IT'S NOT YOUR FATHER'S MAGAZINE AD

Magnitude and Direction of Recent Changes in Advertising Style

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ABSTRACT: We examine how the style of magazine advertisements changed between 1969 and 2002, using ads included in the *Which Ad Pulled Best?* (WAPB) editions published over that period. Six aspects of ad style are examined: the proportion of space allotted to pictures, the amount of body copy used, inclusion of the brand name in the headline, incorporation of the brand into the picture, the layout of pictures and text, and the presence or absence of a stand-alone brand block. Using contemporaneous copy test data from the WAPB editions, we show that the style elements that became more common were those that had been more effective, and those that became less common were those elements that had proved less effective. Results suggest that during this period consumers increasingly approached magazine ads as pictures to be viewed and not as documents to be read. In response, magazine advertisers adapted by altering their stylistic and design choices to give more weight to pictorial elements and less weight to verbal elements.

There is an old debate within social science about the depth and degree of change that can occur when phenomena are observed over time (Gergen 1973). The debate oscillates between two poles, with one view holding that changes, however visible and marked, are really only superficial. This view holds that the theoretical principles governing, say, what works in advertising are universal and unchanging. What changes is only the surface manifestation of these underlying principles. The other view is simply that at certain junctures, fundamental and substantive change may occur, and that theories of how consumers respond to advertising must then evolve to reflect those changes; otherwise, theory loses its grasp on the empirical regularities it was supposed to explain.

In this paper, we examine some of the changes that have occurred in the stylistic arrangement of fundamental building blocks making up magazine ads and then consider possible explanations. We will argue that the changes observed in advertising style reflect substantive changes in the consumers to which these ads were directed, and that these stylistic changes were necessary if such advertising was to continue to be effective. Consequently, understanding the nature of these changes is important for both advertising theory and practice.

To introduce the reader to the nature of the stylistic changes under consideration, we reproduce the two sets of ads shown in Figures 1 and 2. Figure 1 shows three ads, covering a span of 50 years, that all apply the same basic stylistic template. The ad on the left for Ivory Soap is from the 1930s (Marchand 1985, p. 179); the middle ad, for Canada Dry, is from the 1960s; and the ad on the right, for Wish-Bone Salad Dressing, is from the early 1980s. Each of these ads uses the so-called picture window layout (Chamblee and Sandler 1992) in which picture, headline, and body copy are separate elements piled vertically, on the assumption they will be processed sequentially. In these ads, the picture is but one element among several. The body copy occupies a substantial portion of the ad, and the brand name stands alone near the bottom of the ad. Separate picture, text, and brand blocks, of the type seen in the ads in Figure 1, are generally believed to be the fundamental structural elements from which a magazine ad can be composed (Pieters and Wedel 2004).

Figure 2 reproduces three ads from the present millennium that differ in important ways from those in Figure 1. First, the picture is no longer a separate element, but has taken over the entire ad, so that the ad itself is now a picture. Body copy has been markedly reduced, or has disappeared altogether. Finally, none of these ads has a separate brand identification block as traditionally conceived. Brand identification is now accomplished by a reproduction of the package or by the logo emblazoned on a reproduction of the product itself. On the other hand, all of these ads maintain the tradition of photorealism, presenting themselves as clear glass windows through which objects can be seen (Scott 1994). Later we discuss how

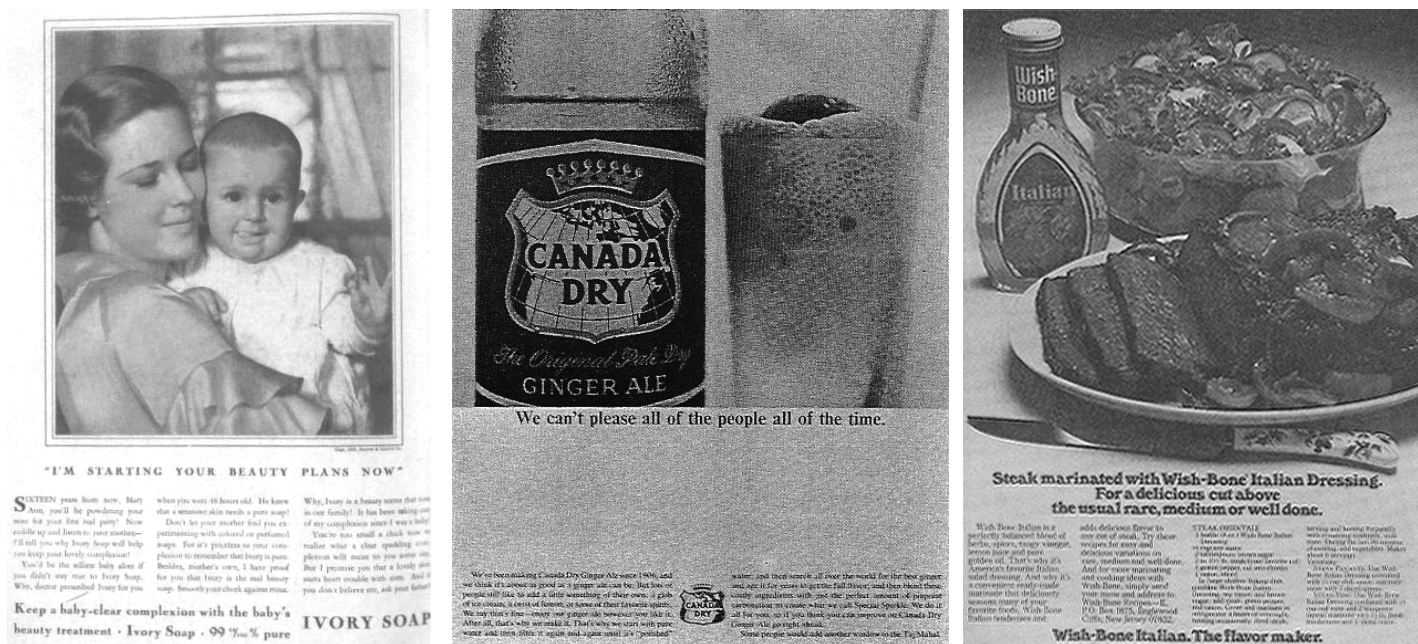**Edward F. McQuarrie** (Ph.D., University of Cincinnati) is a professor of marketing, Leavey School of Business, Santa Clara University.

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FIGURE 1
Examples of Old-Style Magazine Layouts

even this photo-realism convention begins to break down in very recent times.

If the ads in Figures 1 and 2 are representative of their respective eras, then magazine styles have changed fundamentally and the change appears to have occurred relatively recently—sometime after the 1980s. If we ask why the style of advertising has changed, it appears that while the older ads assume an attentive *reader,* the more recent ads presume a visually oriented, casually browsing *viewer.* Old-style ads appear to be structured as documents to be perused for market information; new-style ads appear to be structured as images that provide visual entertainment in their own right. Old-style ads presume a prospect who processes the ad as a message about a brand; new-style ads presume a consumer of media seeking entertainment. Old-style ads expect to engage the consumer; new-style ads expect only a passing glance.

These changes in ad style presumably reflect larger changes in the societal context embracing consumers, advertisers, and advertisements (e.g., Leiss, Kline, and Jhally 1990). For example, to the extent that media intensity has increased, so that consumers are bombarded with greater and greater numbers of marketing communications, consumers may have learned to spend less and less time and energy on individual print advertisements (e.g., Bulmer and Buchanan-Oliver 2006). Ads could then be expected to change to include fewer words and more pictures, on the assumption that reading is laborious and viewing is less so. To the extent that consumer abundance increased, with multiple brands available, all equally effective in addressing consumer needs, consumers might have become less interested in learning about brands from advertisements, thus driving changes in the placement of brand information within the ad (e.g., O'Donohoe 2001). To the extent that the advent of first television, then graphics software for manipulating images, and then the image-rich Web increasingly exposed consumers to more and more imagery and less and less discursive prose, magazine ads may likewise have come to place more and more emphasis on pictures and less emphasis on words (e.g., Scott 1993).

The interesting question is whether the style of ads had to change in response to these larger societal developments. Put another way, if magazine ads had not changed their style, would they have continued to be as effective as before? Was the change in style akin to the swiveling of a weather vane—a matter of swinging to follow temporary fashions, not reflective of any substantive change in the nature of how advertising works to influence consumers? Or were changes to the consumer-advertisement ecology sufficiently profound that a new kind of advertising style had to be forged in response?

To even begin to address this question requires the availability of some measure of advertising effectiveness gathered (1) over time, and (2) across ads exhibiting different styles at each point in time. If the ad styles that are seen less frequently over time are also styles that had been less effective, and if the styles that proliferate reflect styles that had been more effective, then the changes in ad style over time may reflect more fundamental changes in how consumers interact with advertising. Such changes would need to be addressed in any theory of ad effectiveness. Absent such a linkage, changes in ad

FIGURE 2
Examples of New-Style Magazine Layouts

style over time may simply be epiphenomena of changes in the larger societal and media environment, wholly superficial, and without implications for advertising theory and practice.

In what follows, we make use of a unique sample of ads, gathered over a lengthy period and submitted to contemporaneous copy testing, to empirically anchor and temporally locate the nature and extent of recent changes in magazine advertising style. The data set allows us to observe whether changes in the incidence over time of particular styles track changes in the effectiveness of these ad styles. With these relationships laid out, we consider alternative explanations for why magazine advertisements may have changed their style. We conclude with a discussion of how magazine advertising style might continue to develop in the future, in light of the phenomena observed thus far.

CONTENT ANALYSIS

Sample

To document changes in style, we conducted a content analysis of ads appearing in the nine editions of *Which Ad Pulled Best?* (WAPB) published between 1969 and 2002 (Burton 1969; Purvis and Burton 2002). The purpose of the WAPB books was to elevate understanding of what works in advertising by reporting copy-testing results for paired ads that differed in some point of execution (the genesis of this effort is described in Swan [1951]).

Each of the nine WAPB editions contains 40 or 50 pairs of ads, in almost all cases full-page magazine ads. These pairs sometimes present two executions from what appears to be a single ad campaign; they mostly present two ads for the same brand, and they virtually always present two ads for the same product category. Generally speaking, Burton and Purvis constructed the pairs to consist of one ad that was effective and the other less so, based on some executional choice that was meaningful to Burton and Purvis from the perspective of their tacit theory of ad effectiveness (e.g., whether a headline offered a numerical fact, or a picture showed a person using the product). Because the style factors discussed in this paper receive no mention in the Burton-Purvis explanations for ad effectiveness (these explanations may be found in the instructor's guide that accompanies each edition), we assume that their choices in selecting which ads to include, from among the limited number of ads available to them from the copy-testing services to which they had access, are not associated with the stylistic changes examined here.

Both consumer and business-to-business (B2B) ads are included in the WAPB books, with consumer ads accounting for 70% to 80% of the total. The accompanying instructor's guide for each edition supplies one or more copy test measures for each ad. The first four editions used predominantly Starch scores for the consumer ads, while the fifth and subsequent editions used Gallup & Robinson measures. A further complication when the entire series is examined is that the second, third, and fourth editions incorporated only a small number of new ad pairs, with the majority of ads carried over from previous editions. Most but not all of the ads appearing in the fifth through ninth editions appear uniquely in a single edition.

After eliminating ads that were not full-page magazine ads, or that were not tested by either the Starch or Gallup & Robinson methodology (or the Readex methodology, in the case of B2B ads), a total of 656 ads were available for content analysis. Of course, these ads do not constitute a probability sample. Hence, no estimate of incidence obtained from this sample (e.g., the proportion using a picture-window layout) can be projected to the population of American magazine advertisements in the period. This judgment sample may nonetheless be acceptable for use in longitudinal comparisons. Obviously, the WAPB authors could not have included 2002 ads in the 1996 edition, could not have included ads from 1996 in the 1993 edition, and so forth. If there have been fundamental shifts in the style of magazine advertisements as a function of time, these shifts should be detectable when the nine editions are compared longitudinally.

More important, the WAPB sample has one key advantage that would be virtually impossible to replicate in any probability sample freshly gathered by a contemporary scholar: the availability of consumer response data in the form of the associated copy test scores that indicate how particular ad elements were processed by consumers at different points in time. The WAPB series thus allows us to examine whether there is any systematic association between stylistic elements that change over time and the effectiveness of these elements.

Procedure

Two coders (Ph.D. students in English), worked with black and white copies of the relevant pages of the nine WAPB editions. Following an initial training session in which sample ads were coded and these codings were discussed and critiqued by the researchers, each ad was examined by the coders working individually and scored separately by each coder on the measures described below. Training was also ongoing: The coders met regularly throughout the coding process to compare judgments and to ensure that coding definitions were being applied uniformly across coders and over time. Coefficient κ for the measures ranged from .789 to .961, with a median of .906. Remaining discrepancies were resolved by discussion.

Measures: Content Analysis

The proportion of the ad devoted to pictures was coded as more than 75%, 50–74%, or less than 50%; coders used a ruler to determine which of these categories applied to an ad. The amount of body copy was coded as minimal or no body copy, substantial body copy but less than half the ad, or body copy filling more than half the ad (again, using a ruler). Coders indicated whether the brand name appeared in the headline and/or whether it appeared in the picture. Coders also identi-

fied whether the brand name stood alone in a separate block of the ad. Finally, coders indicated whether the ad layout was picture-window or not, using definitions written by the researchers in keeping with Chamblee and Sandler (1992).

Although not the primary focus of the analysis, coders also identified whether the headline, if present, contained a rhetorical figure, and whether the picture contained a visual rhetorical figure. To make these determinations, coders were trained using the definitions and examples in McQuarrie and Mick (1996) and Phillips and McQuarrie (2004) of verbal and visual figures, respectively. Specifically, a rhetorical figure is an artful deviation from expectation that occurs at the level of style and is not judged as an error by consumers. For example, headlines that contain a rhyme ("A rich spicy bar for your cookie jar") or a pun ("Diet Centre: Why weight for success?") would be identified as containing rhetorical figures. Similarly, if the systematic deviation appeared in the ad's picture (such as a string of pearls arranged in the shape of a smile for a toothpaste ad), the picture would be coded as containing a visual rhetorical figure.

Measures: Copy Testing

Editions 1 through 4 of WAPB report Starch scores for consumer ads; among these, "advertiser associated" appeared most similar to the Gallup & Robinson measure available for ads in editions 5 through 9, and we use it as the measure of effectiveness for editions 1 through 4. In some cases, Starch scores for men and women are reported separately; these were averaged to create a single "advertiser associated" score for each ad. Editions 5 through 9 report a Gallup & Robinson measure called "proved name registration" for each ad; this is the "ability of the ad to stop and hold the audience's attention to the advertiser's name." Both Starch and Gallup & Robinson scores are presented in terms of the percentage of the sample that met criterion for the measure. Both used sample sizes in the range of 100 to 150.

Analysis

In keeping with the descriptive aims of this paper, the focus of the analysis is graphical. For each element of ad style, we ask: (1) Is a trend over time visible? and (2) Is the trend in place throughout the period, or does it originate at some later point? We addressed the nonuniqueness of ads in the second, third, and fourth editions of WAPB by using the edition as the unit of analysis (there were too few unique ads in the second, third, and fourth editions to provide stable readings when used alone). Since there were too few B2B ads (*n* = 132) to conduct a meaningful trend analysis, we focus the trend analysis on the consumer ads (*n* = 524). We then briefly compare consumer and B2B ads to highlight the differences between them.

FIGURE 3
Incidence of Large Pictures Versus Substantial Body Copy
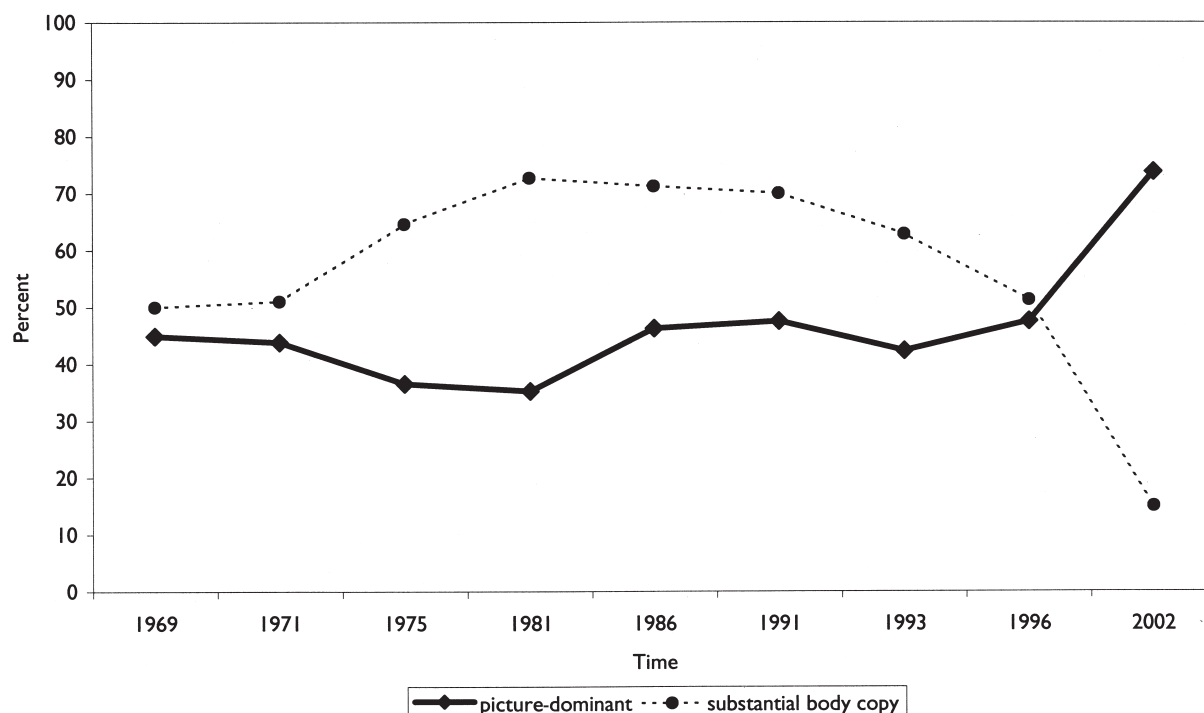
RESULTS

Content Analysis

As seen in Figure 3, ads where the picture consumes more than 75% of the available space accounted for a little less than half of all ads throughout most of the period. In 2002, however, the incidence of such ads increases markedly, accounting for nearly three-quarters of all ads in that year. Likewise, the proportion of ads containing substantial body copy is about 50% prior to 1981. After 1991, however, their proportion falls off at an accelerating pace, until by 2002 they account for less than one-fifth of all ads. Collectively, these trends show advertisers placing less emphasis on words and more emphasis on pictures, especially after 1990. Pollay (1985) indicates that the trend toward pictures and away from words in advertising extends across the twentieth century. The significance of the data in the present study lies in the degree to which this trend appears to have accelerated in recent years.

Figure 4 shows the incidence of ads that include the brand name in the headline but not the picture, versus the incidence of ads that do not mention the brand name in the headline, but show it in a picture. Inclusion of the brand name in the headline was quite common prior to 1981, occurring in almost one-third of all ads. The incidence then drops steadily until it bottoms out in the mid 1990s at about 5% of all ads. Conversely, ads that incorporated the brand name in the picture

accounted for less than one-fourth of all ads early in the period. The proportion of such ads then rises steadily, until by 2002 it reaches about two-thirds of all ads. The trends shown in Figure 4 are consistent with those in Figure 3; they suggest that advertisers became ever more concerned about showing the brand in pictures, even as they became less concerned about stating the brand name within a prominent portion of the ad text.

Figure 5 shows the incidence of ads departing from the picture window layout and the incidence of ads where the brand name is stated as part of a stand-alone brand block. Despite some zigs and zags, the picture window layout became steadily less common, accounting for less than 25% of ads by 2002. A stand-alone brand block remains the norm throughout the period, until a sudden falloff in 2002. Thus, by the end of the time period examined, the picture has broken out of its window to take over the ad, while the brand migrates from a stand-alone position to one that is integrated into the picture.

Finally, we found no trend in the incidence of verbal rhetorical figures in headlines over the time period examined. This is consistent with the findings of Phillips and McQuarrie (2003), who showed that the trend toward increased use of rhetorical figures had begun to top out by the 1970s. The overall levels of verbal and visual rhetorical figures found here are consistent with the totals reported in both Tom and Eves (1999) and Phillips and McQuarrie (2003). The one change of note is that the ratio of visual figures to verbal figures increases

FIGURE 4
Brand Placement
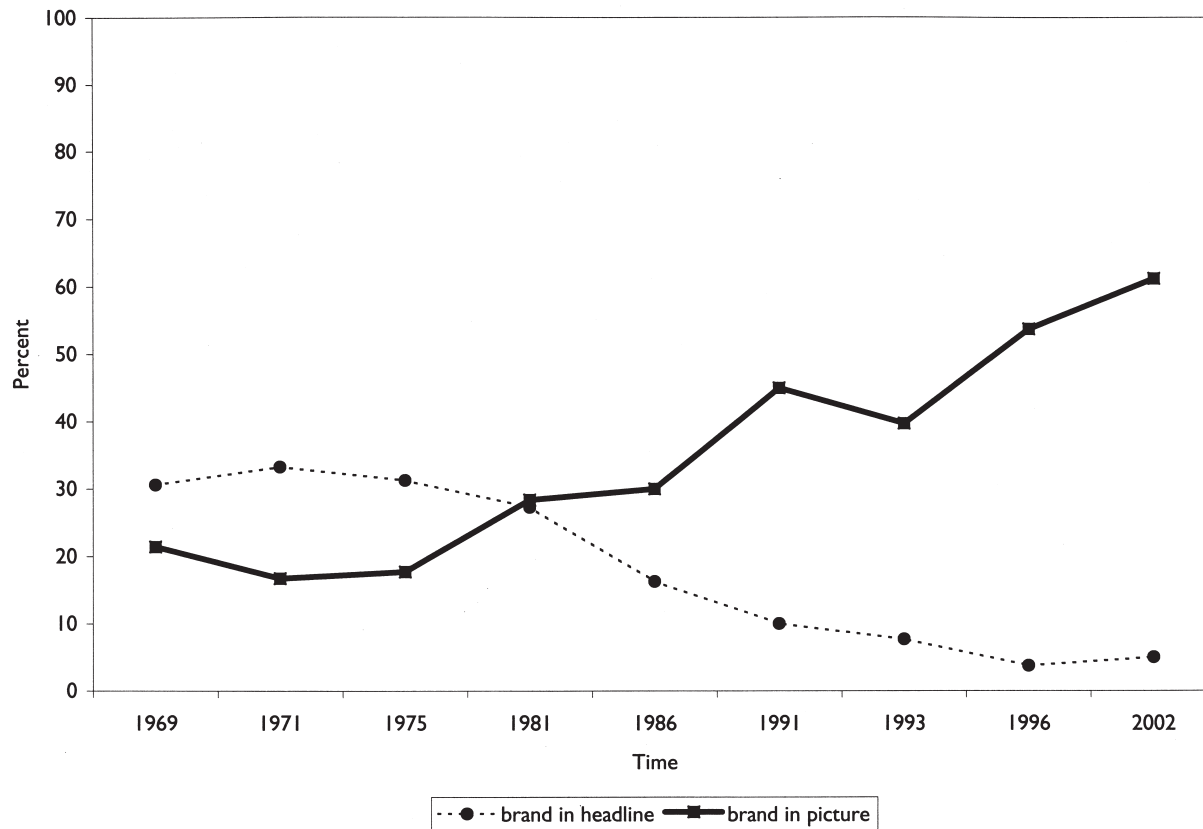
markedly when ads from the 1960s (1:10 ratio) are compared with ads in the final 2002 edition (1:4 ratio), which suggests again the growing importance of the pictorial component of ads to advertisers.

Consumer Versus B2B Ads

We conducted a χ^2 analysis to compare the incidence of the six style elements graphed in Figures 3 to 5 in the consumer ads as compared with the B2B ads. Consumer ads were significantly more likely to have a dominant picture and to portray the brand only in picture form ($p < .01$). B2B ads were significantly more likely to have substantial body copy, to mention the brand in the headline, and to have a stand-alone brand block ($p < .01$). There was no difference in the incidence of the picture window layout ($p > .3$).

These comparisons do not address the question of whether the style of B2B ads may have changed in the same direction as the style of consumer ads, albeit starting from a much lower base. To explore this issue, we grouped B2B ads into those appearing in the 1993 or 1996 editions and, using χ^2 tests, compared them to those appearing in the previous six editions (no B2B ads appeared in the 2002 edition). In no case was there a significant shift toward the new style of ad in the later period. In short, the new style of advertising depicted in Figure 2 is associated with consumer ads but not B2B ads. This is important, because it suggests that the changes in style observed in the consumer ads cannot have been an automatic function of changes in the society at large, or an unthinking response by members of the advertising profession; otherwise, change should be visible in the B2B ads as well, since these ads are part of the same larger social and professional context.

Copy Tests

The copy-testing data available for ads appearing in the WAPB series can be used to examine possible explanations for why the style of consumer magazine advertisements changed during the 1969 to 2002 period. Although many explanations for a trend can always be offered after the fact, potential explanations for why the style of magazine ads changed fall into two major groups, corresponding to positions in the long-standing debate among scholars about the depth of change that is possible in consumer phenomena. Here these positions are contrasted as adopting dismissive versus substantive explanations. Dismissive explanations argue that the changes observed are derivative of some external factor not associated with the effectiveness of the advertisements. By contrast, the substantive explanations

FIGURE 5
Trends in Type of Layout and Placement of Brand
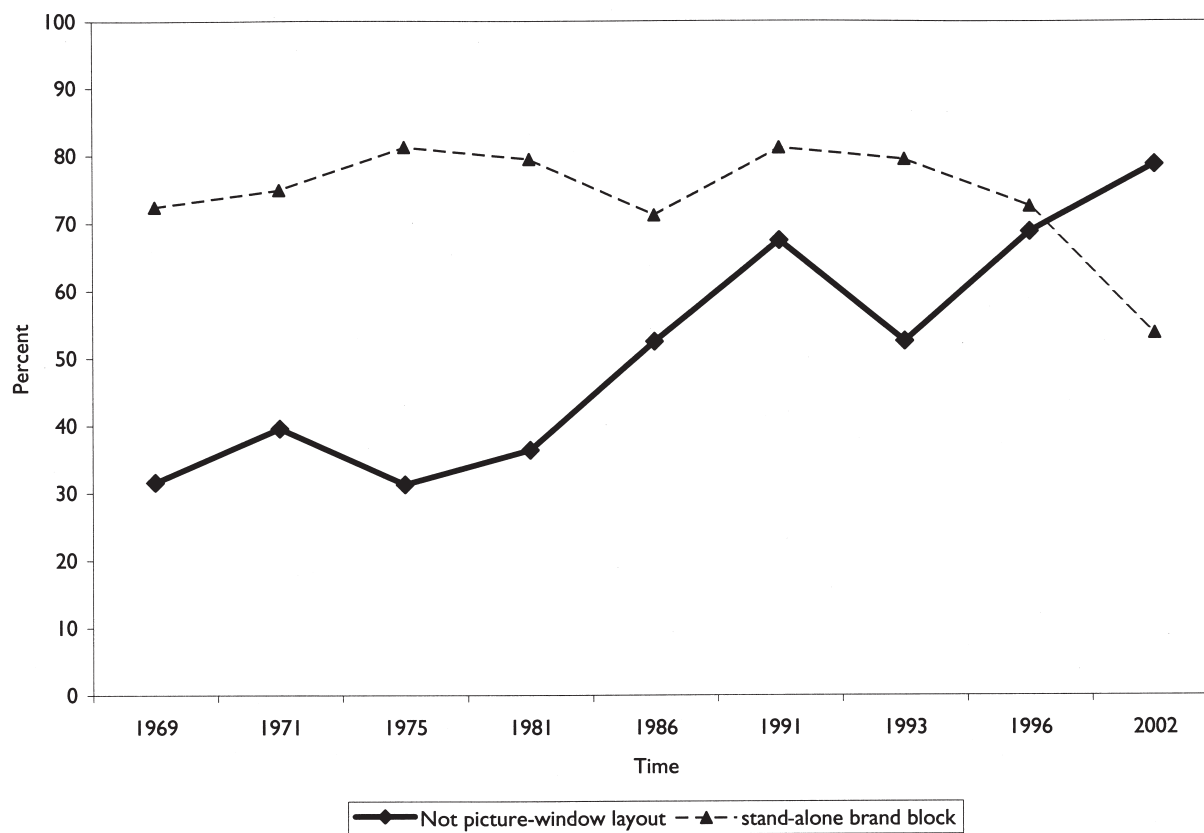
argue that advertisers changed the style of ads because this was a necessary adaptation if ads were to continue to achieve the marketing goals set for them.

The copy test data would tend to support a dismissive explanation if they show no differences in effectiveness when comparing ads that either possess or lack the style elements that change over time. Conversely, the copy test data would tend to support substantive explanations to the extent that changing style elements can be shown to be differentially associated with measures of ad effectiveness. Specifically, for a style element that jumps in incidence late in the period, a substantive explanation would predict the following pattern: Very early in the time period, the element would show no effectiveness advantage (because the relationship between the advertisement and consumer has not yet changed). As the shift in incidence approaches, an effectiveness advantage should appear, as the change in consumer response to advertising precedes advertisers' adaptive reactions to it. Once the shift is complete (especially in cases where a style element begins to appear in almost all cases or in almost no cases), an effectiveness advantage may no longer be present. In such cases, the remaining instances of the almost-disappeared style element (mention of the brand name in the headline, for example) could represent niches where this element continues to be effective.

To explore these issues, we classified each consumer ad in each of the WAPB editions as possessing or lacking the six style elements whose changing incidence was reported above. We averaged the copy test score percentages for the ads in each classification for each edition. We then subtracted the scores ($Mean_{possess}$ minus $Mean_{lack}$) to estimate, at each point in time, how much more effective ads with, for example, a dominant picture were relative to ads that lacked this feature. The results are presented in Figures 6 through 8, each of which shows results for the style elements in the corresponding Figures 3 through 5.

As can be seen from Figure 6, the effectiveness results for picture-dominant ads are close to the pure case. Early in the period, picture-dominant ads are, as often as not, less effective. In the 1980s, they become notably more effective. Once the incidence of picture-dominant ads hikes up in 2002, the advantage, while still present, becomes more marginal. In the case of body copy, the results are unambiguous: Throughout the period, ads with substantial body copy were notably less effective on these copy test measures. The continued gap in effectiveness may indicate that the trend away from including substantial body copy still has a way to go. In addition, one can imagine institutional obstacles that might bolster the role of body copy despite repeated evidence of its ineffectiveness

FIGURE 6
Relative Effectiveness of Ads with a Dominant Picture Versus Ads with Substantial Body Copy
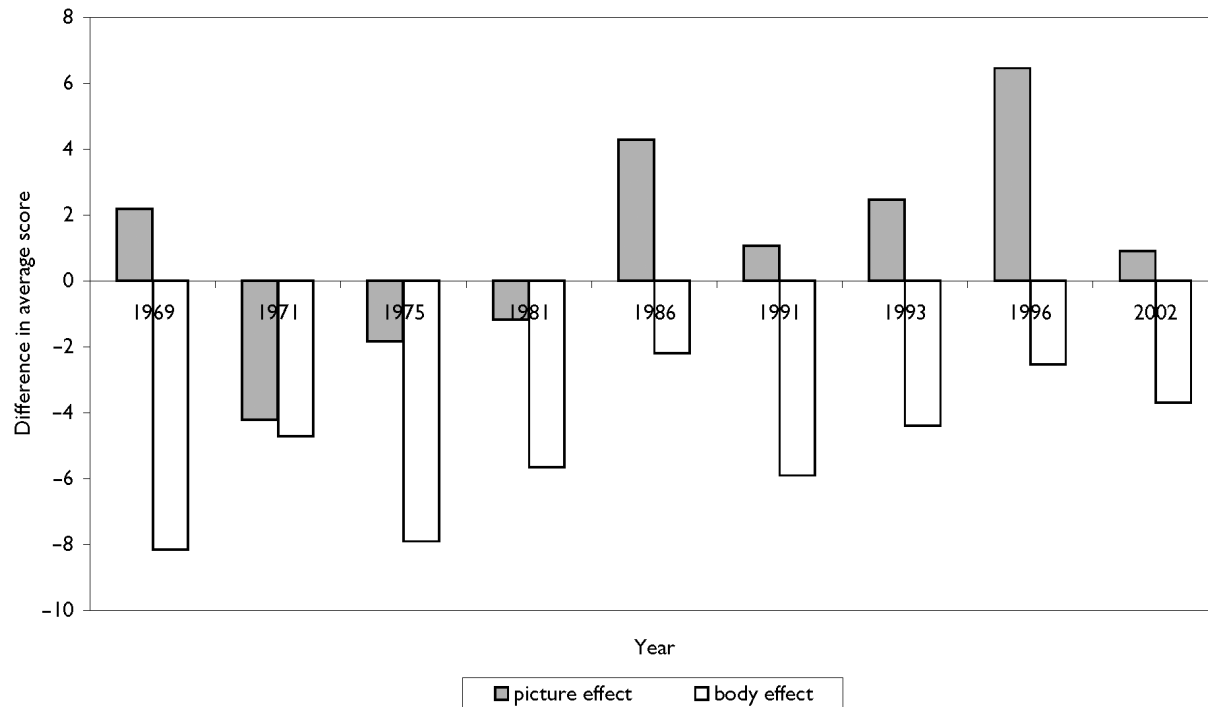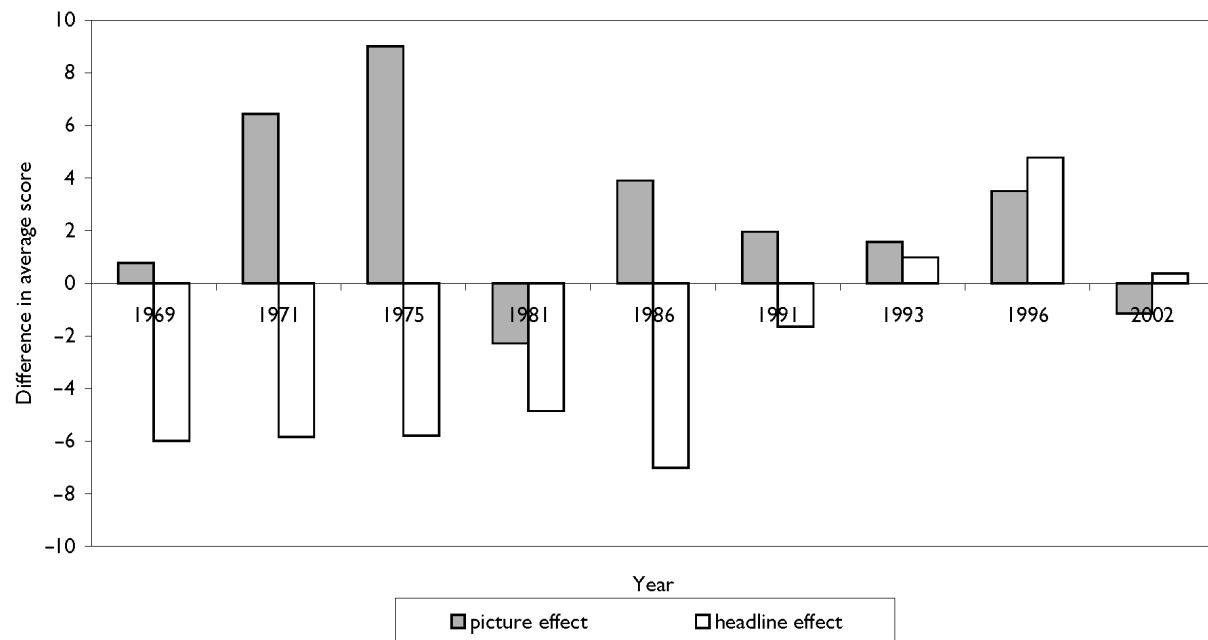

FIGURE 7
Relative Effectiveness of Ads with Brand Name in Headline Only Versus Ads with Brand Shown in Picture Only


(after all, what is a copywriter supposed to do if body copy disappears?). By and large, the effectiveness results for picture dominance and amount of body copy are consistent with the idea that the style of magazine ads changed because it had to change if these ads were to be effective.

Figure 7 is also supportive of a substantive explanation for why ad styles changed. As shown in Figure 4, mention of the brand name in the headline fell off rapidly after the 1980s. In Figure 7, we see that such ads were indeed notably less effective prior to this drop-off. By the 1990s, when there are

FIGURE 8
Relative Effectiveness of Ads Departing from Picture-Window Layout Versus Ads with a Stand-Alone Brand Block
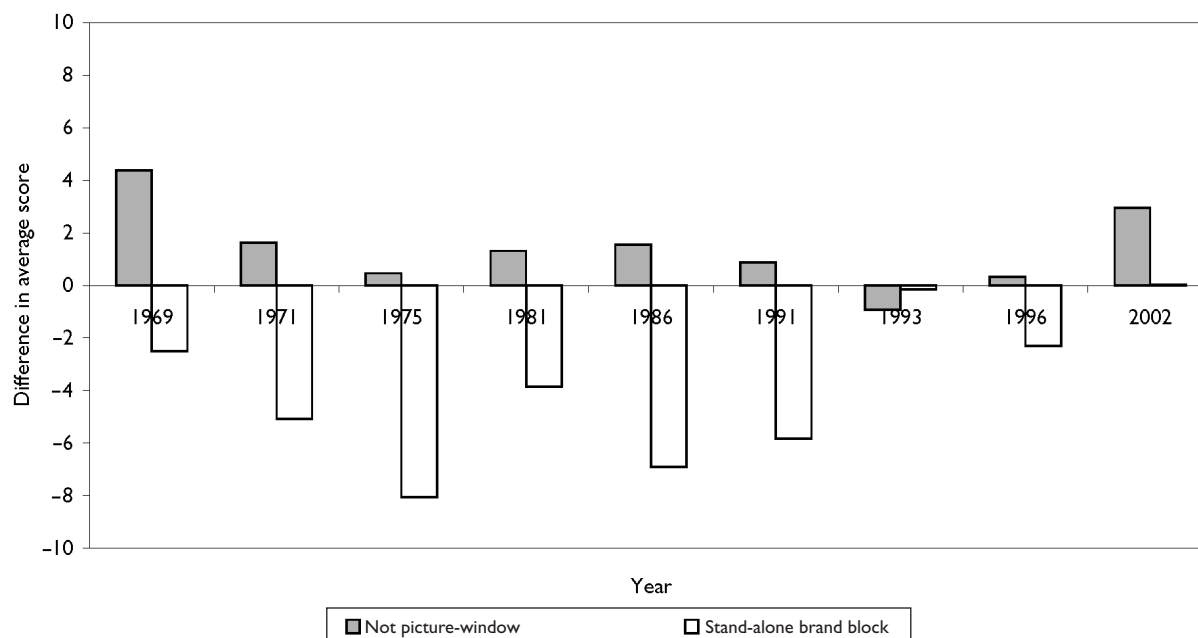
only two or three such ads per edition, the effectiveness deficit disappears. Similarly, Figure 4 shows that the incorporation of the brand into the picture and not the headline climbed steadily through much of the period. Likewise, Figure 7 shows that putting the brand into the picture was generally a more effective strategy.

Figure 8 also supports a substantive explanation for the observed changes in ad style. Ads that depart from the picture window layout, which tend to appear more frequently over time, are also marginally more effective at most time points. The presence of a stand-alone brand block, which falls off in frequency at the end of the period, is noticeably less effective in the periods prior to its falloff.

DISCUSSION

Examination of ads appearing in nine editions of *Which Ad Pulled Best?* published from 1969 to 2002 suggests that the style of the typical magazine advertisement directed at individual consumers changed substantially during this period. The picture comes to play a larger role and textual elements play a smaller role. Separate blocks of elements placed in a linear and vertical arrangement are replaced by integrated pictorial layouts. Brand elements migrate out of the textual portion and into the pictorial portion of the ad. By and large, this change is a matter of a relative shift in emphasis. All style elements were present to some degree in the earliest period, and they all continued to be present at the end. What changes is the relative ubiquity or scarcity of particular kinds of style

elements. Finally, many of the changes seem to have occurred late in the period, after the mid 1990s.

Dismissive explanations of these stylistic shifts can readily be generated. From a dismissive standpoint, the changes observed in ads are a direct or automatic reflection of changes in external cultural, social, or technological factors. Thus, the decision to expand, say, the pictorial component is only a matter of fad or fashion, whim or zeitgeist. More specifically, one could argue that during this period, computer technology was introduced that dramatically expanded the ability of advertisers to work with pictures and with complicated layouts, relative to earlier "pasteup" or darkroom techniques. Because it was newly available, this technology might have been actively explored and used, resulting in the shift toward pictures and away from words observed in the data. Alternatively, one could argue that copywriters and art directors, concerned primarily with impressing their peers and winning awards, embraced novel styles simply for the sake of breaking free of traditional magazine ad expectations.

We used copy test data to cast doubt on dismissive explanations. Copy test data showed that the style elements that became more prevalent were those that tended to be more effective at earlier points and that the style elements whose incidence decreased were those that earlier test data had indicated were less effective. Neither result would be expected if new technology was employed simply because it was available or if advertising creatives were writing primarily to impress each other. Rather, in such circumstances, we would expect no association between changes in style and changes in ad

effectiveness. In summary, the copy-testing data are consistent with a substantive explanation for the changes in ad style.

One specific substantive explanation, consistent with these data, takes the form of an *ecological* account that assumes that advertisers and consumers have a relationship analogous to that of predator and prey within a biome, where adaptations by one party are matched by adaptations by the other. In terms of advertising, it appears that for some period of time, American consumers encountering magazine ads could be conceptualized as prospects who had discretionary spending ability and were seeking information about brands so as to purchase wisely. Accordingly, advertisers adapted to these consumers by using substantial amounts of body copy to deliver information about brands, and by using pictures that functioned mostly to illustrate this verbal content. At some point, however, consumers changed so that they became less interested in market information, perhaps because competition eventually produced multiple acceptable brands in most categories. Following this point, magazine advertising begins to mutate in response to a consumer who was already mutating from a brand prospect into an uninvolved viewer of media entertainment.

Thus, all of the changes in magazine ad style can be parsimoniously explained if we assume that nowadays, a typical consumer encountering a typical magazine ad is disinterested, unengaged, and biased toward minimizing encounters with ads appearing in the magazine. Because this consumer, at best, is only going to glance at the ad, body copy becomes superfluous. Because reading takes some effort, whereas glancing over a picture is easy, the picture expands to take over the ad. In turn, stating the brand in words, whether in the headline or in a stand-alone block, becomes less effective than reproducing the brand pictorially. Because consumers are no longer prospects learning what to purchase, but simply viewers who will at some later point find themselves in a store needing to replenish their supply of a good, it is more powerful to visually reproduce the brand-package-product, rather than simply state the brand name. It is the package that must be recognized at the point of purchase if the consumer is to buy. Finally, because the ad is no longer a document to be read but a picture to be viewed, the picture window layout loses its utility; from the standpoint of a viewer, pictures confined to a window within an ad are probably less rewarding than an ad that is itself a picture.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

While the data appear to favor a substantive over a dismissive explanation for the changes observed in magazine advertising style, the data are very limited, and hence, our conclusions have to be treated as tentative and more in the nature of hypotheses. Because the ads coded do not represent any kind of probability sample, it is possible that the trends could reflect unknown vagaries in the WAPB authors' ad selection procedure, or variations in the mix of types of products advertised in a given edition, or even in the client base of the copy-testing services to which they had access. Because we did not test specific hypotheses about the functional form of trend lines over time, and because the sample is not suited to the kind of statistical analyses required for tests of functional form, the apparent trends have to be regarded as tentative. Likewise, the sample does not support statistical tests of changes in effectiveness over time, so that our interpretation of the pattern of copy test results has to be regarded as provisional.

The importance of the primarily descriptive data presented in this paper is that it shows future researchers where to look for change, even as the copy-testing data vouchsafes that these changes may be substantive and of broad significance. Future researchers can draw probability samples of ads, and even probability samples from such copy-testing archives as may become available, to test more definitively for the existence of trends, inflection points, and changes in effectiveness over time with respect to stylistic elements in advertising. The descriptive data may also be of use to instructors trying to convey to students how advertising has changed over time. Likewise, scholars can use the data to assess whether experimental ad stimuli are reflective of current advertising practice. The data in this study suggest that an experimental ad stimulus that consists mostly of body copy, with only a small picture, can no longer be held to represent the kinds of advertisements that actually appear in consumer magazines.

Future research can assess the ecological explanation proffered in this paper by systematically examining selected product categories and consumer purchase situations. That is, if the ecological account is sound, then the style changes documented in this paper should be minimal or absent from specific product categories and select types of purchase situations. Thus, researchers could identify products and situations where the model of the consumer as a prospect seeking market information likely continues to hold. We would hypothesize fewer stylistic changes and greater prevalence of the traditional document style in the case of (1) hobbyist categories, where consumers buy magazines with more of an intention to review ads as well as editorial matter; (2) new products and innovations, where consumers are in greater need of market information; and (3) high-end durables and other kinds of shopping goods, where either perceived risk or product interest is high, so that a more attentive *reader* of advertising can be assumed. Conversely, the new pictorial style should be most thoroughly in evidence in the case of frequently purchased consumer goods and other parity products where consumer involvement and risk are low, and where brand salience is sufficient to drive purchase.

As an example of how this line of research might proceed, in this study we were able to compare consumer and busi-

ness-to-business ads, and found the new ad style to be much less common in B2B ads. We also found no evidence of style shifts over time in B2B ads. These findings are supportive of the idea that the new ad style is a substantive adaptation to real changes in consumers—changes not evident in B2B purchase situations. Of course, other explanations for the contrast between B2B and consumer ads in our very limited sample can be envisioned. It requires an accumulation of cross-situation and cross-product comparisons of this kind to produce a definitive test of substantive versus dismissive explanations. Thus, if the observed changes in magazine style were simply a reflection of a technological imperative or an automatic consequence of novelty-seeking behavior by ad creatives, then these style changes should be generally present across product categories and types of purchase situations. Conversely, if the changed ad style is not evenly distributed across product categories and purchase situations, it is difficult to see how it can be a direct and automatic response to changes in the larger societal context that embraces all kinds of advertising.

Future Trends

In the new ad style, advertisers are forced to make pictures perform tasks historically assigned to words. To succeed at all, magazine ads now have to be entertaining and reward the consumer, but from the standpoint of the advertiser, success remains ultimately a matter of increasing the probability of brand purchase. To this end, visual reproduction of the package combined with an appropriate media schedule can build saliency (Ehrenberg, Barnard, and Scriven 1997; Ephron 1997). However, if it were possible to also claim a benefit for the brand by means of the picture, then advertisers would likely seek to accomplish this goal as well. This suggests that *visual rhetorical figures* may become more common—a trend still nascent at the end of the time period examined in this paper (see Phillips and McQuarrie 2003).

Figure 9 shows an ad, appearing in the 2002 edition of WAPB, which provides a concrete example of the benefits to advertisers of crafting a visual rhetorical figure within the contemporary magazine advertising ecology. The advantage of using visual rhetorical figures is that one can provide the amusement value associated with any rhetorical figure, while simultaneously making a claim for the brand entirely by visual means (McQuarrie and Mick 1999; Phillips and McQuarrie 2004). Rather than stating its case verbally, the York mint ad shows visually that these mints have an icy cold flavor. To comprehend the picture is to generate that claim. Best of all, because pictures do not speak, it is the consumer who must generate that inference, lending it the persuasiveness associated with any self-generated inference (Kardes 1993; McQuarrie and Phillips 2005).

FIGURE 9
An Example of a Visual Rhetorical Figure

Dark Chocolate. Cool Mint. Low Fat. **Get the sensation.**
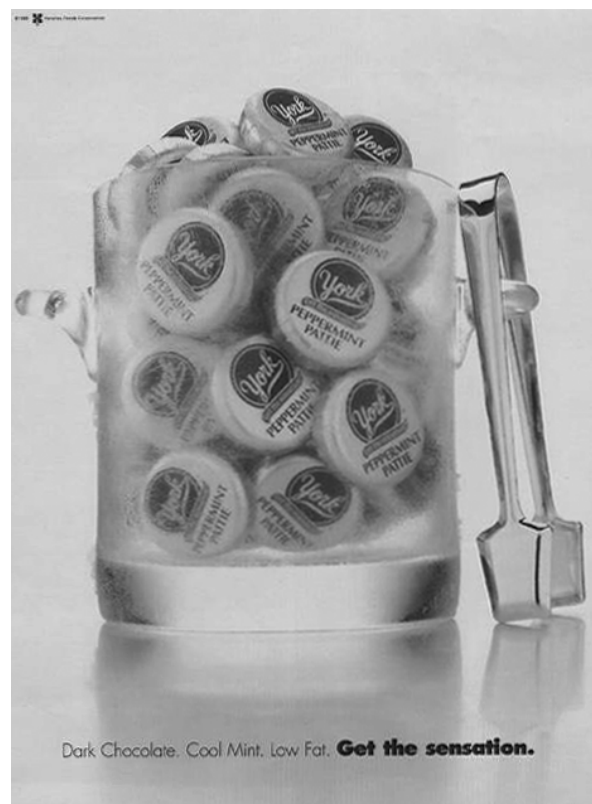
An examination of ads appearing recently in magazines such as *Good Housekeeping, Better Homes and Gardens,* and the like suggests to us that the proportion of ads making use of visual rhetorical figures akin to the one depicted in Figure 9 has continued to increase since 2002. Such ads conform to the pictorial imperative of the new ecology, while also making specific benefit claims of the sort historically advanced in words. However, visual rhetorical figures are only one of many possible adaptations to the pictorial imperative. If the emphasis in creative strategy continues to shift away from crafting words to be read and toward crafting pictures to be viewed, we can expect to see other diverse departures from photo-realism. Theoretical treatments of how consumers respond to magazine advertising, and of the elements that most effectively shape this response, must similarly change and evolve.

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