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Visual Arts and Symbolic Value of Consumer Goods: The Use of Paintings in Print Ads

1. Introduction: Advertising and the visual arts

The encounter of the visual arts and the advertising is not that recent, as it might seem, due to the more intensive convergence between the arts and advertising by the end of the twentieth century. It is a commonplace that visual arts and marketing met each other at the dawn of the consumer society. By the end of the 19th century paintings were used to advertise consumer goods. For example, Lord Leverhume used the painting *Home Bright, Hearth Light* (1896), by Louise Jopling (1843-1933) to advertise his soap (fig. 1)

Figure 1: Quotation of a painting



Advertisement for *Sunlight soap*



L. Jopling, *Home Bright, Hearth Light* (1896)

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On the left picture the ad is shown and on the right the painting. Several changes have been made to the original picture, probably to comply with the purposes of the advertisement and the medium in which it appeared. In this example an ad quotes a painting. Quotation is one of the ways in which paintings are used in advertisements (cf. Berger, 1972; O'Donohoe, 1997; Walker, 2001), not only printed, but filmed as well. In the case of Louise Jopling there is something ironic in the fact that the painting of the first woman to be elected a member of the Royal Society of British Artists (a rather rebellious act for a woman to become an appreciated painter) was quoted in the soap ad of a detergent firm (representing the stereotype about female activities). It is an interesting fact that Lord Leverhume's company came to be known later as Unilever (with 234,000 employees in 100 countries).

Figure 2: Appropriation of a painting



René Magritte, *La Grande Guerre* (1964)



Andriá Creations (fashion designer)¹

In order to understand what makes the images produced by visual artists necessary to the advertisers, the status of the visual arts needs to be taken into consideration. Associated with leisure and wealth, requiring high cultural capital and related with power elites, the possession of art objects and art appreciation have been symbols of high social status, prestige and luxury. Art possession and appreciation have been symbolic expressions of social stratification and distinction since the medieval time and this has not changed that much even by the end of

¹ Ad located by V. Fillipidou during a research for her graduation thesis.

the twentieth century, as P. Bourdieu and others have shown. Today, this distinction persists, as only the members of some elites have the opportunity to see, possess and appreciate *original* art works. The majority of the people know *about* the art works (not *the* artworks), only through mass reproduction (Walker, 2001).

Thus, many people know *about* the painting of René Magritte (1898-1967), for example, but only through the ads, and actually, most of the people don't know that they know, since very often (and this is probably the most common case) paintings appear in advertisements appropriated, but not quoted (see fig. 2).

As several researchers have pointed out during the '70s (Berger, 1972; Williamson, 1978), the '80s (Caudle, 1989) and the '90s (Davidson, 1992; Leiss, Kline & Jhally, 1990), through appropriated *visual conventions* from art, like abstraction, illusion, fade, as well as *art forms* such as portrait, still life, landscape and *styles* like impressionism or surrealism, advertising establishes social codes for audiences to interpret the ads. Advertisers, who have no illusions about their function, often state that they create the image and therefore the identity of the consumer products and the companies that produce them². It is this cultural function of the relation between the arts and advertising that makes its research important in the context of the everyday life. Image, identity and code creation might be considered to be some of the main aspects of this cultural function of the visual arts in advertising. There are, of course, several other aspects of the relation between the arts in general and the visual arts in particular and advertisement. However, this paper is primarily concerned about the symbolic and cultural aspects of the relation under discussion.

2. The research on printed ads, visual arts, and values: main findings

Previous research shows that there is a relation between the image of the brand and the product on the one hand and the use of "high" art in advertising on the other (Dyer, 1982; Margolin, 1992; Hetsroni, 2005). Since art still remains a symbol of distinction, luxury and prestige – according to the research on this field, this status of the visual arts ensures a prestigious image to the firm that includes art works in its advertising campaigns. A good example in this respect is the Johnie Walker Green Label ad that appeared in several magazines (fig. 3).

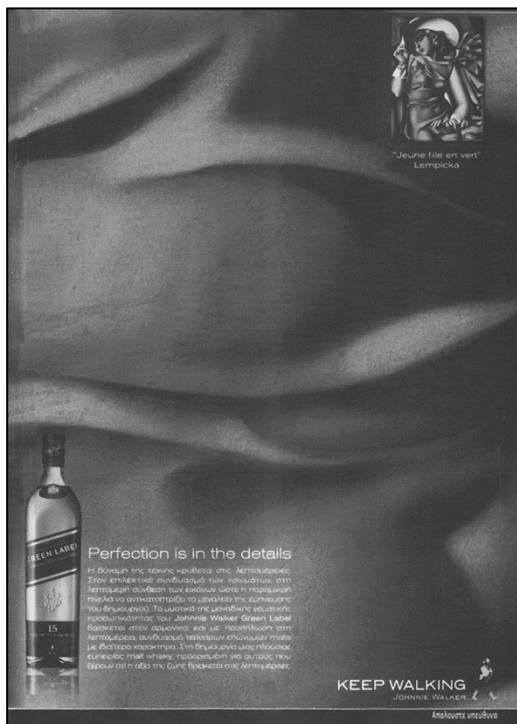
In this case, a detail of the painting *La Jeune Fille en Vert* (1929) by Tamara de Łempicka (1898-1980) is magnified and used as background, while the painting is quoted. Appropria-

² Review with Mr. J. Zafeiriou, manager of "Medialine Advertising".

tion and quotation are used both, but the product is clearly on the foreground and looks much bigger than the painting, as if the ad is stating visually that art-like procedures are behind the production process of a consumer good. It is also noteworthy, that art deco – the style of the painting appropriated and quoted in this ad – usually presented an image of luxury (something that has been criticized for). The text used for this advertisement is also important:

The power of the art is hidden in the *details*. It is hidden in the *selective combination* of the colors, in the *detailed composition* of the images, so that even the slightest brush-stroke reflects the *richness* of the creator’s inspiration. The secret of Johnnie Walker’s Green Label unique *personality* of taste resides in a *harmonious combination* – created with an *attachment to the details* – of four renowned malts with distinct character. It resides in the creation of a *rich experience* of a malt whiskey, designed for *those who know* that the value of life is in the *details* (italics are mine – A. B.).

Figure 3: Appropriation and quotation



Source: “Epsilon”, issue 820, February 2007



T. de Lempicka, *La Jeune Fille en Vert* (1929)

As it can be concluded from the text, in this case the ad emphasizes on the technical aspects of the work. Its social function is neglected, although the social function of the product is stressed. The suggestion is clear: buying and consuming this product are proofs of knowledge about the value of life. In this example, the advertiser based on common stereotypes about the art (it presupposes connoisseurship and certain aesthetic criteria), and on the well established stereotype about the distinction between “high” and popular art as well, creates an

image of the product and an identity for it. This way, the ad producer creates a value that is added to the product, converting the latter into a symbolic value: the product is represented as a masterpiece (cf. Caudle, 1989). A link is also created between the brand and the visual arts. The firm is represented as a connoisseur in general and particularly of the arts, especially because the painting used is not included in the commonly known and assimilated canon (like *Mona Lisa* for example). From this point of view, by most probability the choice of this particular painting is not casual.

To return to the main findings of previous research, it shows also that the use of “high” art in advertising and its impact are related to certain categories of products (Hetsroni, 2005), to established associations with high status (Messaris, 1997; Mostafa, 2005), to consumer attitudes to product categories and brands (Mostafa, 2005), and to consumer status. Hence – according to this literature – the visual arts are used to advertise products that meet specific criteria and address certain socio-economic and cultural clusters.

Based on the findings of previous research, an exploratory study was designed in order to detect eventual peculiarities of the Greek case and test the extent to which findings in other cases may be valid in the Greek case too. Unlike previous research that examines print ads on a 12-month period basis, in this study a period of five years was covered (2002-2007). This decision was made, because a period of 12 months does not seem to exclude the possibility that use of artworks in press ads was circumstantial for that certain period of time. To explain several decisions made about the sample analyzed, some data about the advertisement expenditure in Greece is presented. Some data is also presented, to clarify the criteria and the decisions made about the sample size and structure. Hence, the structure of the magazine industry in terms of circulation, topics covered, and the number of magazines published by topic, are also presented.

3. The printed advertisement in Greece

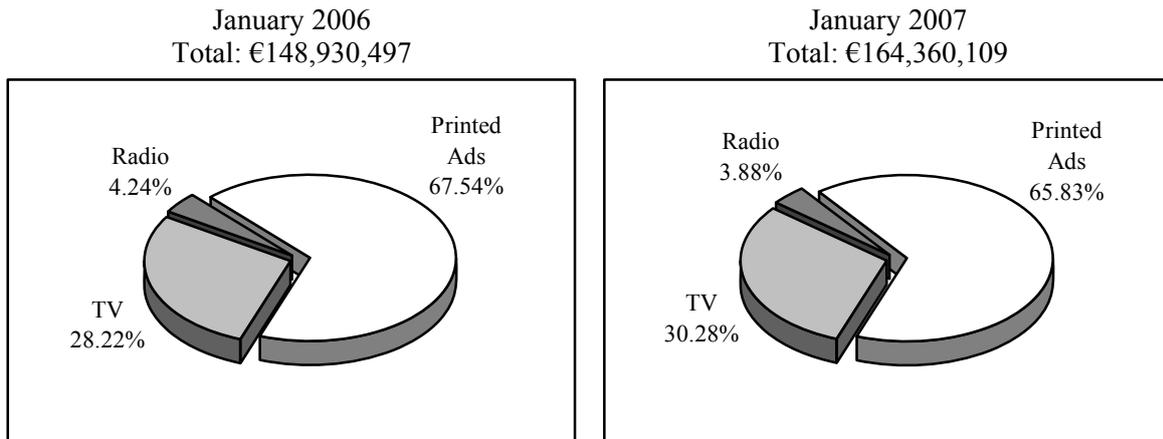
3.1. The expenditure and its structure

There is hard evidence that in the Greek case the press is important to the advertisers. This may be concluded from the data in graph 1. The total advertisement expenditure grew during the period 2006-2007 by 10.36%. Although the expenditure for printed ads declined slightly by 1.71%, the share of the printed ads is still very high. With an average of about 66%, the lion’s share of the advertisement pie obviously belongs to this type of advertisement. It is also noteworthy, that among the press media, magazines are the most important, also in

terms of the advertisement expenditure, as shown in graph 2.

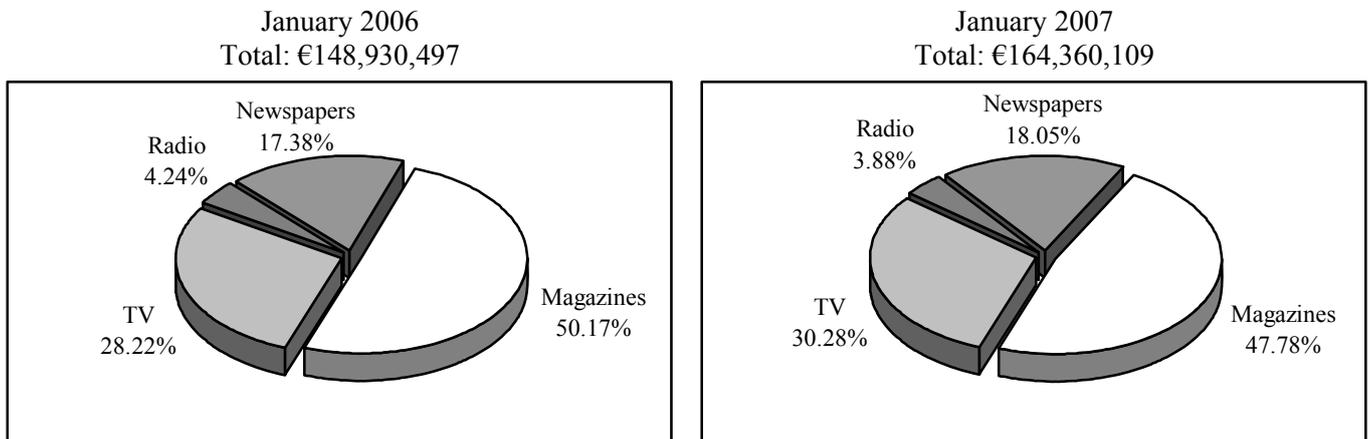
These data suggest that the advertisers prefer the magazines to display their ads rather than newspapers. This might be indicative of the newspaper market in Greece during the period examined. However, since the magazines seem to be the most important place for printed ads to be exposed, and this is only an exploratory analysis, it was focused on this medium. There are also several other reasons for this choice, as it will be explained later.

Graph 1: Structure of the advertisement expenditure



Source: <http://www.mediaservices.gr>

Graph 2: Structure of the advertisement expenditure



Source: <http://www.mediaservices.gr>

3.2. Topics and circulation

In order to understand the significance of the magazines for the advertisement we'll take a brief look at the magazine sector. Of course, this is not a full account of the Greek magazine market structure. The data presented, however, is indicative for the structure of the public, considering the topics covered by the magazines published in Greece.

It is estimated that in Greece there are more than 600 magazines, for about 11,000,000 people, covering a wide variety of topics. The topics covered can be seen in table 1 (scientific and scholarly journals are excluded).

Table 1: Topics covered by the magazines in Greece

Agriculture, Cattle-breeding	Environment, Geography	Money & Finance
Arts & Culture	Family & Children	Packaging, Bottling
Cars, Motors	Fashion & Cosmetic	Paper & Stationery
Chemicals & Plastic	Food & Beverages	Pets
Communication, Media	General Interest	Politics, Diplomacy
Computers & Internet	Graphic Arts, Publishing	Religion
Construction & Building	Health, Medicine	Science & Research
Cookery & Nutrition	Home, Gardening	Sea, Boats
Defense, Security	Jewellery	Social issues
Drugs & Paramedical	Leather & Shoes	Sports, Fitness
Education, Training	Local & Regional affairs	Textile & Clothing
Employment	Machinery	Timber & Furniture
Energy	Marketing & Advertising	Transportation
Entertainment & Hobby	Metals	Traveling & Tourism

Source: <http://www.publicity-guide.gr>

In terms of the fragmentation of the public and its interests, the data presented in this table is illustrative enough. It should also be mentioned that about 88% of the magazines are published in Athens, where approximately 30% of the population lives and about 3% are published in Thessaloniki, the second largest city, where about 9% of the population lives. About 9% of the Greek magazines are published in the rest of the country, where approximately 61% of the population lives. Hence, in a fully developed research it should perhaps be taken under consideration that the topics covered and the issues included in the magazines do not reflect adequately all fragments of the magazine public in Greece.

As this paper is not interested in a full account of the magazine market structure in Greece, concentration, diversification and other economic indexes will not be considered. Of the approximately 600 magazines, circulation data was available for only 134 (through Argos press agency³). These address the general public and account for an average of 22,134 units sold per month (calculated for the last 26 months, from January 2005 to February 2007). Although the research extended to a five year period of time, average circulation was calculated for a period of 26 months for the monthly magazines (January 2005 – February 2007), and a period of 62 weeks for the weekly magazines (week 1, 2006 through week 10, 2007). However, these periods are considered to be representative enough for the total of 60 months and 260 weeks respectively.

³ All data about magazine circulation and the magazine listing, upon which the sampling procedure was based, is collected from the website of this agency (<http://www.argosmis.gr>).

The 134 magazines were classified, according to their topics (or content), as shown in table 2. The classification scheme followed the usual classification, applied in magazine directories, such as the media on line guide by Infopublica S. A. (<http://www.publicity-guide.gr>). It should be noted that the criteria for the classification used are based on some features of the population addressed, like gender, age, occupation and general interests (e.g. hobbies).

Table 2: Magazine typology by content

Content	Share
Lifestyle	21%
Vehicles	15%
Women's	13%
Technology	10%
Military	7%
House & deco	6%
Astrology	4%
Popular science	4%
Sports	4%
Other*	16%

* "Other" includes: children and adolescent, music, nutrition & health, entertainment topics. Because this type is dispersed through a wide variety of topics, it is placed at the bottom of the table.

In tables 2 and 3, the "Share" refers to the count of magazines published per topic. Hence, it refers to the share of each topic and should not be confused with the market share. It can be seen from the table above, that there are certain topics for which more magazines are published. The life style magazines are 28 (21%). They account for an average of 35,462 units sold per month (calculated for 26 months), varying between 90,288 and 11,524 units, and they are further classified according to the topics they focus, as shown in table 3.

Table 3: Lifestyle magazine typology by content

Lifestyle	Share
Women's	46%
Men's	32%
Of general interest	11%
Technology	7%
Food & nutrition	4%

It should be added, that for the purposes of this analysis newspapers supplements were also taken into account. In every term they are magazines and their circulation is far wider. While the highest average of the units sold among the monthly magazines is 90,288, a major newspaper's monthly supplement average is 213,758 for the same period of time (26 months).

Also, while the highest average of the units sold among the weekly magazines is 90,844, a major newspaper's weekly supplement average is 205,001 for the same period of time (62 weeks). It should be expected then, that the percentage of advertisements in these magazines should be higher, for their circulation is expected to make them more attractive to the advertisers. However, because they are newspaper supplements, it is not clear whether they are included in the newspapers' share of the advertisement expenditure or in the magazines' share. The source used (Mediaservices S.A.) does not specify this particular point.

4. Sample and results⁴

4.1. Sample and sampling procedure

Applying the criteria of circulation, topics covered, frequency (monthly or weekly), and whether the magazine is a newspaper supplement or not, seven magazines were chosen for analysis, as shown in table 4. The two magazines with the wider weekly circulation are newspaper supplements and – in terms of their content – of general interest. Three monthly magazines that address the female population were included in the sample, one of which is newspaper supplement. A monthly men's magazine was also included. As explained earlier in this paper, calculations for the average circulation were carried out for 26 months in the case of the monthly magazines, and for 62 weeks in the case of the weekly magazines. For all magazines an average ad indicator was calculated. The ad indicator was calculated as the ratio of the number of pages that include ads to the total number of pages in an issue. In table 4, the average ad indicator for each magazine appears also.

Table 4: The sample

Magazine	Average circulation	Frequency	Content	Average ad indicator
Vimagazino	205,001*	Weekly	General	0.36*
<i>Epsilon</i>	196,211*	Weekly	General	0.33*
<i>VimaDonna</i>	213,758**	Monthly	Women's	0.67**
Cosmopolitan	90,288**	Monthly	Women's	0.60**
Vita	40,958**	Monthly	Women's	0.25**
Free	81,340**	Monthly	Men's	0.34**
<i>Nitro</i>	40,583**	Monthly	General	0.42**
Down Town	27,217*	Weekly	General	0.32*

* Calculated for 62 weeks

** Calculated for 26 months.

⁴ The method and the results are partially explained and presented in this paper, complying with the restrictions of a conference presentation.

In order to have all periods equally represented, the sampling procedure included rotation of the weeks for the weekly magazines and rotation of the months for the monthly magazines. Finally, the sample included 12 issues of each magazine and the period covered was five years (2002-2007). The page was defined as the unit of analysis, regardless of the number of advertisement(s) it included, because in the sample the great majority of the ads takes up a whole page.

4.2. Main findings

- In 2,316 pages with advertisements, 10 cases were found in 3 magazines, regardless of the ad indicator.
- Paintings were quoted in 7 cases.
- In two cases there was a clear appropriation of paintings.
- In one case a gallery is used as brand setting.
- The products advertised are watches, cosmetics, jewellery, alcohol drinks and coffee.
- A variety of works, representing several styles, is used: J. Vermeer (Dutch Golden Age), P. Gauguin and V. van Gogh (post-impressionism), T. de Łempicka (art deco), R. Magritte (surrealism), F. Botero (neo-figuratism), T. Wesselmann (pop art).
- In six cases of quotation there is a specific reference to the work and the artist.

5. Some conclusions

- Compared with other countries, the use of paintings in printed ads is not common in the Greek case (e.g. for a period of 12 months 191 ads were found in USA and 203 in Israel).
- Not only expensive or luxurious products are advertised using art works (e.g. cosmetics and coffee appear in the ads). In some respect, this might be indicative for the attitude of the creative staff about the visual arts. Further research needs to be done to examine this issue.
- Unlike other cases studied in previous research, prestige is not ascribed to products through a commonly known visual canon. However, further research needs to be done in order to investigate the features of this canon in the Greek case.
- Unlike other cases, a wide variety of styles is used and not only “classical” or well known paintings. The cases located indicate that the choice of particular paintings is based rather on the proximity of the topic represented in the paintings to the products advertised. However, further research and analysis needs to be done – including ad practitioners – in order

to establish other criteria.

- The limited usage of art works in the printed ads is indicative for the peculiarities of the visual culture in Greece, which needs to be further investigated in this respect. Further research should also take into consideration the lack of systematic education on art history in primary and secondary schools.
- Consumer and advertiser research as well as extended study of a wider range of magazines are needed in order to formulate a better understanding about the functions of the visual arts in everyday life.

In conclusion, it should be noted again, that this was only an exploratory study and not an extensive research. However, several findings are indicative for the future directions of the research in this field.

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