CHANGES IN ADVERTISING LANGUAGE?
A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF MAGAZINE
ADVERTISEMENTS IN 1980 AND 2000

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores changes in visual prominence and openness in magazine advertisements by comparing advertisements published in 1980 and 2000. Openness refers to the amount of guidance towards a certain message in an advertisement. Several authors in the field of advertising have mentioned an increase in visual prominence and openness in magazine advertisements. A content analysis was conducted on 325 advertisements from 1980 and 212 advertisements from 2000, drawn from four magazines, to evaluate the empirical basis of the expected trends. The results support the expectation that advertisements have become more visual, less verbal, and more open during the past decades. No differences were found between magazines and product categories.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, media analysts have speculated about two trends in advertising content. The first is an increase in visual prominence: the growing dominance of visuals at the expense of verbal copy. The second is an increase in openness: i.e., providing less guidance towards a certain message. The goal of this study is to investigate the empirical basis of these trends for Dutch magazine advertisements between 1980 and 2000.

THEORY

Although pictures have always played an important role in advertising (Edell and Staelin 1983), a number of researchers have referred to an increase in visual prominence (e.g., Berger 2001; Cook 2001; Dyer 1982; Houston, Childers and Heckler 1987; Kroeber-Riel and Esch 2000; Schreurs 2000; Warlaumont 1995). Likewise, the increase in openness was mentioned by several authors. Openness refers to the amount of guidance towards a certain message. More open ads provide less guidance towards a certain message. Consequently, as ads become more open, consumers need to invest more effort in finding an interpretation, or in choosing between possible interpretations. Although the term openness is well known in the field of semiotics (e.g., Barthes 1977; Chandler 2001; Eco 1981), it is seldom used in an advertising context (e.g., Dingena 1994; McQuarrie and Mick 1992; Mick and Politi 1989; Sawyer and Howard 1991). However, several researchers have signalled a number of changes in ads that may indicate a trend towards more openness, because they all seem to imply less guidance towards a specific message, requiring more effort on the part of the consumer to construct an interpretation. The first change noted is the increased use of rhetorical figures, particularly those that require closure such as puns and

metaphors. An increase in the use of such rhetorical figures was noted by Forceville (1996) and Scott (1994). The second change that has been suggested is that ads have become more ambiguous. Ambiguity in ads is explained in terms of 'open to multiple interpretations' (Warlaumont 1995) or 'deficit of meaning' (McQuarrie and Mick 1992). An increase in more ambiguous ads was mentioned by Berger (2001), Warlaumont (1995) and Nicholson (1998). The third change, signalled by Berger (2001) and Stern (1992), is the increase of ads that do not provide verbal anchoring (i.e., verbal explanation of the ad's message), therefore allowing the consumer more freedom to interpret the message.

According to some studies, ads between 1985 and 1990 already contained elements causing openness. For instance, Leigh (1994) conducted a content analysis on 2183 print ads from 1986 and 1988, and concluded that 74% of all ads with a headline contained a rhetorical figure in the headline. McQuarrie and Mick (1992) analyzed 1286 print ads from 1990-1991, and concluded that 15% contained resonance (e.g., with wordplay in the headline and an accompanying pictorial reinforcing the wordplay, leading to two or more possible interpretations). Faier and Unger (1987) analyzed 162 print ads from 1985 and 1986, and concluded that 45% needed closure, containing something unfinished or ambiguous.

The trend towards visual prominence and the trend towards openness are interesting for several reasons. First, both visual prominence and openness often result in ambiguity, breaking with the rule that an ad's message should be as clear as possible. It is therefore not surprising that advertising that does not conform to this rule has met with severe criticism (e.g., Franzen 1994; Kroeber-Riel and Esch 2000; Ogilvy 1983). Second, visual prominence and openness in ads are likely

to have consequences for the way ads are processed by consumers. Although we cannot simply conclude that either the use of verbal copy or visuals leads to more positive advertising effects, previous studies do show that differences in visual prominence in ads influence advertisement effects such as attention (Chamblee and Sandler 1992; Holbrook and Lehman 1980; Singh et al. 2000; Wedel and Pieters 2000), memory (Childers and Houston 1984; Houston, Childers and Heckler 1987; Kroeber-Riel and Esch 2000; Unnava and Burnkrant 1999; Wedel and Pieters 2000), the attitude towards the ad or brand (Babin and Burns 1997; Edel and Staelin 1983; Mitchell 1986), and the intention to buy the product (Mitchell and Olson 1977; Rossiter and Percy 1978). Openness has been shown to lead to changes in attitude towards the ad or brand (Dingena 1994; McQuarrie and Mick 1999; Phillips 2000; Warlaumont 1995), attention (McQuarrie and Mick 1992), information processing (Peracchio and Meyers-Levy 1994), and memory (Tom and Eves 1999; Gray and Snyder 1989; Toncar and Munch 2001; Warlaumont 1995).

Systematic content analysis of trends in advertising is useful for several reasons. First, content analysis enables us to confirm impressionistic observations of trends. Second, because systematic content analysis demands unambiguous operationalization of variables, this type of research presses the researcher to specify exactly what is meant by these trends. In the following section, we discuss previous content analyses that may shed some light on the trends towards increasing visual prominence and increasing openness. Subsequently, we report on a study that was designed to test the empirical basis of the supposed trends.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

According to Phillips and McQuarrie (2002), there has not been sufficient research on changes and developments in advertising over time. Only a small number of studies have used content analysis to analyze changes in form and style in magazine ads over time. Although the main goals in these studies were not the same as ours, some of the results are relevant to our questions about trends in visual/verbal prominence and openness in magazine ads.

Changes in visual/verbal prominence
In order to identify trends in styles and strategies of magazine ads, Pollay (1985) analyzed 2000 ads drawn from the 10 largest magazines in the US, for each decade from 1900 to 1970. The results showed, among other things, that since 1930, the majority of ads (60% or more) consisted predominantly of artwork (visuals like photographs and paintings). In addition, whereas ads got bigger, verbal-copy volume declined. A decline of verbal copy was also shown in a Canadian content analysis by Leiss, Kline and Jhally (1990), who examined ads for specific product categories (cigarettes, automobiles, clothing, food, personal-care products, alcohol, and corporate services) in two general interest magazines (Maclean's and Chatelaine) in the period from 1910 to 1980. The researchers found an overall decline in the amount of words and in the proportion of the total ad surface devoted to copy (an average of 50% in 1910 versus 30% in 1970). Leiss, Kline and Jhally concluded that visuals in ads became more prominent during the period. However, because Leiss, Kline and Jhally fail to produce a detailed description of either the sampling procedure or the data, it is impossible to evaluate the empirical basis of their conclusions.

A study by Dingena (1994) provided further evidence for a change in visual/verbal prominence in magazine ads. Dingena compared syntactic structure and semantic content of business-to-business

advertising and business-to-consumer advertising. She conducted a content analysis on 300 magazine ads (quarter page and larger) drawn from two Dutch magazines, a general interest magazine (*Panorama*) and an opinion magazine (*Elsevier*), that appeared in 1978 and 1988. Among other things, three coders judged whether an ad was mainly pictorial or mainly verbal. The results showed an increase in 'mainly pictorial' ads (15% in 1978 versus 40% in 1988) and a decrease in 'mainly verbal' ads (13% in 1978 versus 7% in 1988).

Changes in openness

Openness is first indicated by the absence of the product in the ad, because a mentioned or depicted product is likely to reduce the amount of possible interpretations (Leiss, Kline and Jhally 1990; Warlaumont 1995; Williamson 1978). Product depiction was examined in the aforementioned studies by Pollay (1985) and Dingena (1994). Pollay assessed whether the product was portrayed in magazine ads between 1900 and 1970. The results showed that the product was depicted in approximately 85% of the ads for each decade from 1910 to 1970. Dingena found a decline in product portrayal in ads between 1978 and 1988, although the decline was only significant for business-to-business ads.

A second indication of openness is the presence of various rhetorical figures, namely those which require closing. In Dingena's study (1994), two categories of rhetorical figures were identified: 'suppression' and 'substitution'. The suppression category contained figures in which something was missing in the message that readers had to supply themselves. "Examples of pictorial suppression are advertisements in which (several parts of) products, product users, or brands are left out" (Dingena 1994, p. 19). The substitution category contained two figures: metaphor and metonymy. In

metaphor, a relationship between two concepts is suggested by similarity, while in metonymy, a relationship is suggested by association. Because suppression, metaphor and metonymy are likely to diminish the amount of guidance towards a specific meaning, their presence may be considered as an indication for openness. For suppression, Dingena found no significant differences between 1978 and 1988 (4.7% in 1978 and 4% in 1988). Ads with metaphor or metonymy had, however, increased, although only significantly for metonymy (metaphor from 12.7% in 1978 to 20.7% in 1988 and metonymy from 8.7% in 1978 to 26.7% in 1988). The presence of rhetorical figures was also analysed in a more recent study by Phillips and McQuarrie (2002). The researchers conducted a content analysis in order to verify trends in the use of rhetorical figures from 1954 to 1999. The researchers selected 816 ads from a general magazine (*Time*). Two coders analyzed the headline and picture for the presence of rhetorical figures, and if determined present, additionally examined the body copy for rhetorical figures. The coders then categorized rhetorical figures in the headline, picture, and body copy as either schemes or tropes. Phillips and McQuarrie defined schemes as figures that deviate from expectation by excessive regularity (e.g., rhyme, antithesis), whereas tropes were defined as those deviating from expectation due to lack of order and requiring closure by their readers (e.g., metaphor, pun, and metonym). The presence of tropes may therefore be considered as a possible indication for openness. The results showed a general increase in the use of tropes in ads, from 32.9% in 1954-1974 to 41.3% in 1975-1999.

Phillips and McQuarrie (2002) also assessed a third indication for openness: the absence of verbal anchoring. Verbal anchoring occurs when the meaning of a rhetorical figure in the headline or picture

is spelled out in literal terms in the body copy. The results showed a general decline in verbal anchoring over time, from 41.5% in 1954-1974 to 22.6% in 1975-1999. Phillips and McQuarrie (2002, p. 6) conclude: "Advertisers have … moved from telling consumers how to interpret rhetorical figures to showing them the figures and leaving the interpretation up to them".

In sum, previous research provides some indications of changes in visual/verbal prominence and openness. Two measurements indicated a change in visual/verbal prominence: (a) verbal-copy volume and (b) the proportion of the total ad surface spent on images and verbal copy. Although visuals were predominant in most ads from 1930 to 1970 (Pollay 1985), the percentage of 'mainly pictorial ads' increased between 1978 and 1988, whereas the verbal-copy volume declined (Dingena 1994; Leiss, Kline and Jhally 1990; Pollay 1985).   Openness was indicated by presence of the product, rhetorical figures, and absence of verbal anchoring. Product portrayal was constant in ads from 1910 to 1970 (Pollay 1985), but showed a slight decrease (in business-to-business ads) between 1978 and 1988 (Dingena 1994). Ads with rhetorical figures requiring closure increased (Dingena 1994; Phillips and McQuarrie 2002) and ads with verbal anchoring decreased (Phillips and McQuarrie 2002).

Previous research provides indications of an increase in visual prominence and openness in magazine ads. However, because previous research was not specifically designed to examine changes in visual prominence and openness, it is unclear whether the increase in visual prominence and ad openness remains when more specific measurements are used. In order to clarify this we designed a content analysis comparing ads over time focusing on visual prominence and openness. We decided to compare ads from 2000 with those from 1980, because magazine ads seem to have become more open since the beginning of the 1980s (Berger 2001; Schreurs 2000). Based on the indications in the studies discussed above, we formulated two hypotheses:

H1: Magazine ads show an increase in visual prominence at the expense of verbal copy.

H2: Magazine ads show an increase in openness.

One may ask how general these statements are. Previous authors have not discussed the generality of the increase in visual prominence and openness of ads by studying different kinds of magazines and different kinds of products. Phillips (2002) and McQuarrie and Mick (1993) argue that ads contain little verbal copy when placed in women's service or fashion magazines. According to Cook (2001), Phillips (2000) and Leiss, Kline and Jhally (1990), changes in openness and visual prominence differ between product categories. Leiss, Kline and Jhally argue, for instance, that tobacco and alcoholic products contain less verbal copy, while corporate ads always contain more verbal copy. Tobacco and alcoholic product also tend to use more rhetorical figures (Phillips 2000). In order to explore this issue, we addressed the following questions:

RQ1: Do changes vary by magazine type?

RQ2: Do changes vary by product type?

METHOD

Sampling procedure

Sampling was based on 2 considerations. First, because the study was designed to compare magazine advertisements in 1980 and 2000, we selected magazines that were published in both years, and had not substantively changed their target groups. Second, because we wanted to draw conclusions about advertisements in general, we created heterogeneous samples for both years. Therefore, we used four

magazines with different readerships: an opinion magazine (*Elsevier*), a general interest magazine (*Panorama*), a magazine targeted at women (*Margriet*), and finally a magazine targeted at men (*Autovisie*). We selected magazines with a female and male readership because advertisers might use different types of ads for male and female audiences (Phillips and McQuarrie 2002). The selected magazines are high-circulation magazines and contain ads for different brands and products. The car magazine *Autovisie* was selected because ads for automobiles have a relatively high degree of verbal copy (Cook, 2001; Leiss, Kline and Jhally, 1990).

We used all full page ads and spreads (ads covering two full opposing pages) in the issues published in February, April, August and October in 1980 and 2000. Different seasons were selected to ensure a heterogeneous mix of products and brands. An ad for ice cream, for example, is more likely to appear in the summer (Phillips and McQuarrie 2002). The 1980 sample contained 325 ads, whereas the 2000 sample contained 212. Of the total ad sample, 23% were published in *Panorama* (98 ads in 1980 and 26 in 2000), 40% appeared in *Elsevier* (101 ads in 1980 and 116 in 2000), 25% in *Margriet* (99 ads in 1980 and 38 in 2000), and 12% in *Autovisie* (27 ads in 1980 and 32 in 2000).

Coding Scheme

Visual/verbal prominence.
We distinguished five verbal components: headline, subhead, body copy, pay-off and 'address/coupon'. The latter component included coupons, addresses of the company, phone numbers, references to websites, and other copy that was not part of the other verbal components. Visuals were photographs, illustrations, product images, charts and any other images, excluding the company logo. In order to assess the prominence of visual and verbal

components, the coding scheme included the following measures.

Presence of verbal and visual components. Coders were instructed to check the presence of each verbal and visual component.

Surface of visual and verbal components Coders were instructed to estimate the percentage of the ad surface taken up by the visual and verbal components, using the intervals 1-25%, 26-50%, 51-75%, and 76%-100%. To estimate the surface size of the image and copy, the coders used a scaled transparency. In order to calculate the average percentage of the ad surface taken up by visual and verbal components, we used the midpoints of the intervals (e.g., the midpoint of the interval 1-25% was 12.5).

Number of words Coders counted the words in each verbal component.

Position of verbal and visual components The relative position of the verbal component might also be taken as an indication of prominence. As art director Lichtenheld (in Aitchison 1999, p. 232) put it: "If the visual is a payoff to the headline, then theoretically you put the headline at the top and the visual below. If it's a visual concept, the headline is small and goes to the bottom". Coders indicated where the verbal components were placed in the ad: top left, top centre, top right, centre left, centre, centre right, bottom left, bottom centre, and bottom right. For the final analysis we recoded the placement of verbal components to three relative positions: top, centre, or bottom.

Openness
In order to measure openness, we used five indicators. *Presence (or absence) of the advertised product in the visuals and verbal copy.* Coders indicated whether the product was visualized (yes or no) and

mentioned in the verbal components (yes or no). In case the ad was for an intangible product, such as a service company, the product was considered depicted if a job-related or service-related picture was shown e.g., an airplane for an airline (following Pollay 1985).

Cropping
'Cropping' refers to the unusually incomplete depiction of the user or the advertised product in the visual components of the ads. Because cropped images are incomplete, they create ambiguity (Peracchio and Meyers-Levy 1994), thus requiring closure by the reader ('Who is the person in the image? Could it be me?'). Coders checked whether cropping was present in the advertisement (yes or no).

Realism of the situation
Because unrealistic images make interpretation more difficult, coders were instructed to indicate whether the visual components of the ad depicted an unrealistic situation (yes or no).

Verbal anchoring
In some ads, visuals are accompanied by verbal copy that explains how readers should interpret the visual (and thus the ad), a technique called 'verbal anchoring' (Barthes 1977; Phillips 2000). Verbal anchoring closes the ad, by guiding the reader towards a certain interpretation of the image. Coders indicated whether three verbal components--headline, body copy, and pay-off--explained the meaning of the visuals in the ad (complete verbal anchoring), guided the reader towards an interpretation of the visuals (moderate verbal anchoring), or did not guide the interpretation of the visuals (no verbal anchoring) (as Phillips 2000). In the analysis, the answers were narrowed down to presence and absence of verbal anchoring.

Obviousness of the message
One question pertained to the obviousness of the message in the ad: To what extent does the ad guide towards a specific interpretation of the message (much or little guidance)?

The coding scheme for visual prominence and openness in the present study was more elaborate than those used in previous studies in several ways. For visual/verbal prominence, we measured the surface and counted the words not only for the total ad but also for each component. We also looked at the relative positions of the visual and verbal components. For openness, we not only scored whether the product was displayed, but also whether it was mentioned in the verbal elements. Verbal anchoring was measured not only in the body-copy but also in the headline and pay-off. Finally, we looked at two aspects of openness that have not been addressed in previous studies, namely the realism of the situation in the image and the obviousness of the message. Although we argued that specific rhetorical figures (e.g., metaphors and metonyms) indicate openness, we only counted the presence of cropping, because it was hard to obtain intercoder reliability for the presence of other rhetorical figures.

Coding Procedure
Average intercoder reliabilities were calculated for ten percent of the final data set (n = 51). Agreement between judgments of the two coders, two trained graduate students who had been trained beforehand, ranged from 70 to 95 percent. Variables with reliability scores below 75 percent were recoded, using Cohen's kappa, until satisfactory scores were obtained. The more interpretative questions regarding openness in ads (questions regarding cropping, realism, verbal anchoring, and obviousness of the message) were coded for the total data set (537 ads) by two independent coders, who were both graduate students trained by us

as well. Average intercoder reliabilities were measured using Cohen's kappa, which corrects for agreement due to chance. The recommended standard of .70 for intercoder reliabilities (Leigh 1994) was found for cropping ($\kappa = 0.82$), realism ($\kappa = 0.86$), verbal anchoring in headline ($\kappa = 0.85$), verbal anchoring in body copy ($\kappa = 0.77$), verbal anchoring in pay-off ($\kappa = 0.69$), and obviousness of ad message ($\kappa = 0.85$).

RESULTS

Visual/verbal prominence

In both 1980 and 2000, almost every ad contained an image (96% in 1980 and 94% in 2000) as well as verbal copy (99% in both years). So, on the most general level, presence of visual and verbal copy remained almost invariant. We found significant changes, however, in more specific verbal and visual components. First, there was an increase in the surface taken up by the image. We used midpoints of the image-surface categories to measure the average surface of the ad taken up by the image. The results showed an increase in the relative surface taken up by the image from 51% in 1980 to 58% in 2000 ($t = 3.125$, $p = 0.001$). This increase was mainly due to an increase of ads in which the visual took up more than three-quarters of the total ad space (see Table 1).

Table 1
Ad Surface Taken up by Images in 1980 and 2000

Image Surface/ Total Surface	1980 (n = 325)	2000 (n = 212)
No image	4%	6%
1-25%	16%	11%
26-50%	27%	17%
51-75%	30%	29%
76-100%	23%	37%

Second, the average size of verbal copy decreased. Using the midpoints of the verbal surface categories, the results showed a decline in the average surface taken up by verbal copy from 32% in 1980 to 20% in 2000 ($t = 7.52$, $p < 0.001$). The

decline was mainly observed in verbal copy taking up more than a quarter of the total ad space (see Table 2).

Table 2
Total Ad Surface Taken up by Verbal Copy in 1980 and 2000

Verbal Surface/ Total surface	1980 (n = 325)	2000 (n = 212)
No verbal copy	0%	1%
1-25%	45%	74%
26-50%	37%	21%
51-75%	13%	3%
76-100%	5%	1%

Third, the presence of verbal components in ads decreased. We observed a decline of ads with a headline from 97% in 1980 to 92% in 2000 ($\chi^2 = 5.57$, $p = .016$) and ads with a body copy from 85% in 1980 to 80% in 2000 ($\chi^2 = 2.77$, $p = .048$). No significant changes were found for subhead, pay-off and address/coupon.

Fourth, the average number of words used in an ad decreased from 212 words in 1980 to 111 words in 2000. The decline was seen in all verbal components, but was most evident in the body copy, where the average amount of words was almost cut in half (see Table 3).

Table 3
Mean Number of Words in Ads by Verbal Component in 1980 and 2000

Verbal Component	1980 (n = 325)	2000 (n = 212)	t	P (1-sided)
Headline	8.8 (n = 314)	8.0 (n = 195)	1.72	.043
Subhead	8.5 (n = 97)	8.0 (n = 59)	0.75	.228
Body copy	184.8 (n = 277)	96.8 (n = 169)	7.48	< .001
Pay-off	5.9 (n = 176)	4.6 (n = 122)	4.82	< .001
Address/ Coupon	61.6 (n = 212)	36.0 (n = 130)	1.62	.050
Total ad	212.0	111.4	6.04	< .001

* In each cell the *n* refers to the number of ads using the given verbal component.

Finally, a change was observed in the placement of the headline and body copy in relation to the visual. The percentage of ads with the headline above the image decreased from 62% in 1980 to 49% in 2000 ($\chi^2 = 9.22$, $p = 0.002$), and the

percentage of ads with the body copy above the image decreased from 30% in 1980 to 10% in 2000 (χ^2 = 24.82, p < 0.001).

Openness in ads

Measurements indicated an increase in openness. First, a decline in visual product depiction was observed, from 89% in 1980 to 67% in 2000 (χ^2 = 37.63, p < 0.001). In addition to this decline, the results showed a decline in ads in which the advertised product was explicitly mentioned in the verbal copy (from 91% in 1980 to 79% in 2000, χ^2 = 15.29, p < 0.001). The product was mentioned less frequently in all verbal components, although no significant decline was found in the subheads (see Table 4).

Table 4
Percentage of Ads in which Product is Mentioned, according to Verbal Component in 1980 and 2000

Verbal Component	1980 (n = 325)	2000 (n = 212)	χ^2	P (1-sided)
Headline	44% (n = 314)	23% (n = 195)	22.12	< .001
Subhead	43% (n = 96)	41% (n = 59)	0.06	.469
Body copy	93% (n = 277)	85% (n = 169)	6.63	.009
Pay-off	39% (n = 176)	25% (n = 122)	6.44	.008
Address/ coupon	51% (n = 212)	34% (n = 130)	10.06	< .001
Total ad	91%	79%	15.29	< .001

* In each cell the *n* refers to the number of ads using the given verbal component.

More indications of openness were found in the visual components of ads. The results showed an increase in cropped images from 2.9% in 1980 to 10% in 2000 (χ^2 = 11.48, p = 0.001), and unrealistic images from 6% in 1980 to 22% in 2000 (χ^2 = 28.437, p < 0.001). Another indication of openness was the decline of verbal copy to help consumers interpret the implicit meanings of images in ads (verbal anchoring). The results showed a general decrease of verbal anchoring in either the headline, body copy or pay-off, from 89% in 1980 to 64% in 2000 (χ^2 = 47.45, p < 0.001). Verbal anchoring decreased for all

measured verbal components: headline, body copy, and pay-off (see Table 5).

Table 5
Percentage of Ads with Verbal Anchoring according to Verbal Component in 1980 and 2000

Verbal Component	1980 (n = 325)	2000 (n = 212)	χ^2	P (1-sided)
Headline	53% (n = 314)	29% (n = 195)	29.99	< .001
Body copy	93% (n = 277)	69% (n = 169)	42.99	< .001
Pay-off	38% (n = 176)	18% (n = 122)	13.35	< .001
Total ad	89%	64%	47.45	< .001

* In each cell the *n* refers to the number of ads using the given verbal component.

Finally, the obviousness of the message in ads decreased. An increase in ads with little guidance towards an interpretation was observed, from 1% in 1980 to 13% in 2000 (χ^2 = 32.84, p < 0.001).

Magazines and product categories

Compared to the total ad sample, the different magazines showed basically the same patterns of changes in visual/verbal prominence and openness. Although some differences between the magazines were found, all significant differences over time were in the same direction as in the total ad sample (see Table 6a).

Table 6a
Changes in Visual Prominence and Openness by Magazine (1980 vs. 2000)

		Magazines			
	Total	Else-vier	Pano-rama	Mar-griet	Auto visie
Visual Prom.					
Image surface	>*	>*	<	>	>*
Verbal surface	<*	<*	=	<*	<*
Words	<*	<*	<*	<*	<*
Headline top	<*	<*	>	<*	>
Bodycopy top	<*	<*	<*	<*	<*
Openness					
Product pres.	<*	<*	<*	<*	<*
Cropping	>*	>*	>	=	>
Unreal image	>*	>*	>	>*	=
Anchoring	<*	<*	<*	<*	<*
Guidance	<*	<*	<*	<*	<*

> : Increase; < : Decrease; = : Unchanged; * : p < .05

The total ad sample permitted the compilation of four product categories: automobiles, food and beverages, service companies, and electrical products. The

sample contained 64 different automobile ads for 27 brands (1980: n = 33; 2000: n = 31). The product category 'food and beverages' included such products as alcoholic beverages, soft drinks, coffee, butter, and soup (1980: n = 59; 2000: n = 20). 'Electronics' included such products as televisions, videos, refrigerators, and cameras (1980: n = 30; 2000: n = 20). Finally, the sample contained ads for service companies (1980: n = 40; 2000: n = 26) such as banking and insurance companies. Results for the product categories resembled the findings for the total ad sample. All significant differences over time were in the same direction as in the total ad sample (see Table 6b).

Table 6b
Changes in Visual Prominence and Openness by
Product Category (1980 vs. 2000)

	Total	*Cars*	*Food & Drinks*	*Electronics*	*Service*
			Product categories		
Visual Prom.					
Image surface	>*	>	=	>*	>
Verbal surface	<*	<*	<*	<*	<*
Words	<*	<*	<	<*	<*
Headline top	<*	<	<*	<	<
Bodycopy top	<*	<*	<	<*	<
Openness					
Product pres.	<*	<*	<*	<	<*
Cropping	>*	=	>*	>	>
Unreal image	>*	>	>	>	>*
Anchoring	<*	<	<*	<*	<
Guidance	<*	<	<*	<*	<

> : Increase; < : Decrease; = : Unchanged; * : p < .05

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Comparing magazine ads from 1980 and 2000, the content analysis showed an increase over time in visual prominence and openness. The increase in visual prominence was indicated by an increase in visual surface area, a decline in verbal copy (both surface area and average amount of words), and a decline of ads with the headline or body copy above the visual. The increase in openness was indicated by a decline in both visual product depiction and verbal references to the product, an increase in cropped and

unrealistic images, and a decline in verbal anchoring and guidance towards an interpretation. These findings corroborate previous studies (Dingena 1994; Leiss, Kline and Jhally 1990; Pollay 1985) which identified a trend towards visual prominence based on an increase of 'mainly pictorial ads' and a decline in verbal-copy volume. In addition, our findings are in accord with previous studies which suggested a trend towards more openness (Dingena 1994; Phillips and McQuarrie 2002) based on a decline in product portrayal in magazine ads between 1978 and 1988, an increase of rhetorical figures requiring closure, and a decline in verbal anchoring. In conclusion, the results of our content analysis supported our expectations regarding the trends towards visual prominence and openness, extended previous research results for the years 1980 and 2000, and strengthened previous indications because the present study used more specific measures. Moreover, our findings showed that the increase in visual prominence and openness were found not only in the total sample, but also in each of the four magazines selected for this study, and additionally in each of the four product types that we were able to extract from our sample of advertisements. Our finding that the trends towards visual prominence and openness are general across four magazines and four product types is not self-evident, because advertisers might be expected to address different target groups in different ways (Cook 2001; Leiss, Kline and Jhally 1990). Our findings suggest that the trends are general and not confined to specific magazines or products, though they may be stronger or weaker for specific magazine types and product categories. For example, this trend might be particularly strong in trendy magazines because these are generally highly visually oriented. Products which are frequently criticized, such as alcoholic beverages and cigarettes, may not reflect these trends, as advertisers may want to avoid clear messages and, instead, rely on a visual and open

communication style. Because criticism of these products is not new, it is possible that, due to a ceiling effect, trends in visual prominence and openness between 1980 and 2000 do not exist for these products. Our sample did not contain enough ads for such products to allow us to check this possibility. In addition, the trends towards visual prominence and openness may be tied to specific brands like Calvin Klein, Diesel and Benetton (Boutlis 2000; Schreurs 2001; Warlaumont 1995). Although it is possible that ads for different brands differ in degree of openness and visual prominence, it is not likely that any specific brand shows a trend opposite to the observed changes (i.e., towards less openness and more verbal prominence). Our sample did not include enough ads for specific brands to allow us to check this possibility. Another limitation of the present study is that it involved only full page ads and spreads. It is possible that the trends found in the present study are less obvious when smaller ads are included, because lack of space may make these ads less suitable for visual advertising.There are a number of reasons why advertisers have chosen for visual and open ads. First, some advertisers and trend watchers claim that society is increasingly dominated by visual media. Consumers who have grown up with visual media may be expected to make sense of visuals without the help of verbal copy. Another reason is the growing use of global advertising strategies. Images need less translation between cultures than verbal copy and can therefore be used worldwide (Berger 2001; Faier and Unger 1987; Schreurs 2001). Although this content analysis was carried out with Dutch magazines, the fact that visual advertising is often used as a global technique (Berger 2001) makes it plausible that the observed trends are not confined to the Netherlands. Advertising in the Netherlands is highly influenced by advertising in the US and many ads used in the US are also used in the Netherlands (Dingena 1994; Schreurs

2001). An important facilitator of the trend towards visual prominence in magazine ads is the development in computer-graphics software (Dingena 1994; Leiss, Kline and Jhally 1990; Phillips and McQuarrie 2002). New technologies make it easier for advertisers to create pictures that are more complex or unrealistic and thus more open. Another reason for both the increase in visual prominence and openness may be that advertisers like to impress their professional peers (Phillips and McQuarrie 2002). Open ads seem to be highly appreciated in the advertising branch, perhaps because open ads deviate from what is expected. Many open and visual ads win international advertising awards and are often selected and discussed in advertising magazines (e.g., *Luerzer's Archive*). Finally, the trend towards openness can be explained because some advertisers expect open ads to be more effective. They feel that less open ads, in which the message is spelled out, may cause irritation among the present generation of ad-wise consumers who might feel that their intelligence is being underestimated. Advertisers hope that openness in ads not only reduces irritation, but also increases ad appreciation when the search for meaning is rewarded. In addition, because of the increased cognitive effort that consumers spend on these ads when searching for an interpretation, they may devote more attention to the ads, have better retention, and they may not engage in counter argumentation so readily (Berger 2001; Leiss, Kline and Jhally 1990; McQuarrie and Mick 1992; Phillips 2000). However, these claims about the effects of open advertisements have hardly been addressed in empirical research (Dingena 1994; Ketelaar, Gisbergen and Bosman 2004; McQuarrie and Mick 1992; Mick and Politi 1989; Phillips 2000). Considering the overall trend towards openness in ads, as shown in this study, these ads should not be overlooked in future research.

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