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Deception in cosmetics advertising: Examining cosmetics advertising claims in fashion magazine ads

化妆品广告中的欺骗:分析时尚杂志广告中的化妆品广告

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Abstract

The FDA has only focused upon the physical safety of cosmetics and has ignored the significant reasonability of advertising claims. As such, the present article is intended to examine/ascertain the extent to which cosmetics claims contain deceptive content in fashion ads. Through a content analysis, the study reported herein revealed that cosmetics claims were not evenly distributed. To that end, the preponderance of the claims appeared to be described primarily by three categories (scientific, performance and subjective). The results also showed that more cosmetics claims were classified as deceptive than were deemed as acceptable. Close examination of these trends revealed that, for instance, most superiority claims were categorized as false, whereas scientific claims tended to be classified as vague or as omitting important information. Furthermore, performance claims were likely to be viewed as vague and endorsement claims were seen to be acceptable. The study concludes with practical and public policy suggestions that need to be addressed by advertisers and the FDA.

Keywords: fashion, cosmetics, deception, content analysis, FDA

在时尚界,实证医学以及其在化妆品中的应用在促进创新增长中变得更为重要。“药用化妆品”这个词是在1961年,由美国化妆品化学家协会的创始成员Raymond and Reed创造的(Newburger, 2009)。“药用化妆品”的本义是指“活性的”和以科学为基础的化妆品,后来扩大到有或声称有药用性质的化妆品(Newburger, 2009)。换句话说,“药用化妆品”是一个由“化妆品”和“药物”组成的混合词。由于不明确的执行广告的规则或实体化程序标准(Cohen, 1980),美国食品和药物管理局(FDA)只专注于化妆品的物理安全而忽视了其广告合理性要求的重要性。因此本研究的主要目的是探索和解析出现在时尚杂志广告中的化妆品的文字叙述的适用范围以及确定某些类型的文字叙述是否有欺骗的可能性。具体来说,研究目标是(1)检查识别某些化妆品的文字描述欺骗性质的分类模式效用,(2)探讨误导类型和不同类型化妆品文字描述之间的交互以及(3)为提高时尚产业中化妆品广告的可信度和真实性提出建议。根据这个目的,这项研究试图通过识别化妆品文字描述的模式和这些文字描述潜在的欺骗性类型,从而有助于丰富营销学文献。综上所述,结果可能会提供保护消费者权益和发现增加广告效果新途径的方式。

结果表明,文字描述的类型(即化妆品类别,误导模式)可以可靠地应用于化妆品广告。内容分析表明,化妆品的文字描述并非均匀分布,即化妆品的文字描述的优势似乎主要是由三个类别:科学、性能、主观来描述的。将639(总757)份文字叙述分为三个类别。换句话说,绝大多

数的描述似乎以表现为基础有或没有证据来支持描述(见表1)。描述被分为这些种类也被主观夸大(至少在我们审定的观点中)。况且强调描述的任务似乎能够在吹捧的描述(夸大的描述)或依靠代言人及带有环境的产品属性组织描述中反应出来的能够被消费者认为是有利的。相对缺乏“夸张”的语句值得关注(757中只有43份-见分类中),尽管化妆品公司可能依赖于其他描述形式宣传,也可能对品牌/产品的优势导致虚假的认识。也就是“科学”、“性能”,和/或“主观”描述可以在一个更传统的夸张语句中同时存在,尽管这些确切语句的性质仍有待确定。从调查结果我们可以得出一些初步的结论结合了两种类型的分类,(当描述类型以误导/欺骗交叉分类为结果)。例如,很多化妆品描述的分类是根据一个误导性或欺骗性进行分类时被认为是可以接受的(621中136)。仔细观察这些趋势显示出超过半数的误导性或欺骗性的描述被称为“模糊”(n=316)而被分为一个“遗漏”(n=130)或作为一个“虚假陈述/谎言”(n=175)。

本研究建议广告商应该努力制定具体策略来处理消费者对市场的不信任。究竟为何会如此?例如,许多担保性的描述被认为是“可以接受的”,为这种描述模式建议一种积极有影响力方式。继续使用担保性的描述可能为广告商对于愤世嫉俗的消费者提供了有益的策略。优势性描述,应清楚地向消费者解释并且比较彻底和完全的比较。例如如果是“获奖”产品,广告商应该在描述中提供明确的时间,地点,什么奖项。

科学的描述,应提供成分的具体证据,科研过程以及使用非专业术语的研究结果,这样消费者才可以理解。而不是陈述难以理解的研究结果、意义和重要性。广告商可能还需要减少使用主观的描述;此种描述方式可能会适得其反(227中只有7个描述这类被视为可以接受)。对于表现的描述,营销人员也应该提供更具体的证据(如解释如何以及为什么唇膏能持续12小时)。此外研究者认为越来越多的消费者所关注环境问题(Lee, 2011)。因此,补充强调产品与环境属性有密切关系是有益的。例如,化妆品销售给消费者之前未使用动物做测试。我们还建议“可接受”描述应该有“足够大小”,所以顾客可以辨别与感受。此外“可接受”描述显示时字体颜色还应该与背景颜色形成鲜明对比,这可能会吸引更多读者的关注。

对于如何宣传改善消费者的利我们提供了一些基础性的建议,我们希望这些建议会对广告商和消费者都有利。未来的研究可能会专注于化妆品的消费者对于嵌入式消息宣传意识和对消费者诉求和购买意向的影响。由于用于研究的广告样本在有限时间内从当前女性杂志抽取,进一步的研究可能需要扩大样本,杂志广告的范围。最后可能研究,对于不同的社会群体消费者如何判断虚伪的宣传会是有趣的话题。

关键词:时尚;化妆品;欺骗;内容分析;美国食品药品监督管理局

1. Introduction

Fashion is a popular style or practice, reflecting cultural and societal values (Halvorsen, Hoffmann, Coste-manière, & Stankeviciute, 2013) and carrying the purpose of esthetic expression (Sproles, 1974). The definition of fashion can be understood as everything that is worn on the body and that is done to or with the body (such as adornment; Barnard, 2014). According to Stone (2008), fashion embraces multiple categories, such as clothing, accessories (e.g. handbags, earrings) and cosmetics. As a result, many fashion brands (e.g., Gucci, Giorgio Armani, Chanel) carry both apparel and cosmetics product lines.

In the fashion industry, evidence-based medicine and its application to cosmetics have become more important as the pressure for innovation increases. As a result, the term “cosmeceutical” was coined in 1961 by Raymond Reed, a founding member of the US Society of Cosmetic Chemists (Newburger, 2009). The original meaning of “cosmeceutical” referred to “active” and science-based cosmetics; it was later expanded further to cosmetics that have, or are purported to have, medicinal properties (Newburger, 2009). In other words, “cosmeceutical” is a hybrid term of “cosmetic” and “pharmaceutical”.

As a result of unclear rules or criteria for enforcing advertising substantiation programs (Cohen, 1980), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has only focused upon the physical safety of cosmetics and has ignored the significant reasonability of advertising claims (Liang & Hartman, 1999).

Prior research has indicated that deceptive claims may lead consumers to make erroneous judgments (e.g. Burke, Milberg, & Moe, 1997; Johar, 1996). Over time, such efforts may lead consumers to become defensive toward and distrustful of advertising claims (Darke & Ritchie, 2007). For instance, incomplete comparisons that suggest that a product is of a high quality but which do not provide a clear comparison referent are meaningless to consumers (Shimp, 1978) and, as a result, strategies which utilize such comparisons may be ineffective. According to Pollay (1986), deceptive claims may “turn us into a community of cynics, [who] doubt advertisers, the media, and authority in all its forms” (p. 29). Deceptive claims can also be considered annoying, offensive and insulting to the consumer’s intelligence (Gardner, 1975).

Therefore, the main purpose/objective of this study is to explore and delineate the scope of cosmetics claims appearing in fashion magazine ads, as well as to determine the likelihood that certain types of claims might be deceptive (or not). We endeavor to understand the degree to which various types of cosmetics claims might be perceived by consumers to be deceptive.

Specifically, the research objectives are to: (1) examine the utility of a previously developed classification schema (e.g. vague, omission, false/lie) for identifying the deceptive nature of certain cosmetic claims in fashion magazine ads; (2) investigate the interaction between this deceptive typology and another cosmetics claim schema whose purpose is to identify specific types of cosmetic claims (e.g. scientific, performance and superiority claims); and (3) make recommendations for improving the credibility and truthfulness of cosmetic advertising in the fashion industry.

The following section briefly reviews cosmetics advertising regulation and its current challenges. The study then uses a matrix content analysis (see Carlson, Grove, & Kangun, 1993) to examine the type of deceptiveness that may exist in various kinds of cosmetics claims. It ends with a discussion on current issues in cosmetics advertising claims and the different perspectives and approaches that could be taken regarding regulation issues.

2. Literature review

2.1. Understanding deception in advertising claims

Consumers’ responses to deceptive claims are a perennially important topic for researchers, marketing practitioners and policy makers (Darke & Ritchie, 2007). Previous research has found that deceptive information held in the long-term memory may have harmful or dysfunctional effects on the consumer’s purchasing decision (Olson & Dover, 1978). In other words, deception may produce a negative bias towards subsequent advertisements (e.g. Darke & Ritchie, 2007; Pollay, 1986) and this distrust may lead consumers to make attribution errors, characterized by an over-attribution of hostile intentions to the advertiser (Main, Dahl, & Darke, 2007). Most recent neuroimaging methods indicate that deceptive claims may not be a promising practice when consumers have time to fully process claims (Craig, Loureiro, Wood, & Vendemia, 2012). Mentalization (the ability to understand the mental state of oneself and others which underlies overt behavior) about the validity of the ad claims may lead them to be processed first as potential threats, followed by reasoning about the underlying intent of the claim (Craig et al., 2012).

Though consumers might fall prey to the subtle inferences in advertising claims, the amount of complaints received by agencies such as the Advertising Standards Agency and the Better Business Bureau are increasing (Darke & Ritchie, 2007). An opinion poll revealed that a mere 17% of respondents trusted the advertising industry, 39% were cynical toward advertising, 7% were deceptiveness-wary (they acknowledge advertising is somehow beneficial without trusting it) and 16% regarded advertising as harmful (Ipsos-Reid, 2003; Pollay & Mittal, 1993). Thus, the following section will review the current situation and the challenges faced by the cosmetics industry in its promotional efforts.

2.2. The challenges of cosmetics advertising

Cosmetics were not regulated until the 1930s (Liang & Hartman, 1999; Newburger, 2009). After 16 cases of blindness associated with the use of Lash Lure Eyelash aniline dye in the 1930s, Congress took action to protect consumers regarding their usage of cosmetics (Riordan, 2004). The FDCA set the regulatory infrastructure for cosmetics based upon prevailing knowledge at that time. The Act was modified in 1960 by the Color Additive Amendment, and again in 1966 by the Federal Fair Packaging and Labeling Act. The criteria for evaluating cosmetics is supposed to be very similar to the criteria for evidence-based medicine: controlled clinical studies using large panels with “blinded” volunteers, use of accepted instrumental technology and/or proven clinical assessment methodologies, well-chosen measurement parameters and statistical analysis of the results (Evidence-based cosmetics: New trend or old hat?, 2011). However, Congress has placed more stringent controls on the manufacturing and preparation of foods and drugs than on cosmetics (Newburger, 2009).

As a result, though terms such as “cosmeceuticals”, “active cosmetics” or “dermo-cosmetics” have been used in the medical field, no major cosmetics industry brand uses any of these words in its advertising, as consumers are more prone to appreciate a product perceived as natural than a cosmeceutical that contains scientifically proven ingredients (Evidence-based cosmetics: New trend or old hat?, 2011). Most cosmetic claims suggest that well-being and happiness will be the result of applying cosmetic products, yet there is usually no substantiation of these claims, and those who back the claims with scientific evidence and consumer testing often use questionable methodologies for their substantiation (Maurer, 2010).

The FDA is charged with enforcing the FDCA in terms of policing cosmetics that use labeling that is false or misleading (Liang & Hartman, 1999). As noted, the gray area between the strictly defined cosmetic and the strictly defined drug is the category of cosmeceuticals, which claim to have both cosmetic and pharmaceutical effects (Liang & Hartman, 1999; Rinaldi, 2008).

As a result, the FDA must make a judgment as to whether these gray-area products are to be considered either drugs or cosmetics. Its categorization as a drug subjects the product to extensive regulatory requirements for new drugs — so, ironically, cosmeceutical marketers do not want to prove the efficacy of their product, since drug regulation would then apply (Finkel, 2008; Rinaldi, 2008). Consequently, cosmeceutical advertising needs to attract consumers, but not regulators (Finkel, 2008). Some examples of cosmeceuticals include anti-aging or anti-wrinkle products, fat-reducing creams and facial scrubs for smoother, firmer, more evenly pigmented skin. In the case of cosmeceuticals, the products claim to eliminate wrinkles, rather than simply disguise them (Finkel, 2008).

3. Research method

Content analysis was employed to examine the nature of cosmetics advertising claims, as it can serve to derive inferences from the text in a claim and provide a scientific description of claim content. As such, content analysis is useful both in the context of justification for establishing patterns which help to support existing theories, and in the context of discovery for establishing patterns on which to formulate new theories (Kolbe & Burnett, 1991). In other words, content analysis is useful to identify content usage and patterns (Torres, Sierra, & Heiser, 2007). The following passages describe how the initial typology was developed and used to examine the nature of the claims in the sample ads.

3.1. Typology development

Two typologies were used to investigate the interaction between the cosmetics claim types and the presence of misleading/deceptive content among the claims. The initial cosmetics claim typology was derived by examining a broad sample of cosmetics ads and reviewing various academic journals for examples of cosmetics claims. For instance, Newburger (2009) developed 12 categories of claims that the cosmetics industry tended to utilize (e.g. clinical evaluation, performance characteristics, superiority and endorsement claims). The complete list of the claim categories is presented in Table 1.

The second typology was adapted from Carlson et al. (1993) and was designed to capture potentially misleading and/or deceptive aspects of the claims. Originally,

Table 1. Cosmetics advertising claims typology.

Cosmetics Claims	Description	Example
Superiority claim	Focuses on the superiority nature of the product	“Our award winning product.” “This is the best lotion in the world.”
Scientific claim	Emphasizes the results of clinical evaluation, scientific process, or product formula	“Clinical proven.” “Inspired by groundbreaking DNA research.” “2% BHA” “100% fragrance free”
Stand-alone performance claim (Sensory claim)	Focuses on performance without any evidence.	“Your skin feels softer.” “Looks more radiant.” “12-hour makeup to instantly cover flaws.”
Endorsement claim	Uses endorsers in the claims	“Dermatologists recommend ingredient that treats and helps prevent breakouts.”
Environmental claim	Associated with environmentally-friendly attributes that a product possesses.	“No animal testing.”
Subjective claim	Expresses fanciful or exaggerated statements of the type no reasonable person would take literally.	“All you need for all day confidence.” “Make visibly clearer skin a way of life.” “Time is on your side.”

the typology (Carlson et al., 1993) was developed from multiple sources (i.e. Aaker & Myers, 1987; Gardner & Leonard, 1990); it was recently adapted by Cummins, Reilly, Carlson, Grove, and Dorsch (2014). Similar to previous research (Carlson et al., 1993), a fifth category (Acceptable) was also included, to avoid our judges perceiving the implication that every claim must fall into one of the misleading categories. The misleading/deceptive classification is described in Table 2.

3.2. Stimulus material and coding

To generate a sample of cosmetics advertising claims, the most popular fashion magazine titles, as regularly delineated in *Advertising Age*, were selected (Advertising Age, 2014). The fashion titles include *Vogue*, *Glamour*, *Marie Claire*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Elle*, *InStyle*, and *People StyleWatch*. During 2013, ads in *Harper's Bazaar* increased by 12.6% and ads in *Vogue* increased by 4.7% (Advertising Age, 2014). Among the seven magazines, *Vogue* was the most productive title, with 2691.43 ad pages in 2013 (Advertising Age, 2014).

April issues were chosen for the fashion titles because this time-frame roughly coincides with the period in which beauty/fashion ads become more prevalent in the popular press, as the fashion industry attempts to promote new trends in the spring (Advertising Age, 2014). Thus, the selected ads reflect the newest trends in the market (newer than March). In addition, there is no heavy sales promotional activity in April, such as summer sales (summer sales in the US start in late May and early June, normally after Memorial Day) and winter holiday promotions (Thanksgiving, Christmas, Valentine's Day). In other words, the April issue presents not only the newest trends, but also an above-average amount of ads for the year.

Moreover, research has suggested that a one-month data collection using multiple fashion magazines can be sufficient for content analysis in a fashion context (Englis, Solomon, & Ashmore, 1994), due to the large amount of embedded ads in the more popular fashion magazine titles (e.g. *Vogue*, *Glamour*, *Marie Claire*). For example, Hung and colleagues conducted a study using magazines from April 2004 to examine women featured in ads (Hung, Li, & Belk, 2007).

Only ads of sufficient size (one page) were chosen, to enhance readability (Ford et al., 1998), and duplicate ads were not deleted, in order to represent results more accurately (Huhmann & Brotherton, 1997; Fowler & Carlson, in Press). This is because "message weight", "gross impressions" and "frequency" are important measures

Table 2. Misleading and/or deceptive typology.

Misleading types	Description	Example
Vague/Ambiguous	The claim is overly vague or ambiguous. It contains a phrase or statement that is too broad to have a clear meaning.	"Inspired by science"
Omission	The claim omits important information necessary to evaluate its truthfulness or reasonableness.	"The product is clinically tested." (Omits information on how and where the product was tested.)
False/Outright lie	The claim is inaccurate or a fabrication.	"This product brings miracles to your skin." (Coders did not believe there is such a miracle for applying the product on the skin.)
Acceptable	The claim is classified as being acceptable.	

Table 3. Sources of cosmetics advertising.

Title	Number of Ads	Percent	Number of Claims (Valid)
<i>Harper's Bazaar</i>	28	8.7	66
<i>Glamour</i>	48	18.3	137
<i>Marie Claire</i>	47	17.6	134
<i>People StyleWatch</i>	34	10.1	77
<i>Instyle</i>	56	19.1	144
<i>Elle</i>	47	15.8	121
<i>Vogue</i>	29	10.4	78
Total	289	100.0	757

Table 4. Sources of cosmetics advertising.

Product Category	Frequency of claims
Makeup	246
Skincare	217
Body product	46
Fragrance	29
Hair product	194
Nail product	24
Other	3
Total	757

for advertising effectiveness (Arens, Weigold, & Arens, 2013). By deleting duplicate ads that the fashion industry intends to present to the audiences, the researchers might intentionally change the frequency with which audiences are actually exposed to the ads in the sample. As a result, the seven fashion titles generated a total of 289 cosmetics ads, 25 of which were duplicated. The ads encompassed a wide range of product categories, such as makeup, facial skincare, body products, fragrance, hair products and nail products. Table 3 and Table 4 summarize the sources of the ads used in the study.

The authors studied each ad to determine the location and the number of cosmetics claims that it possessed. Any differences concerning claims were resolved among the authors. In the process of studying the claims, each was labeled and highlighted for identification purposes. Three female judges then classified the claims (cosmetics ads tend to target women). The authors selected judges with diverse backgrounds to ensure that their views reflected those of the general consumer population, more so than if only individuals with a cosmetics background had served as judges (Carlson et al., 1993). In other words, the prior experience and current occupations of the judges in the current study were quite diverse and may contribute to a tendency to evaluate the cosmetics claims differently.¹ Specifically, one judge currently works as a consultant, with a business degree, in the Southeast United States. The second judge is a small business owner with little to no fashion experience, and the third judge works in academia. Such background variety is precisely what advertisers wish for in order to make an effort to capitalize on beauty concerns, and ensures the objectivity of this study.

Generally, the coding process followed the rules established in previous content analyses on deceptive claims (e.g. Carlson et al., 1993; Cummins et al., 2014). For instance, all three judges were given verbal and written descriptions/training on each typology prior to evaluating the claims. In doing so, a codebook was designed to categorize all the variables under consideration. The judges were also briefed on

cosmetics advertising and were provided with opportunities to ask questions about the coding process. The open discussion ensured that the coders were not primed to look for deceptive claims.

Each ad was viewed independently and the judges subsequently evaluated the claims independently during the study. Each judge began by evaluating the claims according to the cosmetics claim-type schema and then classified the claims based upon the misleading/ deceptive typology categories. In order to ensure objectivity, the judges were allowed to code the claims into the categories of outright lie, omission, vague and acceptable (e.g. Cummins et al., 2014; Kangun, Carlson, & Grove, 1991). By allowing the judges to assign claims to the “acceptable” category, bias can be minimized. In a few cases in which coders disagreed, they discussed the ads and made a final decision together. This procedure was followed to achieve as much objectivity as possible (Kassarjian, 1977). Two rounds of pretests (about 50 claims) were performed in order to train the coders and pretest the categories. The two pretests resulted in inter-rater reliability above 0.7 for both typologies. The pretest ads were not included in the final sample. The judges then examined the claims that were preselected by the authors.

4. Results

Perreault and Leigh’s (1989) index was calculated to evaluate inter-rater reliability as it is sensitive to coding error and allows for corrections due to chance agreement (Ji & McNeal, 2001; Rust & Cooil, 1994). As such, it provides greater objectivity and is considered to be superior to other traditional measures, such as Cohen’s Kappa and the percentage of agreement (Perreault & Leigh, 1989). To provide greater objectivity, we assessed other indices as well, with similar results (for cosmetics claims, Cohen’s Kappa = 0.92, Percent agreement = 0.94, Krippendorff’s Alpha = 0.92; for deceptive claims, Cohen’s Kappa = 0.83, Percent agreement = 0.87, Krippendorff’s Alpha = 0.83). Using Perreault and Leigh’s (1989) index, the inter-rater reliability for cosmetics claims and deceptive types was 0.92 and 0.82,² respectively, and both of the indices exceeded the critical value of 0.7 (Kassarjian, 1977; Perreault & Leigh, 1989).

About 5% of claims which were assessed as possessing more than one category were discarded from our final analysis, as inclusion in the matrix necessitated using only those claims that had been assigned reliably by both typologies (Carlson et al., 1993). A cross-tabulation was performed and a summary of the differences across all categories between the two typologies is presented in Table 5. Overall, cosmetics claims were not evenly distributed ($\chi^2 = 385$, $p < .001$, $df = 5$). In terms of the misleading category typology, the analysis revealed that the cosmetics claims were more often classified as misleading than were deemed as acceptable ($\chi^2 = 310.73$,

Table 5. Claim type and misleading cell frequencies.³

	Vague	Omission	False/Lie	Acceptable	Total
Superiority ⁴	8 (18.6)	4 (9.3)	20 (46.5)	11 (25.6)	43 (100)
Scientific ⁵	94 (41)	99 (43.2)	4 (1.7)	32 (14)	229 (100)
Performance ⁶	88 (48.1)	7 (3.8)	42 (23)	46 (25.1)	183 (100)
Endorsement ⁷	11 (15.9)	17 (24.6)	4 (5.8)	37 (53.6)	69 (100)
Environmental ⁸	2 (33.3)	1 (16.7)	0	3 (50)	6 (100)
Subjective ⁹	113 (49.8)	2 (0.9)	105 (46.3)	7 (3.1)	227 (100)
Total	316 (41.7)	130 (17.2)	175 (23.1)	136 (18)	757 (100) ¹⁰

$p < .001$, $df = 1$). In addition, more misleading claims were classified as vague than as an omission or as false ($\chi^2 = 314.511$, $p < .001$, $df = 14$).

The findings showed that most superiority claims were categorized as false ($\chi^2 = 19.75$, $p < .001$, $df = 3$) and scientific claims tended to be classified as vague or omission ($\chi^2 = 197.634$, $p < .001$, $df = 3$). The results also revealed that performance claims tended to be vague ($\chi^2 = 34.27$, $p < .001$, $df = 3$). In addition, most of the endorsement claims were deemed to be acceptable ($\chi^2 = 71.15$, $p < .001$, $df = 3$), and most of the subjective claims were classified as vague or false ($\chi^2 = 170.18$, $p < .001$, $df = 3$). In addition, the findings suggested that there is no difference among the misleading categories for environmental claims due to the small sample size of such claims ($\chi^2 = 4.95$, $p > .05$, $df = 3$).

We found that the preponderance of claim types appear to be described primarily by three categories of our typology, i.e. “scientific”, “performance” and/or “subjective.” Specifically, the judges classified 639 (out of 757 total) claims into one of these three categories. In other words, the vast majority of claims seem to be performance-based, with or without evidence to support the claim (see Table 1 definitions). Claims classified in these categories also appear to be subject to exaggeration (at least in the opinion of the judges we used). Much less emphasis in terms of claim assignment seems to be reflected in what might be termed “puffery statements” (superiority claims). In addition, the same was true of claims that rely on the recommendation of an endorser, or those having an association with environmental attributes of the product that might be viewed favorably by consumers. We believe the relative lack of “puffing” statements is noteworthy (only 43 out of 757 – see superiority category), though cosmetics companies may be relying on other forms of claims that may also result in the development of false beliefs about assumed brand/product superiority: that is, “scientific”, “performance” and/or “subjective” claims may be serving in the same manner as a more traditional puffing statement, though the exact nature of what actually results from these statements is still to be determined.

We were able to draw some preliminary conclusions from findings drawn from combining the two typology classifications, i.e. when the results of the claim types typology were cross-classified with those from the misleading/deceptive classification (see Table 5). For example, more cosmetics claims were classified according to one of the misleading/deceptive categories than were deemed as acceptable (621 versus 136). Closer examination of these trends revealed that over half of the misleading/deceptive claims were termed as “vague” ($n = 316$), compared to being classified either as an “omission” ($n = 130$) or as a “false statement/lie” ($n = 175$).

An important finding from this research is that “vagueness” in the instances noted above still represents a statement format that appears to our judges to be unsubstantiated and, consequently, less apt to be believable and/or trustworthy. More importantly, a majority of claim types are deemed to be unacceptable according to our categories than are deemed acceptable. This suggests that unacceptable cosmetics claim types are failing not only because of vagueness, but also because of perceptions that important information is missing and/or that the claim evidence is simply wrong. Specifically, cosmetics claims are considered unacceptable because of a lack of concrete evidence to support the claim as well as the uncertainties attributable to, or affiliated with, the claim itself.

5. Discussion

The purpose of this research was to explore and delineate the scope of cosmetics claims appearing in print ads, as well as to determine the likelihood that certain types of

claims might be viewed as misleading/deceptive (or not). To that end, we were able to discern six categories that appeared to represent the range of cosmetics claim types that are being depicted in current (as of 2014) magazine ads (see Table 1). Of particular interest in this research was further examination of claims regarding the type of cosmetics termed “cosmeceuticals”, which may imply to the consumer that the cosmetic product not only enhances physical attractiveness, but also may enrich the user’s quality of life and overall health. We also endeavored to understand the degree to which these and other types of cosmetics claims might be perceived by consumers to be misleading/deceptive according to a typology of misleading/deceptiveness derived from the literature (see Carlson et al., 1993). We learned that our claim types (new for this research) could be applied reliably to the advertising claims that had been identified. Consequently, we have confidence that the true scope of what is being encapsulated by the nomenclature “cosmetic claims” is being assessed by the typology we developed for this research. Yet, given our results and the skepticism noted by our judges regarding cosmetic claims in general, we might argue that consumers (at least as represented by our judges) are already skeptical of such claims and are likely to designate claims like these as lies, omitting important information and/or presenting vague claims. As such, our findings are consistent with past research on “defensive consumers” (e.g. Darke & Ritchie, 2007, p. 114).

This research suggests that advertisers should strive to develop concrete strategies for dealing with distrustful consumers in the marketplace. How might this occur? For example, many endorsement claims were deemed to be “acceptable,” which suggests a positive effectiveness level for this claim format. Continued use of endorsement claims may be a beneficial tactic for advertisers regarding cynical consumers. For superior claims, the benefits should be clearly explained to consumers and comparisons should be stated thoroughly and completely. For instance, if the product is “award-winning”, the claims should present unambiguously when, where and what awards have been received by the advertiser.

For scientific claims, the concrete evidence of ingredients, the scientific research processes used and lab results should be provided in laymen’s terminology. As such, consumers would have clear understanding of such claims, which constitutes the implications and importance of the research findings. Advertisers may also need to minimize the use of subjective claims, as such claim formats may be counterproductive (only seven out of 227 claims in this category were considered acceptable). For performance claims, marketers should also provide more concrete or supporting evidence (e.g. explain how and why lip gloss can last for 12 hours). Additionally, researchers have suggested that there are increasing concerns about environmental issues among consumers (e.g. Lee, 2011). As such, it may be beneficial to provide increased emphasis on whatever environmental attributes might be germane to the product – for example, that the product was not pretested on animals prior to being distributed to consumers in general. We also suggest that the “acceptable” claims should be of sufficient size so that viewers can see the disclosure. In addition, “acceptable” claims should be presented in a typeface color in sharp contrast to the ad’s background color, which could draw and direct more attention from readers.

Our findings may have implications for the phenomenon of cosmeceuticals mentioned earlier. As noted, these claims imply that the cosmetic product may have both beneficial appearance and health-related effects, though substantiation is often lacking in the claim itself. Unfortunately, there has been no clarification as to how these claims could be brought into compliance with the Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act (FDCA) and the FDA has done little to address the cosmeceutical

movement (Liang & Hartman, 1999). Unless the FDA steps in and regulates cosmetics, this unidentified “gray” area, encompassing claims about the beauty and health benefits of the cosmetic product, may be less subject to scrutiny – yet these claims may be the very ones most in need of regulation, since consumers may surmise that their use has a two-pronged advantage: both health AND beauty benefits.

6. Conclusion

Deception not only undermines the credibility of advertising as a whole by making consumers defensive, but also produces damaging effects for the advertisers who are directly responsible for making the claims. The study makes it clear that marketers have a powerful self-interest in upholding the truth in cosmetics advertising. This article presented the genesis and current status of cosmetics claims and suggested that more regulations need to be developed.

There are a few issues that need to be addressed with regard to the analysis. The first concern is the content analysis itself, which is based upon advertising-based observations. As such, future research may focus on consumer awareness of embedded messages in cosmetics claims and the impact of such claims on consumer purchase intent. Second, the sample of the study was taken from current women’s magazines within a limited timeframe (April 2014) and, as a result, further research may need to expand the scope of the sample of magazines. Finally, a previous study addressed the reasons why women purchase magazines (Altuna, Siğirci, & Arslan, 2013); consequently, it might be intriguing to study how women from different social groups judge the deceptiveness of such claims.

Additionally, research has also showed that luxury perception may differ depending on the visual art employed (Kim, Ko, & Lee, 2012). Some of these visual arts are similar to the concept of “radical fashion” (i.e. that unlikely to be adapted in reality) (Zhang & Di Benedetto, 2010, p. 1). As such, future research may examine visual arts and deceptiveness in cosmetics ads. It will also be fruitful to investigate the meaning of the images presented and claims made in cosmetics ads.

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Notes

1. The reliability might have been higher if the judges came from homogeneous backgrounds (Carlson et al., 1993).
2. $I = \{[(F^0/N) - (1/k)][k/(k - 1)]\}^{0.5}$ for $F^0/n > 1/k$. Where N = The total number of judgments made by each judge, F^0 = The number of judgments on which the judges agree and, k = The number of category.
3. Overall, cosmetics claims were not evenly distributed ($\chi^2 = 385, p < .001, df = 5$). In terms of the misleading category typology, the cosmetics claims were more often classified as misleading than were deemed as acceptable ($\chi^2 = 310.73, p < .001, df = 1$). More misleading claims were classified as vague than omission or false ($\chi^2 = 314.511, p < .001, df = 14$).
4. Most superiority claims were categorized as false ($\chi^2 = 19.75, p < .001, df = 3$).
5. Scientific claims tended to be classified as vague or omission ($\chi^2 = 197.634, p < .001, df = 3$).
6. Performance claims tended to be vague ($\chi^2 = 34.27, p < .001, df = 3$).
7. Endorsement claims were deemed to be acceptable ($\chi^2 = 71.15, p < .001, df = 3$).

8. There is no difference among the misleading categories for environmental ads ($\chi^2 = 4.95, p > .05, df = 3$).
9. Subjective claims were classified as vague or false ($\chi^2 = 170.18, p < .001, df = 3$).
10. Claim type percentage.

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