1999 Honorable Mention Critical Analysis

Colgate Brushes On:

A Contrast of New and Old Colgate Advertising Strategies

"To be, or not to be?" This is the question that plagues companies every year. The business is one of survival-survival of the fittest. Companies around the world are constantly scattering about, developing new weapons in nuclear advertisement. Having looked back at old strategies, it is interesting to see the strategies that worked have lasted over time. Since the April 5, 1937 edition of LIFE magazine, Colgate's advertisements have evolved to appeal to different audiences as seen in another ad in the January 1985 edition of LIFE. Though targeting different audiences over the past fifty years, Colgate has kept many of their original advertising strategies, but has changed their approach by introducing children as subject matter, leading parents to respond to the ad with their children in mind.

A sort of sex appeal is visible in the 1950's commercial, mainly focusing on the fun that a man and a women can have if they both were to have nice breath. The Colgate advertisement in the fifties is focused towards an adult audience who are single and looking for ways of attracting the opposite sex. All the characters are portrayed as clean, single people. Ray, the man in the ad, seems to be a business man, though not the type to be swimming in money. Colgate wanted every man to be able to identify with Ray, and so placed him in what would probably have been the largest economic group. Not only would this allow the men in the audience to identify with the situation, but it would also attract the middle class and make it easier for them to relate and become involved with the ad as well.

In the Colgate advertisement of the eighties, a question could be raised in contrast to the mentality of the ad in the fifties. Why are there children in the picture when they don't buy the product? Colgate is no longer advertising their product with the oh-so effective sex appeal, but has deliberately stumbled upon a new audience and a new motive that they would have for buying their product. The audience is still made up of adults, and for the most part young parents. They are clearly the mothers who are viewing, and because they want to help their children, they relate to Colgate's ad. Colgate has learned that people are a lot more conscience about family members, particularly mothers with children, than people are about themselves. The children being the new item of importance, brings an obligation to the mothers. "It is a mothers responsibility to buy Colgate." "Good mothers buy Colgate." "If you love your children, do something great for them at a small cost." These are the types of messages that Colgate is throwing at the mothers in the audience. Colgate's strategy of making the message is nice and comfortable, but strong and directly aimed at a specific audience, and this is why this ad is very effective.

Another effective strategy used by a company in advertising is the use of lines. These lines are made to direct the viewers eye at something specific, usually the product. In the ad of the fifties, about half of the lines are horizontal, displaying a sense of stability, support and confidence. A horizontal white line seems to underline Ray when he states, "...I'm going out!" It then bends down and points to the next caption. The last four captions make a square with a white line running down the center of them. It continues out of the caption and down the white margin between the text. This white line points right at the Colgate box which is exactly what was meant to be the item of focus. The pattern is easy to follow by the eye. Also, because the lines are white, they are not consciencely noticed and don't break up the flow of the ad.
The ad of the eighties uses lines remarkably well, but does it in a way that is very unique. Like the ad of the
fifties, the eighties ad is very heavy on horizontal lines, once again reflecting on stability, happiness and
confidence in the product, but uses these lines in another way which is very inventive. The first focus is on the
children, which is what I have concluded as the important subject matter. The red tooth brush at the top of the
page points to the children, as does the women's fingers. Also, the Colgate bottles in the right corner of the page
also point upwards toward the children. It seems as if everything is pointing toward the children. The important
thing about this, is that those who made the advertisement did so to appeal to mothers. Colgate focuses on the
children, rather than their product because the children will be seen as the important image in the ad. The
viewer knows the ad is for Colgate, but now is given an important reason to buy it. Once the viewer has been
led to the children, the lines that are involved with them leaves the viewers eyes going back and forth across
their smiling faces. What does this is the linear continuity of the children's tooth brushes. The boy and the girl
on the sides are holding their brushes in a way which point to the boy in the middle. He takes their 'point' and
continues it along the back of his tooth brush to the opposite end. The viewer's vision then 'bounces' back and
forth across the page.

As the viewer scans the children, what would he see? First and foremost, the children are happy. The idea of
having fun while brushing your teeth was a huge marketing strategy that probably made Colgate a lot of money
in the mid-eighties. The new tube was a pump action which kids really did like. As a kid, I constantly bothered
my mom about getting a pump tube because I wanted to try it. It was different from the normal tube which just
spurted paste out the end. That's the way kids are, and Colgate recognized it. They predicted that mothers would
buy this new style, though slightly more expensive because their kids would brush on their own, making it a
habit. Hats off to Colgate's ingenious idea.

Though the ad of the fifties doesn't include a new tube, the theme of happiness plays a tremendous role. In the
first four captions, nobody is smiling. It could be argued that the dentist was smirking, but he is definitely not
smiling. Because this drag on unhappiness is apparent for over half of the advertisement, the happiness is more
profound when it happens. In the fifth caption, the picture is accredited to Colgate, and shows not only the
characters happier, but Ray and Jean are in love. This happy image in contrast with the four unhappy captions
leaves the viewer with a positive impression of Colgate. People understand that advertisements aren't real, but if
a company can make a lasting impression on the viewer by telling stories, they just stole away a new customer
from their competitors.

Perhaps the most obvious difference between the two ads is color. The use or lack of use between these two ads
have a lot to do with the ability of the time. It was probably more difficult, or much more expensive to produce
an ad in color during the fifties than it would to have produced an ad in black and white. However, Colgate
seems to compensate for this technological set-back by using big, bold letters to draw the attention of the
audience. The first thing that the audience focuses on after randomly viewing the ad is the bolded and
underlined word SHE'S. The viewer then sees conflict, and so reads on with interest sparked. Because of the
success of bold and big words, the ad of the eighties uses this strategy also, but uses color because the ability is
available. The bold words "PUMP MORE FUN" attracts the viewers attention immediately because of the
word "FUN." Everybody loves fun. With these words and the rest of the text in white on a blue background, the
setting becomes very pleasant and comfortable. Again the audience establishes a positive attitude about the
product.

The use of logos in both advertisements adds a lot to their respective arguments. In the fifties, it was common to
put the price of the product on the ad. It contrast, ads in the eighties and those today no longer do that. People
don't like seeing how they can lose money. In the fifties ad, a huge support of logos is used in stating statistics
such as 76% of all people over 17 have bad breath. I feel this takes away from the argument and slows the pace
of the ad because it doesn't matter if the statistic is 76%, 90%, or 5% of any population. All that matters is
whether or not the viewer is included in the statistic. That is left up to him to judge.
Likewise, the Colgate ad from the eighties also uses logos but in a very different way. The ad refers to MFP fluoride. They're probably the initials for some scientific invention that changed the world of tooth paste forever. But the interesting feature about MFP fluoride, is how Colgate integrates it into their ad. The ad says, "Moms, of course, love the MFP fluoride." In other words, if anyone out there is a mom, you must love MFP fluoride, which by the way we have. This ad is full of other sweeping statements. "Kids [in general] love to push the button.... Everyone loves the great, minty fresh taste..." The ad degrades the reader with the use of common opinions in such a nice way. The sense is if you don't have the same opinion, you're not normal. But because the viewer is an average American, the ad forces the reader into a group- such as you are a mom, or one of those that love the taste- which gives reason for the viewer to by the product.

Ultimately, Colgate has always tried to make their advertisements in a way that stops the reader from flipping the page by capturing his interest. Strategies used by Colgate in the fifties can be seen in the ad of the eighties, though the subject matter has changed and some of the strategies have become extinct. This subject matter, which includes the children from the eighties, became a very important factor in appealing to the audience. Likewise, the subject matter from the fifties, including the sex appeal, was probably very effective in that day. Because times have changed, neither of the ads would have fit in the others time, and would likewise probably not work in 1997.