

Rhetorical analysis of mac cosmetics' print ads



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MAC Cosmetics is a non-traditional makeup line that appeals to middle and upper-class workers who need to be set free to express their true self. MAC is well-known for taking a bold approach to cosmetics, celebrating pop culture and individuality, and promoting makeup as a form of self-expression. In an industry where social appeal, sex appeal and feminine appeal are commonly used by cosmetic companies to emphasize the notion of looking younger or feeling more attractive through the use of a brand's products, MAC defies traditional notions of femininity in its ads, setting themselves apart from other brands. MAC uses non-traditional imagery to advertise its products and elevates its brand as a high-end cosmetic line by limiting sales exclusively through online channels and department stores. With distribution in more than 43 countries worldwide, MAC appeals to a wide range of people, selling more products than any other nondrug store brand, and prides itself on catering to men and women, regardless of race or color. MAC is unconventional in its advertising approach and is well-known for being provocative and interesting. At the forefront of the brand's message is embracing gender equality, and they are committed to raising awareness and money for gender issues, such as HIV/AIDS and the transgender community, through their charitable organizations. In so doing, MAC uses culture and gender issues as a means to reach their target market, encouraging all ages, all races and all sexes to embrace their personality. At the core of MAC's message is creating an environment where people can write their own story, especially through the way they look. As the following advertisements demonstrate, MAC's innovative advertising effectiveness relies on bold, often non-traditional imagery and the use of celebrity icons to celebrate individuality through the MAC look, appealing to people's sense of

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self-expression and their desire to be beautiful and stand out. In so doing, MAC presents themselves as a brand that seeks to empower people and support everyone's individuality and creativity.

The drive to be unique, to stand out, and to be an individual are all emotions MAC promotes in its advertising. One such example of this can be seen in MAC's recent collaboration with Caitlyn Jenner (Figure 1) in which Jenner is the spokesperson for a new MAC Cosmetics lipstick, appropriately named "Finally Free". The initiative is an effort to help the transgender community, with 100% of the proceeds going to the MAC Aids Fund Transgender charity. By acknowledging the transgender community in its advertising, MAC communicates they are a tolerant, open-minded brand that supports diversity and inner beauty. This notion coincides with MAC's mission statement: "All Races, All Sexes, All Ages". Feeling comfortable in one's own skin is what gives an individual their sense of beauty. Being able to bring out inner beauty for the world to see, no matter what a person's gender, promotes the "Finally Free" slogan. The Caitlyn Jenner collection represents Caitlyn's mission of sharing her transition with the world, championing All Ages, All Races and All Sexes. The purpose of this ad is to inspire people to buy MAC's product while encouraging them to embrace life, in whatever form they choose. This ad makes an ethical appeal to those who support the gay and transgender community by donating funds to MAC's charitable cause, and due to Caitlyn Jenner's celebrity status, MAC has successfully invoked an even larger audience by reaching the fans of this well-known celebrity figure. The decision to use Caitlyn Jenner as a MAC spokesperson represents the notion that beauty is found not only on the outside, as many

cosmetic companies limit their focus to, but rather is both on the inside and outside. Jenner demonstrates that beauty is ageless and in order to project beauty, people need to love their inner self. MAC's decision to sign a transgender celebrity that is also over 65 years old, sends the message that age doesn't have to be a defining factor in how beauty is perceived.

MAC is famous for its celebrity collaboration collections, and this is especially true with MAC's VIVA GLAM line (Figure 2), the first of MAC's cosmetic products marketed to raise money for AIDS. Begun in 1994 during a time when other makeup companies were using famous supermodels as the faces of their advertising campaigns, MAC chose to go the unconventional route. Featuring notorious drag queen RuPaul as their first VIVA GLAM spokesperson, the VIVA GLAM ads included the tagline, " We won't look down on you, and we won't intimidate you, because we know what it was like to be picked on by the cool kids. And guess what? Now we're the cool kids." Since then, advertising of the VIVA GLAM line has featured such celebrities as K. D. Lang, a Canadian lesbian singer, and music legend/AIDS activist, Elton John. More recently MAC has included glamorous celebrities as spokespeople for the VIVA GLAM line, including Cyndi Lauper, Lady Gaga, Rihanna, and Miley Cyrus. While Gaga and Lauper are long-time AIDS advocates, Rihanna is known as a charitable voice for young generations. MAC also enlisted Nicki Minaj and Ricky Martin, daring people to " Be Bold, Be Beautiful, Be Safe". These ads have succeeded in positioning MAC as a very hip company, catering to people who are open to accepting gay lifestyles and beliefs, while furthering MAC's commitment to HIV and AIDS and promoting safe sex behaviors. The purpose of this ad campaign is to

inspire people to buy VIVA GLAM lipstick and promote values of acceptance, diversity and glamour across MAC's diverse range of products. By using culture and gender issues as a means to reach MAC's target audience, the ads successfully drive demand for their progressive makeup as a form of self-expression. Additionally, the ads utilize bold colors to catch people's eyes and appeal to their emotions by donating "every cent of the selling price of the VIVA GLAM lipstick toward helping women, men and children living with and affected by HIV/AIDS". The VIVA GLAM spokespeople reflect the cultural narrative of diversity, personal triumph and embracing inner beauty.

True to MAC Cosmetic's non-traditional use of imagery to advertise its products, MAC's Strength Collection (Figure 3) uses the tag line "Flex your femininity". Featuring product names such as "Posed", "Brains and Brawn", "Inner Strength" and "Absolute Power", the strength collection uses a photo of a female body builder, driving home the cultural narrative of inner strength, empowerment and beauty in MAC's ads. Choosing to use Jelena Abbou, a Serbian-American competitive body builder and fitness model "complete in full makeup and a shiny black gown" promotes the idea that men and women are equal. Men are perceived as strong or tough whereas women are considered dainty and fragile. Having a women body builder in MAC's ad demonstrates that beauty comes in many different shapes and sizes and that gender doesn't matter. The purpose of the ad is to grab people's attention through the use of the striking and unusual imagery. The text "Strike a powerful pose, stand out and redefine the notion of beauty", paired with the image of a female body builder further creates interest and

contrasts with traditional makeup advertisements used by other brands. By successfully glamorizing Jelena and highlighting her beauty and femininity, MAC contradicts the mainstream idea that women bodybuilders are masculine, thereby furthering the notion of gender equality and inner beauty. The use of a female body builder is a great example of driving home the cultural narrative of inner strength and beauty in MAC's ads and demonstrates that beauty comes in many different shapes and sizes. Whereas most cosmetic brands feature idealized images of the female body to sell makeup, MAC contradicts dominant ideas about femininity, focusing instead on the psychological emotions of confidence and self-esteem achieved from inner beauty.

In a similar fashion of using striking imagery, MAC's Style Warrior ads (Figure 4) were "made to celebrate the cross-cultural sophistication of the modern Amazon Princess, African Queen, Crouching Tigress..." The ads emphasize makeup as a form of self-expression, promoting a diverse color palette featuring bronzing shades for lips, cheeks, eyes and nails that keep skin looking glowing and radiant. The makeup line is full of bold colors with shades suitable for a wide variety of skin tones. The ads succeed in drawing people's attention due to the dramatic and non-traditional application of makeup that is almost reminiscent of painted works of art, emphasizing makeup as a form of self-expression. By combining this bold imagery with the bold headline "Style Warrior" and the subsequent text that describes every woman as having "an inner wild thing", MAC suggests that makeup is a great way to embody different aspects of a person's personality. By appealing to people's need and desire to feel confident and beautiful, MAC

succeeds in communicating the idea that buying their product will help to make people be bolder and more glamorous.

Building on its philosophy to create makeup for all ages, sexes and races, MAC launched a contest in the fall of 2015 called MACnificent Me. The contest invited MAC fans to submit a photo of themselves, along with a 100-word life mantra, illustrating their style, heart, and soul. From the submissions received, MAC chose six everyday people, including Hispanic, African-American and Asian, to represent the MAC brand, providing each winner with a MAC makeover. The resulting MACnificent Me ad (Figure 5) celebrates diversity and is all about “ being creative, confident, and true to one’s self”, encouraging consumers to look beyond model stereotypes and use MAC cosmetics in an individual way. The six unique individuals from all around the world, including men and women, both young and old, all proved to be magnificent in their own way. Challenging the supermodel stereotype traditionally portrayed in cosmetic ads, the MACnificent Me winners consist of a plus size woman, a gay man, and a transgender woman, to name a few. The cultural narrative is all about finding beauty in the everyday and moving away from traditional mass-produced notions of beauty. MAC succeeds in encouraging everyday people to experiment and see cosmetics as a way to promote individuality. Using names such as “ Make Me Proud” and “ It’s Really Me” for its product line, the MACnificent Me campaign serves to define a new beauty standard, in which everyone is beautiful, no matter age, race, nationality or body shape.

The cultural narrative of beauty is to make the average woman and even man feel more attractive and more confident. Many people today use

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cosmetics to fit in with the crowd whether its gender, age, or profession. Especially when it comes to one's profession, cosmetics boost your look and self-esteem making one more presentable in meetings, interviews, or the everyday workplace. The use of cosmetics promotes people to feel better and comfortable in their own skin. MAC Cosmetics' advertisements are not specifically aimed at one gender, but instead cater to men and women, regardless of race or color, promoting empowerment, diversity and strength. MAC embraces gender equality and uses its advertisements to explore and celebrate inner beauty...defining beauty using a combination of bold, striking imagery, captivating text and iconic celebrities in their ads. As a leading cosmetic manufacturer, MAC has gained strides by successfully representing cultural equality, individuality and self-expression and they continue to stay on the cutting edge in the cultural movement. Although MAC often incorporates famous celebrities in their advertisements who are known for their glamorous appeal, MAC has placed less emphasis on traditional markers of beauty and femininity than many of its competitors. MAC's advertising approach challenges the norm found in traditional cosmetic advertising conventions, narrowing the definitions of female beauty. As a result, MAC has successfully positioned their messaging so that it is not undermined by glamour and sex appeal, but rather focuses on beauty being found in the uniqueness of individuals promoting feeling better and comfortable in one's own skin, embracing one's own personal perception of beauty (versus mainstream society's) and challenging traditional gender role associations.

MAC Cosmetics is in the business of making people feel like their best selves. Their ads empower people to embrace self-expression. Their intended audience began as primarily young women but has evolved to include men and the transgender community, specifically 18-49 years old. This age group meets the needs of their consumers in terms of gender, income, ethnic background and family circle. Through the use of celebrities in their advertisements, MAC has successfully invoked an even larger audience by reaching the fans of those well-known celebrity figures. As a leading cosmetic manufacturer, MAC has gained strides by successfully representing cultural equality, individuality and self-expression and they continue to stay on the cutting edge in the cultural movement.