

The Brand Essence of L'Occitane through Verbal and Visual Expressions in Its Advertisement Videos

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims at revealing the brand essence that is shaped by hidden messages through verbal and visual expressions in *L'Occitane's* advertisement videos. In examining the message, Firstly, the writer starts her analysis by finding out the keyword(s) in both of the advertisement videos in finding out the verbal expressions. Then, she proceeds to capture the visual expressions from both of the advertisement videos which support the verbal expressions. In revealing the hidden messages, the writer uses denotation in order to find the literal meaning and connotation in order to reveal the second layer. Based on her analysis, she finds that the brand essence of *L'Occitane* is "going back to nature". The brand essence is supported by three hidden messages that each of the hidden message conceives several connotative layers which connect to the brand essence.

Key words: Brand essence, denotation and connotation, verbal expressions, visual expressions, natural based product.

INTRODUCTION

There are many ways that can be done in order to make companies able to sell their products to the consumers or even persuade people to do something; one of them is called marketing communication. It can be done through the quality of the product, by words of mouth or testimonies from the people who have already bought the product or have tried the service. However, there is one thing that is essential and has a huge impact to the popularity of the products or services that are sold or offered. This crucial aspect is the advertisement. Advertising has become the main concern for almost every company or institution when introducing its products or services to the public. A good advertisement is not only able to draw the attention from the public but can also be understood easily, so that the viewers are able to really know the message from that particular advertisement.

The problem with advertisements is not only its elements, which are visuals as well as texts, but also its branding. Most companies decide to do the branding by creating the name, logo, or design in order to identify and differentiate its brand from other competitors. When it comes to branding, there is one thing that is known as the brand essence. It is very important for a company to have a clear brand essence so that the customers can understand exactly the core concept that correlates with the brand itself that makes it different from others. Branding process is very essential for all companies either selling goods or services. In branding strategy, there is a term called brand narrative. A brand narrative is the main point of a meaningful brand strategy (Lloyd, 2016); it is built upon all of the insights as well as the information collected during the starting point of how the process in building the brand is done. Advertisements are usually made to promote the products or services that they have. However, by using the brand narrative, the producer would make an advertisement video that may not sound like selling or promoting its products at all, but rather in a form of telling a story that can catch the viewers' attention so that they will watch it until the end. One thing that is interesting about the brand narrative is that brand narrative somehow can give the message indirectly, but they still retain the main purpose of creating an advertisement; which is to promote its products. From the reason above, the writer finds it very interesting to analyze brand essence that is shaped by the advertisement videos which have brand narration as the branding strategy.

In this article, the writer has decided to do a research in the interest of understanding the underlying message of the advertisements by one of the popular beauty brands based in France called *L'Occitane*. The two advertisements of *L'Occitane* that are chosen are *A #TrueStory: The True Story of L'Occitane* and *40 Years of True Stories: The Beginning*. The first advertisement talks about the story of the brand *L'Occitane* which shows the *L'Occitane's* identity as a brand of natural skin care products based in France. In this article, the writer wants to reveal the brand essence of the *L'Occitane's*. Through this research, the writer wants to discover the message which is created

through the verbal expressions appeared in the advertisements. Not only that, but the writer also wants to discover how the messages in the verbal expressions are supported by the visual expressions in regards to the brand essence that *L'Occitane* wants the customer to perceive.

In analyzing the data, the writer uses the Semiotics theory which focuses on the use of denotation and connotation which is proposed by Chandler (2007) in order to reveal the hidden messages in both of the advertisement videos in shaping the brand essence. Then, she uses the theory of Metaphor by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) because some keywords that are found in the advertisement has another meaning that can be revealed through metaphor and it delivers the same message even though the words that are used are different from the concept.

As a tool of references, the writer gathers several studies which help her to understand more in applying the theories in a more accurate way. The first related study is entitled *Meaning in The Process of Signification by The Advertisement of Honda* (Wibowo, 2015). He uses advertisement of Honda as the object of his research. The second related study is entitled *Innisfree's Brand Image Through Jeju Island Campaign* (Tansilia, 2016). Both of the related studies above use the theory of denotation and connotation in revealing the meaning and the message in the advertisements.

METHOD

For the approach of the study, the writer uses qualitative content analysis method by Schreier (Schreier, 2012) to analyze two advertisement videos of *L'Occitane*. The data are taken from *L'Occitane's* official Youtube channel. The two advertisement videos that are chosen are "*A#TrueStory: The True Story of L'Occitane*" which was uploaded on February 4, 2014 and "*40 Years of True Stories: The Beginning*", which was uploaded on April 6, 2016.

In analyzing the data, firstly, the writer analyzes the verbal expressions from both of the advertisement videos which are taken from the narration. Then, she determines the keywords from the narration. After that, she proceeds to find the denotative meaning of those keywords and she connects them with the whole sentence appeared in the scene so that it can give a better understanding to the readers and to reveal the meaning behind them. In here, as her source of definition, the writer uses Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 8th edition. After that, she finds the hidden messages from both of the advertisement videos which support the brand essence. Then, she tries to find the connotative meaning and relate it with the denotative meaning in order to give a better understanding to the readers. Later, the writer comes up with the conclusion of the verbal expressions of the analysis. Secondly, the writer analyzes the visual expressions from both of the advertisement videos by proceeding to find how visual expressions; such as, images, colors, and visual attractions support the verbal expressions in shaping the brand essence.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Going Back to Nature

Provence is a province which is located in the southeast area of France and part of the Provence runs along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Since Provence is located around the Mediterranean Sea, it has a general Mediterranean climate with lots of sunshine, little snow, and hot summers. Provence is known for its cultural and natural environments which make Provence the best place to de-stress from hectic lifestyles such as working at the office, going to crowded places, markets. The writer finds that *L'Occitane* is the first nature-based cosmetic brand that is based in France. So, the writer finds out that the brand essence of *L'Occitane* is "going back to nature". The brand essence of *L'Occitane* is supported by three major hidden messages which have connotative layers that are taken from both of the advertisement videos. The first hidden message which supports the brand essence is the originality of *L'Occitane*, the second hidden message which supports the brand essence is the naturalness of *L'Occitane*, and the last hidden message is the commitment of *L'Occitane*. All the explanations are put in the following section.

The Originality of L'Occitane

In revealing the messages that are conveyed through the verbal expressions, the writer finds five keywords which reveal the hidden message of the originality of *L'Occitane*. Originality means that each of the reality that happens in *L'Occitane* is original and it has something to do with nature.

The first four captions are found in the first advertisement video, while the last one is found in the second advertisement video. The keyword from the first caption in “*A#TrueStory: The True Story of L'Occitane*”, the “true story” connote “truth” as the opening gate to tell the audience about the true story that happens in *L'Occitane*. It is supported by the visual of a story book which has yellow color as its base color which represents creativity and enlightenment. The keyword in the second caption, the “journey” connotes “process” as in the journey, there are more events, adventures, struggles happen. It is supported by the visual of a map of Provence which represents the journey itself along with the plants that are cultivated by *L'Occitane*. The keyword from the third caption, the “sun” connotes “hope” as every single day, all creatures always wait for the sun to shine on the world and that the sun always brings new hope in our everyday life.

The keyword from the fourth caption, the “authentic” connotes “reliability” as *L'Occitane* has a strong desire in creating a product with nature-based ingredients (as explained by the word “nature” that means things in the universe that are not made by people). The word “authentic” supports the word “nature” in the caption, and that the word “authentic” here tries to deliver a message that *L'Occitane* is reliable because it depends on the root source that is nature as the base ingredients of its products. The visual expression which supports “hope” and “reliability” is shown in a picture of the land of Provence that is rich of sunlight as the representative of the sun itself and the nature in Provence which represents the authenticity of the nature that is reliable. The last keyword from the last caption in “*40 Years of True Stories: The Beginning*”, the “son of Provence” connote “expertise” as the founder who is known as “the son of Provence” really understands his homeland and knows what is best from it and so *L'Occitane* carries out the best thing from Provence. Therefore, connotatively, it can be assumed that by being the one who clearly understands about the natural condition in Provence, the founder of *L'Occitane* has a goal of being an expert in natural-base products by showing that he is the son of Provence, a person who originates from Provence and really knows and understands about the power of nature. It is supported by the visual expression of a black and white photograph of the founder together with his family, standing in the middle of Provence as the representative of the son of Provence who knows about his homeland.

The Naturalness of L'Occitane

The next hidden message is the naturalness that *L'Occitane* has. What the writer means by “naturalness” is the quality of being natural based on the natural principal of the nature (Oxford Dictionary, 2010), meaning that it is not Geo-engineered (men-made). The hidden message is supported by four keywords that are taken from both of the advertisement videos. The first two captions are taken from the first advertisement video entitled “*A#TrueStory: The True Story of L'Occitane*” and the last two captions are taken from the second advertisement video entitled “*40 Years of True Stories: The Beginning*”. The keyword in the first caption from “*A#TrueStory: The True Story of L'Occitane*”, the “true beauty” connote “ultimate charm” as the true beauty is not something that can be concealed and it comes out naturally. It is supported by the visual of a beautiful woman who appears as not wearing make up and it represents the natural beauty that can be gained in applying *L'Occitane's* products. The keyword in the second caption, the “incense” connotes “uniqueness” as incense is the metaphor form of the flowers in Provence. Each of the flower has its own aroma and it is unique. It is supported by the visual expression of the two flowers of Verbena and Peony which has its own aroma and even the time when they are harvested is different.

Then, the keyword from the third caption in “*40 Years of True Stories: The Beginning*”, the “commitment” connotes “emotional connection” as *L'Occitane* emotionally attaches to its root source, the natural condition of Provence. It will always stick to the nature-based cosmetics even though many years have passed and it means that the brand really attaches to the nature and always depends on nature as its root source. No matter what will happen in the future, *L'Occitane* will always refer to nature as its main pillar in its company. It is supported by the visual of the values of *L'Occitane* that are going in to the bottle. The bottle represents *L'Occitane*, while all the values which are going in to the *L'Occitane* indicate that *L'Occitane* does really attach to the value. The last keyword from the last caption, the “wisdom and respect” connote “high cultivating and preserving value” as the workers of *L'Occitane* use their knowledge to take care of the natural biosphere and treat the nature really carefully. The keywords actually show a deep message that the workers of *L'Occitane* have values, such as wisdom and respect in cultivating the land so that they will not

damage the base ingredients of *L'Occitane*. Therefore, the brand essence, “going back to nature” is supported by the workers who do not only water and fertilize the land, but they also devote their mind and thoughts in cultivating the land of Provence. It is supported by the visual of a man as the representative of the workers of *L'Occitane* in paying attention to the distillation bottle that he holds. It indicates how the acts of “wisdom” and “respect” are shown by the man as the representative of workers who work in the laboratory and devote his or her thoughts and ideas to the products.

The Commitment of L'Occitane

The third hidden meaning that is shown in both of the advertisement videos entitled *A#TrueStory: The True Story of L'Occitane* and *40 Years of True Stories: The Beginning* is the commitment of *L'Occitane*. The commitment of *L'Occitane* supports the brand essence of “going back to nature” in the sense that *L'Occitane* needs a strong commitment in using the power of nature while other brands rather choose Science over nature. The writer finds keywords that are taken from five captions. The first three captions are taken from the first advertisement video entitled “*A#TrueStory: The True Story of L'Occitane*” and the last two captions are taken from the second advertisement video entitled “*40 Years of True Stories: The Beginning*”. The keyword in the first caption from the “*A#TrueStory: The True Story of L'Occitane*”, the “observation” connotes “meticulousness or thoroughness” as the act of observing something is not an act of revealing something miraculously to the public. Doing an observation consumes a lot of efforts such as, time, knowledge, and patience. An observation must be done carefully. If something has been observed thoroughly, it will reveal and produce the best outcome for other people. In other words, *L'Occitane* would like to reveal its commitment to the customers. This is shown from the term “observation” as the revelation of the commitment in each of *L'Occitane*'s product. The keyword in the second caption, the “treasure” connotes “only giving the best” as the revelation on how *L'Occitane* only gives the best and the most valuable active ingredients that nature offers. Connotatively, by putting the word “treasure” here is to connect “the valuable substances” that are contained by the nature to something that is highly cherished and treasured by people. Treasure is a word which is strongly related to something that is valuable. The two keywords above are supported by visual expression of the distillation bottles in a laboratory as the act of observation that is done in order to reveal the best thing from a particular ingredient. Not only to reveal the best thing out from the ingredient but also to show how commitment has a role in order to do the observation so that the observation can reveal the best thing and it can benefit all the consumers. The keyword in the third caption, the “endless” connotes “promise” that *L'Occitane* commits a promise to the customers that it will always renew and revitalize the natural biosphere in *L'Occitane* by endlessly reinventing the nature. It is supported in the visual expression of the natural biosphere in Provence. The purpose of putting the nature elements in this scene is to emphasize to the audience that *L'Occitane* uses nature as its root ingredients and also to show how the land of Provence looks like. The part where the *I'immortelle* flowers are circling the almond tree is the part where the sense of “promise” is shown. Through that motion, it indicates that the natural biosphere in Provence will always be reinvented (as the same motion of ∞ - the “infinity symbol”).

Then, the keyword from the fourth caption in “*40 Years of True Stories: The Beginning*”, the “leading light” connote “role model” as the leader of the nature-base cosmetic. Then, by being the product that has been a “leading light” in natural cosmetics for forty years, the commitment of *L'Occitane* is shown in the sense that this brand becomes a “role model” or a “leader” in the natural cosmetics field and that other natural cosmetics brands always look up to *L'Occitane*. Then, the visual expression which supports the verbal expression of “leading light” is shown in the scene of the land of Provence, together with the sunlight, and also the Science pattern as if completing the nature. The Science pattern is put in one frame with the natural ambience of Provence in order to give a sense of equality between the nature and the Science. *L'Occitane* still shows the brand essence of “going back to nature” in projecting the land of Provence in one scene together with the Science pattern. In addition to that, the part where the nature fills in the Science pattern indicates that nature completes Science. Furthermore, the sense of “leading light” is shown through the existence of the sunlight in the picture (see Figure 4.14). Thus, through those elements, *L'Occitane* projects its commitment in being the brand that acts as a “role model” for other natural cosmetics brands since *L'Occitane* uses nature and chooses nature in completing the Science.

The last keyword from the last caption, the “tradition” connotes “habit” as when something has become a habit in our life, we tend to do it over and over again without even realizing it. Hence, the tradition that *L'Occitane* has done for forty years of its carrier shows its commitment and it carries the brand essence of “going back to nature” even though many years have passed. It is also supported by the visual expression of two figures of men who are looking at the land of Provence (the image of a middle-aged man turns into an old man). The existence of the shadow figure actually indicates that the tradition has passed from generation to generation (this is also shown through the way the producer changes the middle-aged man into an old one). As the tradition of keeping the nature alive, so the commitment and value of *L'Occitane* can be passed down to each of the worker in *L'Occitane*.

CONCLUSION

By analyzing *L'Occitane's* advertisement videos, the writer finds that the brand essence of *L'Occitane* is going back to nature. This “going back to nature” is shaped by three hidden messages that are taken from two advertisement videos. This can be seen through three hidden messages of “the originality of *L'Occitane*”; “the naturalness of *L'Occitane*” and “the commitment of *L'Occitane*”. Each of the hidden message is supported by several keywords which conceive connotative layer. Throughout the advertisement video, *L'Occitane* constantly shows the natural biosphere in Provence, the existence of deep yellow color, and also green color. Those elements of nature and color that are used in the advertisement videos imply that *L'Occitane* truly uses nature as its base and primary ingredients.

Through the first layer, which is the denotative meaning, the writer finds that all of the messages just merely talk about *L'Occitane* and its brand story. However, it is not enough just to see the messages only through the first layer. Therefore, the second layer or the connotative meaning is needed in order to reveal the true message or value which cannot be seen only by looking at the denotative meaning. Through the second layer, the writer finds how *L'Occitane* projects its value of going back to nature in all of its advertisement videos. All of the verbal and the visual expressions exist support each other in revealing the hidden messages of the originality, the naturalness, and also the commitment in building the brand essence of the brand, *L'Occitane*.

In conclusion, the verbal expressions and the visual expressions support each other and they show that actually *L'Occitane* is consistent in delivering the brand essence. The consistency can be seen through *L'Occitane's* advertisement videos. Even though the data are taken from two different advertisement videos, but they show the whole same concept of the brand essence, which is “going back to nature”.

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