



W. P.: 384


# Working Paper

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WP384  
  
1981/384

W P No. 384  
September 1981

The main objective of the working paper series of the IIMA is to help faculty members to test out their research findings at the pre-publication stage.

INDIAN INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT  
AHMEDABAD-380015  
INDIA

## VISUALS IN ADVERTISING

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Pictures, contrary to normally held beliefs, have great value of providing detailed information not easily amenable to written descriptions. So it is erroneous to assume that pictures are primarily used to perform a function of getting the readers' attention and to lure him to read the copy. Pictures do attract attention. But it may not hold valid, for example, that a photograph of a sexy looking girl would only perform this function. A picture giving really useful information to the prospective customers would also attract attention. Information given to support a point of view is a message which carries weight, unless one is interested in giving extra, between-the-lines messages. In that case, the language of pictures is admittedly much more suggestive than that of the words. Any picture will generate curiosity, but only a relevant one will make sense. Therefore, pictures should be faithful to the theme, and not to the urges of creativity alone.

Photographs come very close to depicting reality as far as "seeing is believing" goes. But in reality what a person sees, and the subsequent interpretation he gives, depend on many other factors than seeing alone. What is shown to him is also very critical. A very well attended public meeting, for example, can be shown as a flop by taking a photograph of tail-enders and thinly scattered crowd. Therefore, the photographs come close to reality to the extent the source of

communication wants them to. By seeing a really healthy child along with a tin of advertised baby milk food, a reader is less likely to immediately believe in the claims of the product. It has to be substantiated with adequate proof. Unless the pictures are also likely to provide conclusive proof in some way, the "seeing is believing" principle is not likely to be applicable to illustrations in the advertising copy. Before-after series is a good technique for this purpose. However, the manner in which this technique has been used by some product groups hardly make it any reliable. Artificial reconstruction of reality through make-believe photograph is harmful both in the medium and the long run. .

Illustrations are generally composed of subjects, objects, symbols and their combinations. However, bold and attractively presented letters can also serve as illustrations, individually or in combination with the above elements. Upright letters indicating the name of the company, for example, can succeed in attaining the desired objective of registering the identity of the company fairly quickly. To establish the brand name more urgently and vigorously, some advertisers choose the approach of displaying brand names, or a headline consisting of a brand name, as part of a visual. Normally, a small sized copy of the product is also shown somewhere in the advertisement. A main picture can be supported or linked by one or more smaller pictures conveniently positioned and enclosed by a frame. Drawings, sketches, scale models, graphs, charts,

figures and maps also render a good service to illustrate a point.

Pictures play a principal role in establishing product identification. The potential customers can get an idea of how the product looks like. Furthermore, they also help strengthen the written information. The parts of the product or salient features of the offered services would otherwise go unnoticed, but pictures bring them in prominence and increase their visibility and distinctness.

Almost any photograph has a potential to be used as a visual in an advertising copy. However, it should match with the idea. Otherwise the picture loses its value. One should avoid to stretch the main idea to accommodate a readily available picture. Or put it differently, a picture should not lead to the development of an idea, the idea should lead into an identification of a suitable picture.

Pictures can have many discriminating values, properties and characteristics. These characteristics also depend on the subjects or objects used. Pictures could be dull as well as pleasant. They can depict the feelings of pain, sorrow, anxiety, discomfort, misery, despair etc., as well as those of pleasure, peace, gusto, happiness, surprise, innocence, and ecstasy. Pictures also can be seductive, bewitching, and enticing. Refreshingly attractive pictures have the power to captivate the reader.

Three types of visuals can be used : photographs, art work, and a combination of photographs and art work. Visuals can also be presented in different colours, or simply in black and white. Many a times one cannot photograph a particular object (say planet Saturn or Goddess Laxmi), or capture a particular mood (a lady anxiously awaiting the return of her husband), or a particular subject (say, Rani Padmini or Raje Shivaji). In all these and similar cases art work comes handy. Art work minimizes the search for appropriate costumes, locations, and models needed to bring the right effect.

As mentioned earlier, a great variety of things can be utilized as visuals. However, these visuals, realistic or symbolic, invariably centre around a) products/services and their features; b) customers; c) rewards these products and services offer; d) experts who can give independent or experience based opinion about the product/company performance; e) places and processes of manufacturing; f) concerns and contributions of the company/organization; and g) background material composed of nature, people, buildings, animals, plants, labels, paintings, equipments and instruments, and other man-made things. Different types of possible illustrations are elaborated in the following sections.

#### A) Range of products/services

1. The products manufactured by the company itself sometimes has a powerful message value and it can be exploited skillfully. A major portion of the advertising space

can be devoted to a well focused photograph of company's products placed near each other. Along with products, the differentiating features of the company can be presented in visuals by breaking the visual space into different blocks. These features can include past achievements, present policies, application of products on different crops or animals, different types of target groups, different kinds of insects and pests, etc.

2. The copy of the advertisement in this case plays a secondary role, and at best only describes the products shown in the picture in general terms. Of course, one can develop a strong copy to give added support to the picture. Nevertheless, the importance of the picture should not be reduced.
3. The arrangement of the products in the photograph is vital to maximize shade effects, the depth, comparative sizes of the different products, outstanding features of some products, and impressive range appearance.
4. In spite of a marketable range of products, a company may want to concentrate on only one product to promote it in specific regions. It may also be a product which is being marketed for the first time. In such cases,

a full or partial view of the product may be presented depending upon the purpose. For example, to emphasize the size of the product, the full view of it along with some other identifiable common object may be necessary. To be on the safer side, it is always advisable to opt for a full view whenever the product is new.

5. A partial view of the product can be used as visual. If the product has crossed the introduction phase, and if the company feels reasonably certain that consumers can recognize the product fairly well, it helps smaller aspects of the product come in prominence. Moreover, many a product is recognized by its container, rather than the product per se. Partial view of the container can be presented to give full scope to the contents, and the other things which go with it. For example, a cup of tea can be shown with its container, or a sprayer with a tin of insecticides.
6. In yet another combination, a full view of the product can be given along with a partial view of a part of the product.



B) Product serving the needs of the customers

1. Every product, service, or idea must serve the need of some target group. Use of this theme in advertising is very common. Since competitors are also likely to make use of such themes, the advertiser has to be extra alert in choosing his themes.
2. The product is shown while in operation. Unlike in the range of products, the product is placed in an appropriate situation to highlight the action component or the active phase. The content of the visual in such cases assures the customers that their needs can be met by the products or the services shown. An example could be a tractor carrying a full load of sugarcane to the factory.
3. Many a time, a product has to operate in most awkward situations or perform with the same level of efficiency in adverse conditions such as a tractor going through rains and muddy roads. Using these situations, a product can be shown as capable of taking on all kinds of punishments.
4. One drawback of this approach, however, is that mere presentation of the product in operation does not convey the full message. A reader is required to refer to

the text copy or the headline to understand the significance of the picture. The picture without written reference appears to be incomplete. On the basis of day-to-day experience with objects shown in the picture, a reader is likely to give multiple interpretation to the theme in the picture, and in the process, miss the reference point.

5. The product shown in the picture should be prominent with the situational details playing secondary but supportive role.
6. As an alternative, locations of the customers or the facilities provided can be illustrated keeping the product in the background. For example, a recognizable picture of a country can be used to indicate exports and product popularity in that country. Specimen copies of coupons and credit cards, special purpose bank booths, or any other facility extended by an organization can be shown to emphasize the point.

c) Focusing on the product features

1. The basic needs the products fulfil is very well known in some products. The best example which comes to mind is wrist watch. And yet the wrist watches differ in

terms of their features. Reader's attention can be focused on these outstanding features.

2. Situational details for such a purpose may be distracting depending upon the product nature.
3. However, a suggestive background to highlight the importance of a particular product feature or its relative size can be used profitably.
4. A mixture of colours and shades improve the feature visibility.
5. It is advisable to bring in sharp focus any printed matter associated with the advertised feature of the product as it increases its message value.
6. Another variant could be to show a contrast of the advertised feature and without that feature in the same picture. For example, a photograph showing a coupled segment of specially coated and uncoated pipes used for irrigation to demonstrate damage by corrosion.

D) To indicate contacts with grassroots clients

1. The more remote the organization from the ultimate beneficiary, the lesser is its sensitivity to the practical

problem areas. The latter in turn, does not help it to establish its credibility.

2. The functioning of the contact points and/or individuals can be depicted to bring home the idea of the organization's concern and effort. The picture should be able to generate the feeling that the company is always ready to help its customers.
3. These contact points could be extension workers, dealers, salesmen, research workers, demonstrators, mechanics or even the local influentials.
4. The setting in which the interaction is shown to be taking place determines the credibility and eventual effectiveness of the idea. It should, therefore, be natural, engrossing, representative, and more important, convincing. The mood, clothing, postures, and gestures of the personalities shown in the interaction situation also add to the credibility of the advertisement.

E) A symbolic representation of an idea

1. Symbolic representations are usually used to convey abstract ideas like truth, strength, durability, productivity, profit, prosperity, freedom, democracy, warmth, hospitality, luxury, intimacy, complexity,

tradition or modernity, and so on. Only appropriate symbols can convey the meanings behind the selected idea. A frog, for example, can be used as a symbol to represent the arrival of monsoons, a horse for strength, a medal for quality, and an intriguing combination of stars, light and space for future.

2. Choice of symbol requires originality and creativity of the part of the selector. A strong foundation in native culture and cultural objects provide good support in the selection process. Randomly and carelessly selected symbols lose the battle for the meaning behind that symbol is more important than the symbol itself.
3. Symbols likely to represent multiple meanings should be chosen after a great deal of scrutiny, debate, and thought. A prosperous looking rural women feeding a baby with a bottle, for example, can represent an idea of success of family planning as well as increased prosperity because of use of chemical fertilizers.
4. Enigmatic symbols can be used to catch the attention of the readers. However, objects representing only a word in the text copy or the headline should be avoided. To show a pair of handcuffs because the headline says that

a particular brand arrests pests is not likely to drive the point home.

5. Symbols telling in a nutshell the entire story given in the text are likely to be successful as they also serve as reminder messages in repeat exposure advertisements.

F) Presenting people giving testimonials

1. Companies, organizations or agencies occasionally come across people of repute or significance whose views on any segment of the company's operation have potential to influence its larger clientele, existing or prospective. Every now and then we see advertisements featuring the testimonials of such personalities. The picture then is simply composed of a photograph of the person giving a testimony.
2. A large number of choices, and an equally large number of poses of these choices, could be available to select an appropriate personality. The selection, however, is very much dependent upon the purpose, mood, and occasion of advertising. To give a few examples, these choices could include political leaders like Prime Minister and chief ministers, intellectuals, academicians, researchers, government officials, film stars, sport celebrities,

social or religious workers, owner entrepreneurs, company executives, sales personnel, company workers, unidentified but authentic users, or representatives of certain segments of the affected population like children, women, handicapped or self-employed people.

3. Use/glamorous personalities to attract attention has of limited utility - it can catch attention, but will not hold it longer. Readers do tend to differentiate between gimmicks and serious business. Of course, as stated earlier, it very much depends on the purpose of communication.
4. The basic idea behind testimonials is to lend credibility to the claims of the company indirectly. A mere photograph is not likely to extend such a credibility, but what he says will. And, therefore, a photograph in this case is only a necessary, and not a sufficient, condition.
5. The gestures of the model play an important role in establishing the authenticity of the testimonials. They should appear to be alert, active, taking time out for this special purpose, confident, on-the-spot, and formal or relaxed depending on the situation.

6. A photograph of an expert along with the product in background is likely to carry more weight. For example, an insurance agent telling about the accident proneness of a particular brand of tractor can be shown along with that tractor in the background to lend it a credibility. A person selected for testimonials should appear to be the most competent to talk about or vouch for the product performance or service.

G) Displaying rewards likely to accrue to the customers

1. As a result of purchasing a company's products, or doing transactions with service organizations, or by accepting certain ideas a customer is likely to derive measurable or non-measurable benefits. The underlying assumption is that customers' response, to a large extent, is determined by the prospects of some reward. Drawing attention to these rewards has been one of the commonly used message strategies. Illustrations in such cases centre around the perceived benefits to the customers.
2. Illustrations in such advertisements become either consumer centred, or reward centred, or a combination of consumer and reward.



3. Measurable and universally acceptable reward of course is money. Coins, checks, bank notes are often used to illustrate a point.
4. Non-measurable rewards include some degree of satisfaction. This satisfaction may get reflected into or arise out of factors such as joy, relaxation, convenience, efficiency, and prosperity.
5. Non-measurable rewards can be best expressed by symbolic visuals, but the customer or consumer becomes the best medium to show these rewards.
6. Most commonly used visual is the facial close-up of the consumer. However, to bring out the right impact, the model consumer must be capable of giving such a response. For certain categories of rural product groups, say hybrid seed, it is difficult to locate and use a representative consumer who can act before a camera the way the idea demands.
7. Illustrations can also include consequences of not using the product, i.e., the rewards missed. For example, a standing crop. Thus money is lost for not using the insecticides; or the milk production is affected for not treating the animals against certain disease.

H) Place and process of manufacturing products or business

1. To establish the claim of a superior product, the place of manufacturing or business, or the part of the process of manufacturing a particular product can be shown in illustrations. Clean and impressive looking factory or business premises; or complex but efficient looking machinery has a value of its own to create an altogether different kind of feeling among the readers.
2. Products partly superimposed on the background of buildings or machinery improve the presentation and make them more lively.
3. People knowing and using a range of products rarely get an opportunity to see how these products are manufactured. The process of manufacturing, therefore, has a built-in curiosity component. The machinery, however, should not appear to be static.
4. Illustrations of this type can be used effectively to create impressions regarding efficiency, high volume output, design, construction, modern technology, expansion, inauguration, exploration, maintenance, size of operation, warehousing, styles of supervision, internal environment, work force, and of course, production.

5. Movement against air, water, and noise pollution are gaining ground and industries are held responsible for damaging the environment and ecology of the region in which they are located. For example, efforts made to modernize existing facilities so as to prevent the release of pollutants in the environment can be brought out very effectively with pictures of this type.
6. A focus on the most critical activity or a major portion of the structure can be very inviting to the readers. It should be powerful enough to stimulate the reader's imagination.
7. Wherever it becomes difficult to accommodate the entire structure or activity into a single photograph, it can be broken down in different segments and recomposed with good art work. Alternatively, a place of business can be shown in the background with a specific feature superimposed in the inset.
8. Structures and machinery not only indicate vastness, enormity, volume, and grandeur, but also provide remarkably useful information.

I) Visuals from mythology and history

1. Mythology, folklore, legends, divine scriptures, supernatural beliefs, scholastic wisdom, superstitions, prophetic teachings, etc., provide culture specific, inspiring stories woven around the heroes of admiration, worship, and identification.
2. These stories and characters usually are a valuable source of learning, and are widely known to the public at large. They also offer innumerable themes and a stock of time-honoured ideas to influence the attitudes and behaviour of people.
3. Selective episodes from such stories can be profitably used to visualize a point elaborated in the text of advertisement.
4. Sometimes mythical visuals can be used as part of the background scene to suggest religious or traditional upbringing of the models used in the pictures.
5. Similarly, sketches from memorable historical narrations can be brought into play to emphasize various attributes like nobility, valiance, generosity, sufferance, passion, grace, chastity, friendship, devotion, and, temper.
6. And finally, objects from ancient arts can also be effectively used in visuals.