

Language Study: Old Spice Commercials

Advertising has become one of the biggest industries in the world, making millions of dollars each year by persuading and manipulating consumers. *Old Spice* is a company that sells body products for men with a unique and original approach to smelling like a 'real man'. The company has exaggerated and parodied generic advertising, resulting in a bizarre video campaign, introducing viewers to a series of characters and scenarios unique to the Old Spice campaign. This language study analyses three short advertisements from the Old Spice collection. The first is the original video that started the craze: 'The Man Your Man Could Smell Like,' the second is simply called 'Wilderness,' and the last is 'Shower' from the 'The Bar You've Been Smelling For' collection. Each video promotes a different type of body product, and whilst there is an element of simplicity to the videos, the dialogue itself is very busy, persuasive and fast-paced, with a witty, almost condescending humour.

TEXT ONE: 'The Man Your Man Could Smell Like'

"The Man Your Man Could Smell Like" introduces the beloved 'Old Spice Guy,' former NFL player Isaiah Mustafa, promoting, with exaggerated seriousness, the product *Old Spice Body Wash*. The chiselled sports star quickly draws in the audience with a simple "Hello, ladies." He goes on to explain all the incredible things that can emerge from a man after switching to Old Spice Body Wash, resulting in him becoming more like the handsome athlete on the screen, or "the man your man could smell like."

With punchy, fast-paced dialogue, Old Spice Guy immediately directs the attention of the viewers, and is constantly creating new reasons to pay attention to what he is saying by starting new topics quickly or asking questions. With stereotypical and over-the-top manly wisdom and certainty he arrogantly answers the viewers' subconscious questions with a soothing tone.

From the first word viewers are immediately drawn to Old Spice Guy's aromatic tale presented in his deep sultry voice. Whilst selling a man's product, the advertisement is clearly targeted towards women, who presumably often buy hygiene products for their spouses. The dialogue directly addresses female viewers, enticing them to "look at your man, now back to me, now back at your man, now back to me," giving women an opportunity to compare the sexy man on the screen to their own plain man. This comparison leads to the judgemental comment, "Sadly, he isn't me." Each moment of

dialogue entices the audience, and they are constantly being given new reasons to pay attention. The man continues to mention the stereotypically feminine items and experiences he has in store for the viewer, such as “two tickets to that thing you love,” and diamonds- promises of what life can hold when smelling great. All of this appeals as much to the fears and inadequacies of men as to the desires of women.



An exaggerated stereotypical male is represented in this charming character (above). He is utterly confident and fearless. In all three advertisements analysed, he speaks with an authoritative manner and words with frequent imperatives and constant eye contact. This is a parody of what all women apparently want and men long to be. He is such a “manly man” that he feels no need to wait for an answer, and speaks with great skill and certainty. Indeed, not all men feel confident or fearless nor do women seek a man who speaks over the top of them, but it is a stereotype that men should be this way. Gender is subtly used with reference to smelling like a man instead of like a woman: “Anything is possible when your man smells like the Old Spice and not a lady.”

Old Spice Guy maintains a deadpan gaze into the camera, or into the eyes of his audience, for the whole clip, engaging them in an intimate conversation. His bold, accelerated monologue fires directions and questions at the audience that are answered before viewers have a chance. Questions are answered in real time, with the advert being more in line with an impromptu talk than a traditional advert. Both visually and verbally the advertisement does not let the audience go for a second, which is a technique used in the past by other companies, but not to this degree.

A random flow of events follows, with scenery seamlessly changing, and Old Spice Guy carrying on with his monologue in an aloof manner. The text remains rapid and directions continue, as this man remains serious, although saying completely abstract words, such as “it’s an oyster with two tickets to that thing you love”. He is a “knight in shining armour,” (or, in this case, a bath towel), who promises everything a girl ever wanted. As he speaks, the things appear on the screen, making him appear as some sort of magician.



The advertisement ends with the cool, calm and collected man randomly and abruptly stating “I’m on a horse,” which when panned out viewers discover to be true (above). This unexpected end is characteristic of Old Spice ads, and is a distraction from the intention of the text: selling Old Spice. The random placement of this line is an effective and humorous device as well as making the ad memorable through shock value.

TEXT TWO: ‘Wilderness’

Another bizarre advertisement is ‘Wilderness’, in which a debonair man continues the monologue of Old Spice, but instead promoting their deodorant, ‘Danger Zone’. ‘Wilderness’ is a detailed compilation of a specific and common kind of advertising to men, selling with adventure, but with one huge difference: the man does not come out unscathed. Unlike many canoeists and rock climbers who have survived hair-raising situations, all the time smelling fresh or looking good at the end of their journey, this video takes it a step or two further, with the unlucky man hardly coming out in one piece. He is pierced by a stick, attacked by a snake and crocodile, hit by a truck and attacked by piranhas while almost drowning, leaving him with half his flesh completely gone. This man does not flinch, but rather continues his monologue, impressing his message with a smooth manner.

“Danger excites me”, are the opening words, which clearly define the theme of this satirical advertisement – danger, courage, and the adrenalin rush men love. The product Old Spice Danger Zone is mentioned several times in the monologue, as well as the word ‘danger’ itself, to reinforce the importance for a man to feed his adventurous nature. As with other Old Spice advertisements, we see the stereotype of an utterly fearless, confident man presented.

Once again, the audience is drawn into an intimate connection, with the character maintaining constant eye contact with the camera, despite facing dangers beyond belief, such as crocodiles, snakes, drowning, and piranhas- things nobody would want

to associate with. The quick script leaves the viewer breathless, and creates an air of excitement, as the background scenes change seamlessly. This man thrives on danger, and can cope with anything thrown his way, as long as he has the smell of courage: "I can't fully enjoy it when I smell like fear and body odour." Equating fear and body odour in this way appeals to both male and female stereotypes; men do not want to appear fearful and women do not want odorous spouses. The underlying message is that "real men", even the kind that wrestle crocodiles, smell good.

Unlike the first advertisement, the obvious is not stated in the text. The character never refers to any specifics of what he is seeing or doing, but continues with confident, rapid dialogue about the importance of removing all smell of fear. Viewers are constantly seeing horrific things happen to him, but he merely continues to speak, uninterrupted, about the answer to courage – "the secret is smelling..." He informs male viewers that the scent of Old Spice Danger Zone will leave them smelling like they have "nothing to worry about" (below).



This advertisement "manages to build trust through a parody style commercial while promoting its own product by creating positive associations in the process" (Shor, 2013). The twisted logic in the text implies that no matter what danger may befall the owner of this deodorant, no one will notice due to their incredible smell. "You smell like you look: amazing" is spoken by an attractive women draped over him even though he is half skeletal. The theme song, whistled once again, concludes this unusual wilderness experience, with the written text 'The scent of courage' summing it up.

TEXT THREE: 'Shower'

'Shower' introduces a young, professional man, who washes with Old Spice Bar Soap. This advertisement parodies other soap commercials and more generally, the genre of the "musical." The music gives an innocent, wonderland feel not at all characteristic of men's hygiene product ads. The first line contains some great rhyming words which

also contribute to the corny, theatrical feel: "You've gotta wash your body the manly way, and the freshness will follow you all through your day." Again, advertisers have been creating big number musical ads for decades. The key aspect to this advertisement that the ad is inflating is 'exaggerated claims,' which has been fed to audiences through numerous ads in the past. Old Spice is clearly parodying this concept with the idea of an eternal shower.

The opening line brings in the manly theme, once again. "You've gotta wash your body the manly way", encouraging men to see using the soap as a manly pursuit.



The character's body language shows that he is thoroughly enjoying his shower, smelling his soap bar with passion and pleasure (above). This is another approach that has been used by many advertisers before. Many advertisements have shown people smelling products in a way that is totally unrealistic.

The bar produces so much freshness that the refreshing shower never ends. The text corresponds cleverly with the unreal scenarios. "It's literally following you everywhere" is sung, while the shower follows the character as he moves into different parts of his life. "Freshness will follow you all through your day" is played out comically. Driving in his car, as his car slowly fills up with water, he is still blissfully happy, rubbing his Old Spice Soap bar over his body. Showering while at work in the operating theatre doesn't concern his own sense of professionalism, but the lyrics state that "he's probably ruining that person's body that he's operating on," which causes worry to the patient (below). Displaying knowledge of the action on screen and even critiquing it in this way, breaks the "fourth wall" which is the source of the humour.



The text alludes to this being a “serious problem”, which is very out of place for a song of this type. As the ad continues, well into a very wet dinner date, the song actually seems to point out the down side to using the bar soap. This indeed may be way more freshness than one man needs. There is almost a warning not to purchase the product, if you ever want to leave your house again. This makes this advertisement unique as the key goal of the current over saturated market is to simply get people’s attention and make them actually want to purchase their product. This great musical number has the trademark bizarreness of an Old Spice advertisement, with the abstract text and concepts.

The catch phrase at the end of each advertisement- “Smell like a man, man-” suggests that the viewer in fact does not smell like a man, or perhaps isn’t a man at all, momentarily depleting his self-esteem. However, there is hope, as with the help of Old Spice he could become the man he wishes he could be. The phrase also addresses the viewer as “man,” which sends out a mental invitation to become a manly man, much like the protagonist in the video. This catch phrase is also enticing to female viewers, as women often dream of being with a burly, handsome man, and hearing the phrase “smell like a man” makes a woman wonder if her man not smelling as the man on the screen is describing, that perhaps he is not as manly as she thought he was.

Conclusion

The general language of the Old Spice advertisements is very authoritative. The three advertisements analysed above are fast paced and exciting, with a monologue flowing, with a lack of pauses, regardless of what is happening to each character. The use of repetition is used to add extra emphasis and humour to important moments in the text, particularly key adjectives like ‘manly’. Eye contact is held throughout the entire time the actor addresses the audience, and a strong, confident stance is also held throughout.

Advertising expert Angela Godding states that even though advertisements are “short-lived, their effects are longstanding,” (*The Language of Advertising*, Godding, 2001). Old Spice has undoubtedly done just this, for whilst their advertisements can be as short as fifteen seconds long, they leave a lasting impression on viewers, and are among the most popular short videos of today’s generation.