You Deserve a Beak Today:  
The Persuasiveness of Vegetarian Advertising  
as a Function of Humor, Image Appeal,  
and Message Type  

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SENIOR HONORS THESIS  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements of the  
College Scholars Program  
North Central College  

June 04, 2004  

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This research is dedicated to me, to remind myself to work each day to make a difference in the lives of those that suffer and cry unheard.
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Abstract

Advertising has been studied in relation to countless products and techniques (Cialdini, 2001), but vegetarianism, which promotes the avoidance of products rather than their purchase, represents a different type of issue. This study examined how the characteristics of vegetarian print advertisements influenced persuasiveness; specifically we examined: 1) appealing vs. unappealing image, 2) humorous vs. serious tone, and 3) animal rights, health, or environmental message. One hundred four participants each rated 24 stimuli, answering questions about persuasiveness. Results indicated that serious advertisements were more persuasive than humorous advertisements, unappealing images were more persuasive than appealing ones, and animal rights messages were more persuasive than either health or environmental messages (p<.001). These effects were qualified by significant interactions between the factors.
You Deserve a Beak Today:

The Persuasiveness of Vegetarian Advertising as a Function of Humor, Image Appeal, and Message Type

Imagine flipping through your favorite magazine and coming across a full page photograph of a cow’s head, skinned and dripping with blood, at the top a bold red message—“Would You Like Fries With That?” At the bottom there is a short message describing the conditions in which the animal lived and died, with an impassioned plea for the reader to go vegetarian. How would you feel? Would you think about the worth of the lives of factory farmed animals? Would you dismiss the ad as some shock tactic by a radical group? Would you consider going vegetarian? Or, would you simply glance at the sheet for a moment, and upon realization of what it was, turn the page in disgust?

Advertising has been studied in relation to countless products and techniques, but vegetarianism, which promotes the avoidance of a product rather than the purchasing of one, represents a different type of issue. There are a number of vegetarian groups that produce advertising, however they often receive bad press for the shocking and frequently gruesome messages they put out to further their cause. Whereas this press exposure may help get their messages out, the negativity associated with some groups may be enough to keep people from listening to the important messages that such groups are trying to spread.

Not only that, but many advertising venues are closed to such graphic portrayals—television stations refuse to run ads, billboards can be torn down, and protestors in sandwich boards may be unceremoniously carted off. Overall, there is a limited amount of time and space allotted to vegetarian ideas in the media (especially
compared to the volume of meat advertising shown each day), so for those who wish to promote vegetarianism, it is critical to be able to create highly effective ads that will stay with people after they have quit looking at the ads and are deciding what to eat for lunch.

This study examined vegetarian advertising in the medium of magazine print, which has the benefits of rapid delivery, low cost, and target marketing. Three key components factor into how advertising is perceived, and these factors may be especially important in vegetarian advertising. Those components are image—appealing or unappealing, tone—humorous or serious, and message type—animal rights, personal health, or environment.

Literature Review

Image

There are two image types that are frequently used in vegetarian advertising. One is the appealing or attractive image—such as happy, playful animals, attractive people, or celebrities—that appeals to a person’s positive emotions in order to create a more favorable perception of vegetarianism in the viewer’s mind. The other image is very unappealing and unattractive and may be manifested in such forms as slaughtered animals, environmental destruction, or simply the conditions in which many farmed animals live. Knowing which of these types of imagery is the most effective is important to anyone seeking to create persuasive advertising, but while there is much research on advertising images in general, studies on advertisements that promote avoidance are not as common. Although most research on advertising has not focused on avoidance, it is still applicable to understanding how image affects advertisement perceptions.
Messaris (1997) found that people make automatic connections between the images in advertisements and the products those images are attached to, even if the two are really unrelated—examples of which include every ad whose primary subject ranges from politicians to air conditioners that tosses in the gratuitous image of the American flag. Even though there is often no connection between the image and the product, the advertisements can use the loaded imagery to create positive reactions to the merchandise in the minds of viewers. Furthermore, images can be used to suggest product claims that would be unacceptable to assert are direct outcomes of product usage. For example, in his book, Messaris examines a bulking powder ad that includes a photo of a world champion body builder. While the ad does not state one will reach a high peak of physical fitness after using the powder, this claim is implied by the photograph. Therefore, the image that is used in the advertisement is crucial to the perception of the product.

Much of the existing research on product perception found that positive images are liked more, and the affirmative feelings thus generated may persuade the viewer, regardless of whether the advertisement is pro or con consumption (Shadel & Niaura, 2001). However, there is also some evidence that negative images may help push the message in situations where avoidance is the desired behavior (Pechmann & Reibling, 2000).

Of studies that do feature avoidance advertising, while there has been little research about vegetarian imagery specifically, anti-smoking advertising has been studied a great deal. The examination of this body of research is useful to us because promoting the avoidance of a successfully advertised product represents the same type of challenge
in both fields. It has been shown that increasing cigarette advertising does in fact increase the amount of smoking by young people (Gilipin & Pierce, 1997).

Unfortunately, many of the anti-smoking advertising programs have not led to a decrease in smoking rates (Pechmann & Reibling, 2000), a fact that suggests we need to consider the importance of the issue of image. A study done by Shadel and Niaura (2001) looked at the inherent appeal of the images used in smoking vs. anti-smoking advertisements. They removed all product messages and only presented the images to the participants in their study, and found that youths saw the images in the smoking advertisements as more appealing than the images in the anti-smoking advertisements.

For youths, having a positive image to associate with cigarettes seems to enhance their perspective on the product, while the anti-smoking advertisements did not significantly alter their perspectives. In fact, Petty and Cacioppo (1986) also found the same results, noting that pleasing images may be associated with a higher propensity to buy the advertised product. Furthermore, according to Rust (1999), youth are more apt to buy products they view as favorable than to avoid products they view less favorably, which means youths may be more willing to absorb messages designed to promote consumption rather than those which advocate the avoidance of consumption.

Overall, most of the research on the use of images in advertising indicates that positive imagery is the best way to get people to recognize the product message (e.g. Shadel & Niaura, 2001, as described above). However, also recently (while examining anti-smoking advertising), Pechmann and Reibling (2000) found that negatively slanted advertisements may be effective as well, as long as they appeal to the right group—for example, a woman with cigarette butts for hair (short-term negative) may be more
effective for adolescents than a gravestone (long-term negative) would be. This is useful to note because a great deal of current vegetarian advertising does favor the negative image approach. Thus, it is important to know how well graphic negative images work to persuade audiences.

The images used in advertising have a great deal of impact on how well messages are received, or indeed if they are received at all. Whereas much of the research seems to indicate that youths like the positive images in pro-cigarette advertising, some of the most recent data suggests that negative advertising seems to be effective as well, particularly in persuading people to stop a specific behavior. Image may be especially important in vegetarian advertising because there is a disproportionately small number of vegetarian advertisements compared to meat advertisements, so the image needs to be one that captures interest and makes an impression.

In the current study, both positive (appealing) and negative (unappealing) images are used in order to see which will be more persuasive. We hypothesize that positive images will be liked more emotionally (following the Shadel and Niaura (2001) studies), but that negative images will be more persuasive (Pechmann & Reibling, 2000).

Tone

A significant portion of the vegetarian print advertising that exists today is meant to be humorous. This may be partly due to the fact that not all people react that favorably to the idea of vegetarianism, and so perhaps the creators of the existing humorous ads try to use humor to help move negative outlooks to positive ones. Also, humorous ads may be more persuasive in promoting vegetarianism than are serious ads that people may be more tempted to disregard. Most vegetarian advertising is generally aimed at the college
age population, which is the age group that typically responds the most favorably to humor (Madden & Weinberger, 1984). In addition, most of the humorous vegetarian advertising is related to either plant or meat based diets, and Weinberger and Campbell (1991) found that humor was most effective when tied to product use.

However, even though a significant portion of the pre-existing vegetarian ads are meant to be humorous, many other ads have serious overtones. Approaches based on fear (especially in ads focused on health related issues), logic (in ads dealing with environmental issues), or compassion (in ads spotlighting animal rights) are also very popular in vegetarian advertising. Therefore, if advertisers know which tone is relatively more effective, they can reach more people with the vegetarian messages they create.

When looking at image content, much of the research seems to indicate that images that establish positive emotional connections with the audience are the best way to advertise (Shadel & Niaura, 2001). This may or may not apply to the issue of tone—i.e. advertisements utilizing either a humorous or serious feeling. Humor is used very commonly in advertising—in fact, in 1989, Weinberger and Sports found that almost 25% of television advertising is meant to be humorous. Weinberger and Gulas (1992) conclude that the number is even higher today; more specifically, the amount of humor in advertising seems to be highest in audio media, with print media having considerably less.

Many studies have shown that the use of humor increases peoples’ positive attitudes toward a product (Sternthal & Craig, 1973). Weinberger and Campbell (1991) found that humor was most effective when tied to product use (as opposed to humor unrelated to the product). Madden and Weinberger (1984) found that humor
effectiveness also depended on various audience factors. For example, they found that younger, more highly educated individuals responded to humor the most favorably.

Michaels (1998) found that while humorous ads better captured peoples’ attention and promoted more positive product associations than did serious ads, people better recalled information from the serious ads. He also suggested that humor did not affect peoples’ willingness to buy a product, although Sternthal and Craig (1973) disagree on that point, saying that the distraction effect of humor might actually lead to persuasion in some cases. Cline and Kellaris (1999) looked at humorous and serious tones in print ads and found that humor can create more positive product associations with weaker arguments, while serious tones are more appropriate for stronger advertisements. For example, eating junk food because it tastes good is a weaker argument, whereas eating whole grains to get balanced nutrition is a stronger one.

However, in 1981, Brooker found that humor was more influential in accomplishing its advertising aims than a fear-based approach was. This finding was in contrast to findings of Biener, McCallum-Keeler, and Nyman (2000), who found that among adults, strong negative emotions (as opposed to humorous emotions) seemed to be the most effective in anti-smoking advertising. Humor was less effective at deterring smoking behaviors, and Biener (2000) also found the same results with teens as well.

The research on humor’s effectiveness is mixed, and every study points out a plethora of variables that can affect its value. However, regardless of the amount of information provided by the humor research that has been done thus far, only a very limited amount has been based on a consumer avoidance perspective, and some of those data show that humor may be the most effective way to reach people. Furthermore, due
to the nature of the subject and the fact that vegetarianism research has received very little attention, humor in vegetarian advertising merits examination.

Additionally, the previous research on humor has typically been concerned with either persuasiveness or the issue of attention. The general consensus is that humorous ads are not as effective at persuasion (although not everyone agrees to this) as are ads with 'serious tones,' yet humor is the most effective way to attract attention and elevate emotion toward a product. Humor's effectiveness also seems to depend on both the context in which it is used and the product itself.

With all this in mind, in this study we expect that humorous ads will be more emotionally liked overall (Sternthal & Craig, 1973), but that with regard to persuasiveness there will be an interaction between tone and image (Brooker, 1981; Biener, et al., 2000), although we do not have a specific prediction about how the factors will interact.

**Message**

Most vegetarian advertising is based on one of three ideas—animal welfare, personal health, or environmental effects. Although there is advertising that pertains to other issues, such as the mental health of the individuals working in slaughterhouses, the majority of the existing ads examine one of these three topics. There has been no research at all that looks at how the various message types (as defined as content theme) are comparatively received by the public, and so this study examines those three factors.

Animal welfare issues are typically the message most often highlighted in vegetarian advertising, and whereas there are no hard numbers, anecdotally many vegetarians cite their concern for animal welfare to be the (or one of the) most prevalent
reasons for becoming a vegetarian. While there is no research about animal welfare message effectiveness, ads spotlighting this issue would seem to be among the most well received.

There is some limited research about message content focused on the issue of personal health, specifically in relation to anti-smoking advertising. However, because most of the other messages the anti-smoking ads examine do not apply to vegetarianism (such as being ‘uncool’) (Goldman & Glantz, 1998; Pechmann & Goldberg, 1998), this research does not provide a good ground for comparison. Furthermore, the few studies that examine environmental issues (the third message type) are limited in number, and typically relate to the concept of recycling, a focus which is not useful in this forum.

For the message type factor, we hypothesize that ads that spotlight the animal welfare issue will be the most persuasive, but we have no hypothesis on how ads spotlighting the issue of health vs. environment will fare against each other.

Emotion

According to Teenage Research Unlimited (1999), dramatic, graphic, and emotional anti-smoking ads seemed to be particularly effective at producing attitude change. For maximum effectiveness, the message and the emotional content must work together to form a single opinion (Biener, et al., 2000). Beaudoin (2002) also noted the importance of message and emotional tone in looking at health communication messages, stating that the various elements of anti-smoking advertisements need to be examined in many combinations in order to find the most effective emotional patterns for advertisements.
In research about emotional responses to advertising dramas, Escalas and Stern (2003) found that sympathy and empathy for characters and situations in advertising dramas directly enhanced positive attitudes toward the advertised product. Even though vegetarian advertising tries to create negative views of eating meat by arousing sympathy and empathy for farmed animals, the same principles should apply. By its very nature, vegetarian advertising is an emotional topic for many people. Even people who eat meat may be very uncomfortable when seeing the conditions and effects of factory farms. In this study we examine participants’ emotional responses when looking at the ads, both to gauge how the ads make people feel, and to see which emotions correlate with the most persuasive advertising. We hypothesize that positive images and humorous tone advertisements will be the most liked, but that ads that result in more negative feelings may create more persuasion in this study.

The Current Study

In this study we hypothesize that in terms of their emotional responses, people will feel most positively toward advertisements with appealing images. Meanwhile, the advertisements with the unappealing images will have a more negative emotional rating but will be viewed as more persuasive. We believe that humorous ads will also be rated positively, but that there will be interactions between humor and image type that will affect the ads’ persuasiveness. Concerning message type, we hypothesize that ads that spotlight the animal welfare issue will be the most persuasive, but we have no hypothesis on how ads spotlighting the issue of health vs. environment will fare against each other.
Method

Participants

Participants were 104 students (39 males, 65 females, mean age 18 years) enrolled in an introductory psychology course at a Midwestern liberal arts college. The students received course credit for participating. All participants responded to each of the advertisements in the study.

Materials

Twenty-four print advertisements were created for this experiment. The advertisements included two stimuli for each combination of the independent variables—humorous vs. serious tone; appealing vs. unappealing photo; and animal rights, personal health, or environmentally based message.

For example, in an advertisement with a serious tone, unappealing photo, and animal rights message, the photo shown is a close-up of a pig in a small barred cage. The message at the top of the advertisement reads in large red print “Factory farmed animals thank God they only live 1/20th of their natural lifespan,” and in small white print at the bottom of the photo, the message reads “This animal will never move from the confines of this barred cage until it is shipped to slaughter. Think before you eat. Go Vegetarian” (see Figure 1).

In contrast, in an advertisement with a humorous tone, appealing photo, and health message, the picture is of a younger man (standing in front of a large display of laxatives) holding a very large plastic tub of Metamucil and looking at it with a shocked and slightly disgusted look on his face. There is a large red circle with a slash through it surrounding the container, and the message at the top of the ad reads “Vegetarians are
Regular People.” At the bottom there is a message stating that “Vegetarians are regular everyday people. Regular people, with naturally healthy colons” (see Figure 2). All of the stimuli were pilot tested on at least five people to ensure that all of the ads were classified correctly (e.g., did they find the humorous ads humorous?).

All of the stimuli were professionally printed in colored ink on glossy paper (to resemble magazine advertisements), and placed in clear plastic sleeves in a random order in binders. As each page was opened, the advertisement was on the left, and a questionnaire on the right. The questionnaire was three questions long, and used a Likert scale. The three questions were as follows: 1) How does this advertisement make you feel emotionally? (with 1 being the most negative and 5 being the most positive), 2) How persuasive do you personally find this advertisement overall?, and 3) How persuasive do you think others will find this advertisement? (with 1 being the least persuasive and 5 being the most persuasive in the latter two questions).

Procedure

Participants were tested in groups of 12. The room that the experiment was conducted in was small and comfortable, with a selection of tables, chairs, and couches. After all students arrived for a session, attendance was taken and then informed consent sheets were handed out. Participants were told this was a study about vegetarian advertising. Next, they were given the stimuli binders and asked not to open them until the experimenter left the room. They were asked to look at the advertisements and rate the questions on the scales given. As the participants completed the task, they were given a written debriefing and were reminded of the importance of not sharing their experience with others until the study was complete.
Factory farmed animals thank God they only live 1/20th of their natural lifespan.

This animal will never move from the confines of this barred cage until it is shipped to slaughter. Think before you eat. Go Vegetarian.

Figure 1. Sample Stimulus: “Factory Farmed Animals”—Serious Tone, Unappealing Image, Animal Rights Message Condition.
VEGETARIANS ARE REGULAR PEOPLE

Vegetarians are regular everyday people. Regular people, with naturally healthy colons.

*Figure 2. Sample Stimulus: "Vegetarians are Regular People"—Humorous Tone. Appealing Image. Health Message Condition.*
Results

All post-hocs in this analysis were done using $t$-tests with a Bonferroni correction, $p<.05$.

*Emotion Measure*

The question “How does this advertisement make you feel emotionally?” was used in part as a manipulation check to determine that the advertisements were classified correctly, as well as to test our emotion hypotheses. We hypothesized that both humorous ads and appealing ads would be rated significantly more positively than serious or unappealing ads.

We found support for both of these hypotheses, as the humorous ads were rated significantly more positively than were the serious ads, $F(1,103) = 29.21, p<.001, \eta^2 = .221$. Appealing images also had a significantly more positive influence than unappealing images, $F(1,103) = 221.33, p<.001, \eta^2 = .68$. Emotional response varied with message type—there was no significant difference between health vs. environment, but animal rights messages were responded to significantly more negatively overall, $F(2,102) = 38.65, p<.001, \eta^2 = .43$. Please see Table 1 for means and standard error values for the emotion measure.

Emotional ratings were also affected by interactions between the factors. The most important finding here was an Image X Message interaction, $F(2, 102) = 50.55, p<.001, \eta^2 = .50$. Although image affected each message type, the effect sizes varied by which of the three messages the ad contained. Ads with environmental messages yielded the smallest emotional difference between unappealing and appealing image type, the effect size for the health messages was only slightly higher than that for environment, and
the animal rights messages had the greatest difference in emotion simply as a result of changing the accompanying photo (please see Table 1 for mean and standard error values). This suggests that people are not as affected by health or environmental issues, but animal rights issues can evoke strong emotion (depending on the general appeal or lack of appeal of the image). There was also a Tone X Image interaction, which was fairly small and suggests that humor helped create a more positive emotional response when the photo was unappealing, $F(1,103) = 4.97, p<.03, \eta^2 = .05$.

Table 1

*Mean Emotion Ratings as a function of Image, Tone, and Message Type*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Tone</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Humor</td>
<td>Serious</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appealing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal Rights</td>
<td>3.00 (.08)</td>
<td>2.74 (.09)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>3.12 (.08)</td>
<td>2.93 (.08)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>2.77 (.06)</td>
<td>2.81 (.06)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unappealing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal Rights</td>
<td>1.90 (.07)</td>
<td>1.67 (.07)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>2.60 (.07)</td>
<td>2.24 (.06)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>2.65 (.08)</td>
<td>2.41 (.06)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Standard error values are in parentheses.

*Persuasion of Self*

The question “How persuasive do you personally find this advertisement overall?” was our main test for persuasiveness. We hypothesized that unappealing
images would be more persuasive, that humor would interact with image type, and that animal rights messages would be more persuasive than health or environment. There were both main effects and interactions in the results found in connection with this question.

Image type was significant; unappealing ads were rated as much more persuasive than appealing ads, $F(1,103) = 61.22, p<.001, \eta^2 = .37$. Tone was also an important factor in determining persuasiveness of the advertisements; overall, serious ads were rated as significantly more persuasive than humorous ads, $F(1,103) = 52.03, p<.001, \eta^2 = .34$. Message type did not produce a significant difference between health as compared to environment, but animal rights messages were significantly more persuasive than ads concerned with either health or environment, $F(2,206) = 38.90, p<.001, \eta^2 = .27$. Please see Table 2 for means and standard errors for the personal persuasiveness measure.

In a Tone X Message interaction it was found that a serious tone was more persuasive than a humorous tone when the message pertained to animal rights or health, but not if it featured an environmental message, $F(2,206) = 10.43, p<.001, \eta^2 = .09$, (please see Figure 3). In an Image X Message interaction, unappealing images were more persuasive for ads with animal rights or health messages. However, there was again no difference in the persuasiveness of environmental messages based on the relative appeal of the image, $F(2,206) = 23.42, p<.001, \eta^2 = .18$, (see Figure 4). In addition, there was a three-way interaction, but because the effect size was fairly small (.04) we did no further analysis.
Table 2

Mean ‘Persuasiveness of Self’ Ratings as a function of Image, Tone, and Message Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Tone</th>
<th>Animal Rights</th>
<th>Health</th>
<th>Environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Humor</td>
<td>2.85 (.10)</td>
<td>2.26 (.10)</td>
<td>2.70 (.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Serious</td>
<td>3.32 (.09)</td>
<td>2.80 (.09)</td>
<td>2.77 (.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appealing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal Rights</td>
<td>3.21 (.11)</td>
<td>3.21 (.10)</td>
<td>2.72 (.10)</td>
<td>2.72 (.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>3.75 (.10)</td>
<td>3.33 (.09)</td>
<td>2.87 (.09)</td>
<td>2.87 (.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>2.70 (.10)</td>
<td>2.77 (.10)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Standard error values are in parentheses

Figure 3. Tone X Message Interaction for Personal Persuasiveness
Figure 4. Image X Message Interaction for Personal Persuasiveness

Perceived Persuasiveness for Others

The main reason for the ‘perceived persuasiveness for others’ question was to guard against the possibility that meat-eating participants might claim to be unaffected by the ads in order to reduce cognitive dissonance. Therefore, we expected they might reveal their true assessment of the ads’ persuasive power when they were asked to assess the degree to which ‘others’ might be persuaded by the ad. However, the results for personal persuasiveness and persuasiveness for others were very similar, indicating that people rated the ads approximately the same whether rating for themselves or for ‘others.’
Ads with serious tones were viewed as more persuasive than humorous ads, unappealing image ads were viewed as more persuasive than appealing image ads, and messages focused on animal rights were more persuasive than personal health or environmental messages (while again there was no significant difference between the persuasiveness of health or environmental messages).

All of the statistical interactions that existed in relation to personal persuasiveness also existed in the same manner in relation to the perceived persuasion for others. The only difference was that in persuasion for others there was an additional interaction of Tone X Image. However, this effect did not contribute in any significant way to our understanding of the persuasiveness of the advertising, so it is not discussed further.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of image—appealing or unappealing, tone—humorous or serious, and message type—animal rights, personal health, or environment, on vegetarian advertising. We found that each factor influenced how people felt emotionally toward the ads, as well as how persuaded they felt. In addition, many of the factors interacted with one another, meaning that one cannot simply pick and choose ad factors to create a highly persuasive ad, but instead would need to consider how the factors work together.

Image

Most of the advertising research suggests that the positive emotions associated with attractive images make people more willing to buy the advertised product. Shadel and Niaura (2001) noted that the more negative images of anti-smoking advertising may be at least partly to blame for the low rates of smoker cessation. Other research
(Pechmann & Reibling, 2000) has found that negative images may work if they are used appropriately, and we concur with that research, finding that, in the case of vegetarian advertising, although people did like the attractive images more and rated them more favorably, the unappealing images were much more persuasive.

**Tone**

Even though a great deal of advertising is humorous, humor does not seem to be the best way to persuade people to see the world through vegetarian eyes. Again the pattern seen with image also emerged regarding tone—people felt more positively about humorous ads and even commented after the study how funny they felt certain ads were, but the data indicate that these ads were not as persuasive as were the seriously toned advertisements. This does match with previous research which has concluded that humor is not always effective (Michaels, 1998), because while people enjoyed the amusing ads, they did not report that they were as persuaded by them.

**Message**

In the case of message, as it was with image and tone, the advertisements that made people feel the worst—animal rights—were often reported to be the most effective. Health messages were rated intermediately on both the emotion and persuasiveness scales, while environmental messages generally made people feel more positively emotionally, but less persuaded overall. This may or may not be unique to the population of college students, but participants were not overly concerned with environmental issues and were only slightly more concerned with their personal health. The animal rights messages had the advantage of showing individual animals currently suffering. The sense of immediacy that this produces may be a reason that these ads were rated as more
persuasive than ads about health or environment, which may be viewed as vague problems that may occur sometime in the future or somewhere far away.

*Possible Research Limitations*

Problems that may have occurred with the research include the demographic limitations of the sample. While there were people of a variety of ages included in the research sample, the mean participant age was 18, and all of the participants were in an introductory psychology course at a private liberal arts school in the Midwest. However, students in the early college age range seem to be the most willing to change behavior patterns, especially in relation to meat-eating and vegetarianism, so because much vegetarian advertising is aimed at that age group anyway, findings based on the study of this group may be exceptionally useful to advertisers promoting vegetarianism.

Another possible limitation of the current research is that, regardless of how persuaded people felt, this study did not produce any proof that these people actually changed their personal behaviors after viewing the advertisements. Whereas there were a few individuals who reported that they decided to become vegetarians at the completion of the study, it is unlikely that most people changed their behaviors significantly. However, because it is a common phenomena in research that self-report measures of peoples' intentions do not always match their behavior (Festinger, 1964), it is important to be able to develop optimally effective advertising that will stay with people after they have been removed from the advertisement and are choosing what to eat for lunch.

*Final Words*

Because it may be argued that meat-eating damages our society on moral, public health, and environmental grounds, being able to efficiently and effectively spread
vegetarian advertising is an important goal. Unfortunately, we found that the advertisements that were the most effective were also the most negative. Therefore, it is possible that when people are confronted with those negative images, they would rather look away than take the time to absorb the unpleasant messages they are being confronted with. With this in mind, research should be done not only to discern which types of ads are the most persuasive, but also to determine which types of ads draw the most attention. Even if the appealing image and humorous tone advertisements are not the most persuasive, an advertisement that someone will pass by without reading is not persuasive at all. Although this study constructs a base from which to begin looking at creating more effective vegetarian advertising, more work needs to be done in order to create advertisements that are attention-grabbing as well as persuasive.
References


Author Note

The title of the thesis, You Deserve a Beak Today, has a dual meaning—it first is a play on words that refers to the McDonald's slogan—'You Deserve a Break Today' (when it is likely that many of the meat products sold by McDonald's do contain ground beaks). The second refers to the debeaking process done to factory-farmed chickens, in which their beaks are sliced off with a hot blade in order to keep the chickens from pecking each other to death out of frustration and boredom. You Deserve a Beak was used as one of the stimulus in the study in this context. Chickens deserve the beaks they were born with—let them keep the ones they have by choosing vegetarian.
Acknowledgements

I would like to first thank my advisor, Dr. Lisa C. Whitfield, who spent hours of her time to help me complete this project, as well as going to the American Psychological Society conference to co-present it.

I would like to thank the Richter Foundation for the funding to make professional stimuli, as well as funding me to present my work at the National Conference of Undergraduate Research.

Scott Styles also deserves recognition for being patient with me and the work I needed to put in, as well as giving me the occasional nudge (or sometimes a kick) to get back me to work.

Thank you to the entire North Central Psychology Department, as well as Dr. Richard Paine, for being supportive of my research with their time and encouragement.

I would also like to thank Amanda Jordan and Lazarus Miller, who both helped me put my thesis together, as well as being there for me as friends.

On a final note, I would like to encourage everyone to examine vegetarianism. There are innumerable benefits to a vegetarian diet, and with the wealth of information on nutrition, as well as the growing vegetarian product lines, there is no reason not to switch to a sustainable plant-based diet.

Vegetarianism has the power to drastically improve the environment, public health, animal rights, and personal morality, and the sooner the information gets out about the horror that meat-eating behavior entails and how vegetarianism can change it, the better.