

Analysis of Campbell's Soup Advertisements

Krista K. Fretheim

University of Northern Iowa

Abstract

Campbell's soup company uses advertising to help sell their products. This advertisement analysis compares one from the 1940s and one from 2012. Strategies such as placement, color, direct messages, and indirect messages are used. Women are a target audience for this company. The content of these ads fits in with the time period they are from, with themes such as food scarcity and the ingredients of the soup.

Advertising is all around us. Campbell's soup company is no exception. Since the company's start, they have been marketing their products to the American audience. Their initial advertisements were geared towards women as they filled the role of housewives. They still target women today but in a more indirect way. They use strategies such as placement, color, direct messages, and indirect messages to convey ideas about their products and society.

I chose to analyze two Campbell's soup advertisements. The first advertisement is from the 1940's and the second is from 2012. According to the Campbell's website, the company began in 1869, with two men, Abraham Anderson and Joseph Campbell, canning French peas, fancy asparagus, and beefsteak tomatoes. By 1897, the company was transforming into what we know today; a third partner joined the crew, Dr. John T. Dorrance, and invented their signature product, condensed soup. Campbell's has since started producing even more types of products including sauces, baked snacks, and beverages.

Campbell's advertisements have changed with time to reflect what is going on and popular in the world around them. In 1929, the United States experienced a stock market crash, which led to an economic downturn with lasting effects into the 1940s. In the 1940s, food rationing was a byproduct of World War II (Hurt, 2008). One of the things rationed was meat. Sexism is obvious in the advertisement I examined from the 1940s. Women and men had gender roles to satisfy and this reflects them.

The advertisement from the 1940s depicts four women talking amongst each other while standing around a sign that reads "for men only." The phrase "'He-Man' is the word for the Hearty Soups! But, Ladies, you'll like 'em too!" is between the posts of the sign. Below the sign there is a steaming bowl of Campbell's beef soup with the can to its left and a short paragraph to

its right. The short blurb reads “Beef! Beef! Beef! Beef is Big News everywhere today! So if you really want beef here’s the soup for you: a grand, deep flavored beef stock, with healthy pieces of tender beef in it, and thick too with fine vegetables. You’ll enjoy it—lots!” The intended audience for this advertisement is housewives. The way the women are standing around the sign discussing it shows that this soup is something to be talked about. The women are wearing aprons, so they have probably been in the kitchen preparing their husband’s meal, even though this soup is “for men only”. This establishes the gender roles of the time period. They could also be discussing the possibility of themselves eating this soup alongside their husband. I think it could also appeal to men. Men of the 1940’s could see this advertisement and think *yes, this food is manly so I can eat it.*

The purpose of this ad is to convey a direct message. This soup is a good buy. With the scarcities Americans were experiencing in the 1940s, they were looking to buy the best products they could with what they had. This means cost effective and filling. The message about beef in particular supports this. They state “if you really want beef here’s the soup for you,” which is something Americans were looking for. It also conveys that beef is a manly food, but now it is okay for women to eat it too. Even the birds sitting on the sign seem to be looking down at the message in shock. There is not an actual man present in this advertisement, but the sign represents men. “Men” is the largest word depicted. The women are all leaning towards or on it. The sign seems to dominate them and be another example of gender roles.

There are many colors strategically used in this ad, down to the color of the four women’s hair; they seem to be representing all women included in the white housewife realm. The color red is used to catch our eye and attract attention to the Campbell’s label. This makes

sure we notice not just how delicious this soup looks, but also what brand it is so we make no mistake about what to buy.

This advertisement would not be effective today because sexism is no longer a part of the United State's sociological norms. It is not truthful because men and women can eat the same things and this advertisement implies they will like different things. This was a bad message for society at the time because gender roles still needed to be broken and this just reassured them.

The advertisement I chose to look at from 2012 depicts Victor Cruz, an NFL football player for the New York Giants. He is shown with an enlarged head, holding a spoon full of soup with a full bowl in front of him. To the side of his head are the words "After a big day of catchin' New York pigskin, Victor Cruz likes kickin' buffalo chicken." Below the can of soup reads "Big pieces of chicken and veggies to feed an NFL size hunger. It fills you up right." The company chose these things to appeal to a specific audience.

The audience for this advertisement is football fans. Campbell's made the specific choice of not just having Victor Cruz in this, but having Victor Cruz the NFL football player in his jersey. Supporting football is a way that men reassure their masculinity, so this soup will attract them. It also targets fans of specifically Victor's team. They might think, *if this soup is good enough for Victor Cruz to eat then it's good enough for me to eat too*. This advertisement was placed in "This Old House" magazine, a magazine targeted toward women. Perhaps this is suggesting that some women are still fulfilling the traditional role of housewife, and might be looking for food to buy for their husbands or sons.

Victor is shown in a casual way by how he is arranged. Thus, making him more relatable to the average person. He is shown as almost childish. He is grasping the spoon with his whole

hand instead of the more advanced way most adults hold silverware. Children's head are proportionately larger to the rest of their bodies than adults. There is a cheesy grin on his face making him look approachable.

The Campbell's logo is almost completely red. The word "new" is surrounded in yellow to ensure that you notice this product. This advertisement uses mainly the colors black, blue, and red. The descriptions are written in bold black letters so that you notice them, but they are not the most prominent aspect.

The words in this advertisement have a deeper meaning than just their dictionary definition. "Kickin'" and "buffalo chicken" are repeated in just block letters and again on the label of the soup can. Since this is a new flavor of soup, it's not something Campbell's is known for. Repetition of the flavor gives reader a better chance of remembering it. A play on words is also used. "Catchin'" and "kickin'" are both actions performed in football. They are the largest words displayed. This makes the audience's eyes go to them, which makes sense because the audience is football fans.

Campbell's has to consider their opposing forces. Groups like People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals would oppose their use of meat and animal-based stocks. By choosing to use an NFL football player Campbell's could face some specific challenges. They will not reach an audience that is not knowledgeable about professional football because they will not understand the significance. They could lose potential customers who do not like the player Victor Cruz or his team, the New York Giants.

This advertisement says a lot about our society. Men do not have to be manly, but the message implied goes along with this idea. Not only should men be doing masculine things like

playing football, but they should carry that characteristic through to all things they do. Even to what they eat. It also says that watching professional football is popular in our society.

Campbell's has kept some aspects of this modern advertisement the same as the one from the 1940s. Meat and vegetables are emphasized. As well as that the soup is filling. The arrangement of the advertisement is somewhat similar even though the main focus of it is different. Both depict a bowl of the soup. Although they are different flavors, the colors of the soups are very similar. The soup can is the frontmost aspect of the advertisements, and it's one of the first things you notice. Soup is conveyed to be a manly food. The last thing you see on both advertisements in the bottom right hand corner is the Campbell's brand name.

Campbell's has been in the advertising game for over 70 years, but many things have not changed. Both advertisements suggest sexist roles, although the older one is more extreme. Campbell's relies on strategies like placement, color, direct messages, and indirect messages to sell their product. Next time you are flipping through a magazine and see that familiar red can, take a moment to look and see if these techniques are still being used.

Campbell Soup Company (2012). *Campbell story*. Retrieved from

<http://careers.campbellsoupcompany.com/who-we-are/campbell-story>

Campbell's. (2012 October). [Advertisement for Chunky Soup]. *This Old House*, 12.

<Http://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2009/05/20/for-men-only-vintage-campbells-soup-ad/>

Hurt, Douglas R. (2008). *The home front rationing*. Retrieved from [http://plainshumanities.unl.](http://plainshumanities.unl.edu/homefront/rationing)

[edu/homefront/rationing](http://plainshumanities.unl.edu/homefront/rationing)