. Fight back.” Although the above mentioned linguistic categories could be found in both drug and dietary supplement ads, the use of imperatives indicates differences. In the drug ads, imperatives were seldom used alone and usually appeared after a rhetorical question. Examples include “Think your over-the-counter pain relievers for arthritis or joint pain are totally safe? Think again.” and “Can’t take the congestions? Take Allegra-D.” Interestingly, the imperative sounds more like a direct suggestion from the advertiser than a construction whose “primary role is giving orders” due to the existence of the preceding rhetorical question (Matthews, 1997). The imperatives in the ads for dietary supplements, on the contrary, were mostly used alone or appeared after a statement. For example, the headline of an ad for a multivitamin product reads, “Ordinary multivitamins are a waste of vital nutrients, and money. FIGHT BACK.” Here the headline involves a presupposition that the viewer is taking one of those ordinary multivitamins. Also, the statement seems to serve as a reason why one needs to “fight back.”

Both the rhetorical questions and statements before the imperatives included information that could increase the relevance of the products to potential consumers. The rhetorical questions in drug ads, for instance, were usually about the symptoms that consumers might suffer from. In “Can’t take the congestions?”, the ad copywriter seems to presuppose that consumers are experiencing allergy that causes congestion. This presupposition creates a contextual implication that one does not have to suffer from congestion and that one can get relief by taking the medication. Presupposition, according to Fairclough (1992), is intertextual, and most often manipulative. In media discourse, “presuppositions are effective ways to manipulate people, because they are often difficult to challenge” (p. 283). Presupposition is often taken for granted by the text producer and “can be interpreted in terms of intertextual relations with previous texts of the text producer” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 283).

Another shared feature of the data is the use of “written-to-be-spoken” language featuring informal vocabulary and fragmented syntax (Byrne, 1992). Such “written-to-be-spoken” texts are usually composed of parts of other texts or discourse types to attract readers’ attention and to maximize the relevance. Discourse representation, mixing discourse types, and recycling are the three linguistic/discourse features that reflect intertextuality in the data collected (Fairclough, 1992; Hermeren, 1999; Johnstone, 2002).

**Discourse representation.** Discourse representation or speech reportage, commonly used in news reports, “is a form of intertextuality in which parts of specific

other texts are incorporated into a text” and is usually marked “with devices such as quotation marks and reporting clauses (e.g., *she said* or *Mary claimed*)” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 273). In the data, discourse representation is reflected in the use of direct speech with quotation marks.

The direct speech within quotation marks informed readers of other people’s experience in using the product. Most often the direct speech was addressed by a character in the ad. Example 1 was taken from an ad for an arthritis formula, Chondro-Pro, right below a picture of Pat Boone, a popular rock-and-roll singer in his 60s. The direct speech creates a feeling that Pat Boone is directly talking to the viewer.

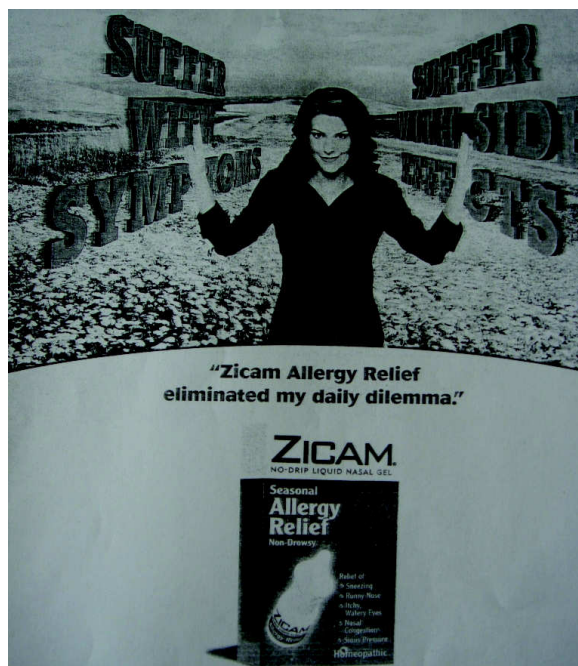
### Example 1

“I used to have pain in my knees. Now, with Chondro-Pro, I can play two hours of tennis a day...and win!”

### Example 2

“I won’t let arthritis pain keep me from teaching.”

### Example 3



“Every morning, I had to make a tough decision: take my allergy medicine and put up with unpleasant side effects. Or skip the medicine and suffer the allergy symptoms. Either way, I suffered! Then I found Zicam Allergy Relief. It reduced my allergy symptoms without making me feel drowsy or jittery. Now I use Zicam every day and I feel great.”

Example 2 was retrieved from an ad for Vioxx, a drug for arthritis pain. The direct speech within quotation marks was used as headline and appeared right next to a full-page picture, showing a female African American teacher working with kids with full energy in a classroom. Here, the use of the image and direct speech within quotation marks creates an implicature that taking Vioxx offers one an “arthritis pain free” life. In example 3, the direct speech was put below an image of a female character. The leads and the personal narrative were put in quotes to illustrate positive experience of taking the medication. This creates a contextual implication that “since Zicam has worked for me, it will work for you too.”

**Mixing discourse types.** It was found that ad writers tended to use the form or format of different discourse types and adapted them to make the product look more appealing. The analysis of data showed that the form/format of newspaper articles and research reports is sometimes adopted to inform viewers of the superiority of products. Figure 3 showed how the ad copywriter used a mock news report to tout the product. Similarly, ads for dietary supplements, especially those in *Life Extension* magazine, tended to take the form of a research report which contained dense information and usually included references to scientific studies to show the effectiveness of the product. Example 4 shows an opening paragraph taken from an ad for a weight control supplement called Super CLA in *Life Extension*. In this example, the ad writer compared the results of different research on conjugated linoleic acid (CLA) to set up a case of why one should take the product. Here the way the text was composed is similar to that of an academic research report in which the author usually draws on scientific research to support his/her points. The copywriter of dietary supplement ads tends to make use of this rhetorical technique either to get viewers’ attention or to show potency of the products.

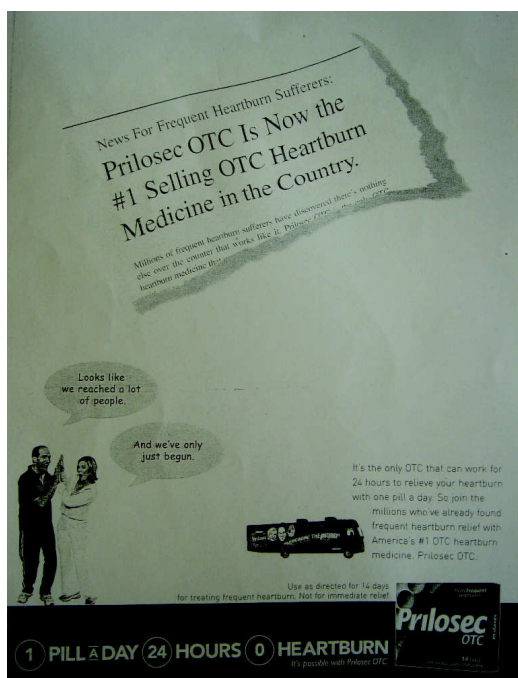


Figure 3. Prilosec.

Source: *Health*, September, 2004.

#### Example 4

Since its introduction in 1996, **conjugated linoleic acid (CLA)** has become an enormously popular supplement to help **control excess body fat**. A review of previously published scientific studies shows that CLA reduces **body fat** while increasing lean muscle mass **when used in conjunction with reduced calorie intake and an increase in physical activity**. These studies, however, were all relatively short term. The results of a new one-year CLA study were released at the 94<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the American Oil and Chemical Society (May 4-7, 2003). The new study, titled **“Efficacy and Safety of One-Year Supplementation with Conjugated Linoleic Acid in Moderate Overweight,”** found that compared to placebo, CLA-supplemented subjects reduced body fat by 9% and increased lean muscle by 2%. This study confirmed **a reduction in total body weight** in addition to body fat percentage. Analyses of blood tests showed **no side effects** over this one-year period.

In addition to drawing on the style of research report genre, the ad copywriter usually highlighted certain information in written texts by making it in bold. In example 4, the highlighted portion summarizes the main purpose and effect of the product—“conjugated linoleic acid (CLA) control[s] excess body fat...when used in conjunction with reduced calorie intake and an increase in physical activity...reduced

body fat by 9%...reduction in total body weight...no side effects.” This highlighting enables viewers to get the gist of the entire text without reading all the details.

Some ads also included paraphrasing of cited sources and footnotes with complete references to the sources. Example 5, retrieved from an ad for a dietary supplement called WellBetX PGX, illustrates one of such references included in one ad. Interestingly, the use of the research report genre and footnotes is a feature that was not found in any of the drug ads collected. This might have to do with the difference between dietary supplements and drugs. Unlike drugs, dietary supplements are not usually viewed as a necessity, especially for those who are not concerned about health issues. Therefore, the ads for dietary supplements tend to draw on clinical scientific research to show that there is a need for one to use the products. The use of clinical research creates a feeling that the information presented in the ads is not ungrounded and deserves one’s attention.

#### **Example 5.**

The patent-pending PGX formula is the result of hundreds of tests designed to create a highly viscous fiber that “soaks up” some carbohydrates in the gastrointestinal tract before they are assimilated into the bloodstream.<sup>2</sup>

[text deleted]

2. Marlett JA, McBurney MI, Slavin JL, American Dietetic Association. Position of the American Dietetic Association: health implications of dietary fiber. *J Am Diet Assoc.* 2002 Jul; 102(7): 993-1000.

**Recycling.** Another feature that involves intertextuality is the use of proverbs, sayings, aphorisms, maxims, catchphrases, clichés, allusions and similar expressions (Hermeren, 1999). Most often such usage was altered a bit (e.g., word substitution, spelling changes, alteration in phonetic or phonological features) to fit the content and the context reconstructed in the ads. The headline of an ad for Bextra arthritis medicine, “To bend or not to bend”, in Figure 4 is an alteration of a famous line in Shakespeare’s play, *Hamlet*—“To be or not to be: that is the question”. The headline was then followed by a half-page image of an elderly man picking up a morning newspaper. By changing some words in a famous line that portrays Hamlet’s dilemma, the copywriter was able to “reconstruct” a difficult situation which arthritis patients would find themselves in when picking up morning newspapers. Although the word “be” was replaced with “bend” and thus undergoing phonetic alteration (i.e., /bi/ → /bend/), the grammatical structure and the first-part spelling “be” in “bend” might still reinforce one’s memory about Shakespeare’s famous line and the dilemma presented through the rhetorical question. Such alteration makes the rhetorical question more

relevant to the potential consumers' situation. The use of the headline and the image thus creates a contextual implication that taking the product would prevent one from such as a dilemma.

To bend or not to bend?  
Don't let arthritis joint pain decide for you.

Today, arthritis joint pain doesn't have to get in your way. Call toll-free 1-877-380-3671 for your FREE BEXTRA Relief Kit and 7-day trial offer. Or go to [www.discoverbextra.com](http://www.discoverbextra.com)

- Discover how you can relieve joint pain, swelling and stiffness with just one pill, once a day
- Learn about the science behind how BEXTRA works
- Try BEXTRA free. Just bring the voucher included in your kit to your doctor and ask if a 7-day free trial prescription is right for you\*

Call 1-877-380-3671 for this FREE BEXTRA offer, then share it with your doctor.

**BEXTRA**  
valdecoxib tablets

One BEXTRA. Once a day. Powerful 24-hour relief.

**Important Information.** BEXTRA is not for everyone. Prescription BEXTRA should not be taken if you've had allergic reactions to certain drugs called salicylamides, aspirin or other arthritis medicines or if you've had aspirin-sensitive asthma or are in late pregnancy. It is not recommended if you have advanced kidney disease. Tell your doctor if you have kidney or liver problems. In rare cases, serious stomach problems such as bleeding can occur without warning. Tell your doctor right away if you develop blisters in the mouth or a rash, as it can be a sign of a serious skin reaction that may be life threatening. If you experience other unusual symptoms while taking BEXTRA, tell your doctor immediately. The most common side effects are headache, abdominal pain, indigestion, upper respiratory infection, nausea and diarrhea.

BEXTRA is indicated for the relief of osteoarthritis and adult rheumatoid arthritis.  
Please see accompanying important Product Information.

\*Restrictions apply.

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Figure 4. Bextra.

Source: *Health*, October, 2004

### Example 6

Get whistles from  
Construction workers.  
And nutritionists.

Another type of recycling is the use of context-dependent utterances, as shown in example 6, retrieved from an ad for O'LAY multivitamins. The product is usually geared toward female consumers in the 30s-50s age groups who care about their skin. The leads were placed right next to the image of a smiling female character with radiant skin tones. The imperative, "get whistles from construction workers", implies that using the product makes one look so gorgeous that she can get whistles from them. Interestingly, the copywriter seems to presuppose that women like getting whistles, although in reality, some do not like it and might even feel offended if someone does that to them.



Recycling of certain words or part of words in terms of spelling and phonological features is also common in the data and usually reflects in the product names, as shown in example 7. The intertextuality in this case is at lexical level, as in the name of an allergy medicine, “allegra”. “Allegra” is the combination of partial spelling of two words—“allergy” and “Viagra.” The combination of the two morphs—one implying the health problem and the other, the name of a popular drug for men—can remind consumers of not only the purpose of the drug but also the product name itself due to the high publicity of Viagra. “Allegra-D”, a different type of allergy medicine from the same company, is another example. Because the product is for congestion relief, the “D” in the name seems to be used on purpose to echo the /di/ in the word, “decongestion,” and thus reminds viewers of the purpose of the drug. In addition, the use of second person possessive pronoun “your” and the superlative adjective, “most frustrating” in the lead maximize the relevance because of a presupposition that viewers suffer from congestion and consider it as the most frustrating symptom.

#### Example 7

**ALLEGRA-D RELIEVES YOUR MOST  
FRUSTRATING ALLERGY SYMPTOM:  
CONGESTION.**

[body text deleted]

*allegra-D*  
**FINALLY, D-CONGESTED.**

Other examples include “Aller-7”, a dietary supplement containing seven herbal extracts to enhance respiratory health, and “Ester-E”, a vitamin E supplement. The “Ester-“ in the name is borrowed from “Ester-C”, which was first introduced in the *Journal of Research Communications in Chemical Pathology* to describe a patented vitamin C complex, whose absorption rate is twice faster than the regular vitamin C supplements (Murray, 1993).

## CONCLUSION

Drawing on relevance theory and the concept of intertextuality, I have analyzed

drug and dietary supplement ads that are geared towards different groups of consumers. The results indicated that compared to ads for dietary supplements, the drug ads tended to rely more on visuals to increase relevance between products and potential consumers who might be also afflicted with health problems portrayed in the images. Most often the visuals in the drug ads were designed to illustrate a certain context involving human or non-human characters to reinforce a contextual implicature that the advertisers would like to pass to the viewers. The visuals in the dietary supplement ads, on the other hand, were mostly the images of actual products. Some ads for dietary supplements include a photo of products and a female character with perfect body figure to create a contextual implicature that if one took the products, she would be more likely to have a perfect body figure too.

In addition to the visuals, I have examined intertextuality in the written components of the ads. Discourse representation, mixing discourse types, and recycling are three intertextual strategies observed in the data. Discourse representation involves direct speech from a human or non-human character within quotation marks. The written text in the ads for dietary supplements tends to take the form of a research report genre to inform viewers of the advantages of using the products. Finally, intertextuality also funnels through the recycling of previous texts in both sentential and lexical levels (e.g., using a famous line in literature, other drug names, or the medical terms of certain health problems). These intertextual elements not only serve as a means of getting viewers' attention, but they can also enhance viewers' memories about the products due to the catchy feeling of the borrowed words, linguistic texts, or forms.

This study primarily focused on examining the use of visuals and discourse features of drug and dietary supplement ads in four monthly magazines. However, it is not without limitations. Because of the small data size, there was an imbalance between the two kinds of ads collected. Fewer drug ads were found in the four different monthly magazines. Further research with a larger and balanced data set is needed before the results of this study can be generalized to all the drug and dietary supplement ads in general. In addition, this study only examined drug and dietary supplement ads in English magazines targeting mainly Western English-speaking population. For future research, one can analyze ads in magazines published in languages other than English to explore the ad genre from a cross-cultural perspective. Another direction for future research is to look at ads of various products in different print or audio-visual media (e.g., newspapers, TV, radio, or commercial websites, etc.) to compare and contrast the intertextual elements and strategies of maximizing relevance.

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## 藥品與保健食品廣告的相關性及互文性分析

### 摘要

本研究藉由檢視藥品與保健食品廣告中的圖像運用和文體特色，來探究此兩種廣告的互文性 (Intertextuality)。研究語料取自在美國發行，以健康保健為主題之四種英文雜誌所刊登的醫藥廣告。根據 Sperber 與 Wilson 所提出的關連理論 (Relevance Theory) 為架構，以言談分析法，比較所蒐集的廣告樣品中，語言及視覺要素的形式和結構。研究結果顯示藥品廣告比保健食品廣告採用更多的圖像來重建語境及增強產品與潛在消費者的相關性。本研究也發現三種顯示互文性的語篇特色：包含不同語篇表徵的引用或改寫、跨文本的互涉(言談類型的混合)以及特定語言單位(例如：詞素、語素或音素)的重複使用。總結發現，醫藥廣告撰寫者常運用不同層次的圖像及語言要素來增強情境上的蘊含(contextual Implicature)藉以吸引潛在消費者的注意。

關鍵詞： 言談/論述分析 藥品廣告 保健食品廣告 互文性  
視覺圖像分析