

Rhetoric Analysis of Old Spice Advertisement

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The Old Spice advertisement “The Man Your Man Could Smell Like” addresses women directly even though it promotes a men’s body-wash product. The commercial immediately captures attention by presenting a confident, physically fit spokesperson standing in a shower and opening with the words, “Hello, ladies.” He asks female viewers to look at their man, look back at him, and imagine how their partner could smell if he used Old Spice. The original essay correctly identifies this unusual audience strategy as the foundation of the advertisement. Instead of explaining ingredients or cleaning performance, the commercial uses humor, fantasy, rapid visual transformation, and rhetorical persuasion to connect the product with confidence, romance, adventure, and male attractiveness (Old Spice, 2010).

A successful advertisement must understand the audience’s desires and the cultural meanings attached to a product. Old Spice faced the challenge of refreshing a brand that many younger consumers associated with an older generation. The commercial made the brand contemporary without abandoning masculinity. Its spokesman, Isaiah Mustafa, performs an exaggerated version of the ideal romantic man. Because the performance is intentionally impossible, the advertisement can use gender stereotypes while also making them humorous. The persuasion works through pathos, ethos, logos, kairos, visual rhetoric, and a carefully controlled comic tone (Aristotle, 2007; McQuarrie & Mick, 1996).

The Intended Audience

The direct grammatical audience is women. The spokesman repeatedly uses “ladies” and asks them to compare him with the man beside them. This choice recognizes that women may purchase toiletries for male partners or influence household product choices. It also allows the advertisement to reach men indirectly. A male viewer may want to resemble the confident figure or avoid appearing inferior in the comparison. The commercial therefore creates two audiences at once: women are invited to desire the image, while men are invited to identify with it (Old Spice, 2010).

The original essay suggests that women are generally the most avid buyers of body wash. That claim would require market evidence and should not be treated as a universal fact. The rhetorical point does not depend on proving that every woman buys men’s toiletries. It depends on the plausible marketing insight that partners and household shoppers influence personal-care purchases. The commercial turns that influence into a joke by telling women that the product cannot literally change their partner into Mustafa, but it can make him smell more like the fantasy.

The advertisement also targets younger viewers accustomed to fast-paced media. Its continuous shot moves from shower to boat to horse with impossible transitions, rewarding close attention and replay.

The unusual style made the commercial highly shareable online, extending its audience beyond television.

Pathos: Desire, Fantasy, and Humor

Pathos is the advertisement's strongest rhetorical appeal. Old Spice asks viewers to feel desire, amusement, surprise, and aspiration. The opening comparison—"Look at your man, now back to me"—places the viewer inside a playful romantic fantasy. The spokesman's appearance, direct eye contact, and confident voice make the appeal personal. He does not simply appear on screen; he behaves as if he is speaking to one woman whose attention he already controls (Aristotle, 2007; Old Spice, 2010).

The original essay correctly connects this appeal with fantasies of an ideal partner. The Old Spice Man is handsome, composed, adventurous, and apparently capable of providing travel, tickets, diamonds, and romance. Each image arrives faster than the viewer can evaluate it literally. Emotion works before logical objection. Viewers know that body wash cannot produce a boat, tickets, or diamonds, yet the association between scent and desirability is established through pleasure and repetition (McQuarrie & Mick, 1996).

Humor protects the advertisement from appearing too serious or threatening. The spokesman's perfection is exaggerated beyond realism. An oyster produces tickets; the tickets become diamonds; the scene reveals that he is sitting on a horse. The commercial does not ask viewers to believe these events. It asks them to enjoy the absurdity. Laughter creates positive feeling around the brand and makes the sales message memorable (Old Spice, 2010).

The Boat and Romantic Adventure

The movement from bathroom to boat expands the fantasy. The shower is a private, ordinary place associated directly with body wash. The boat represents travel, wealth, freedom, and romance. Without cutting away, the commercial converts routine hygiene into an adventurous lifestyle. This transition suggests that the product is not merely soap; it belongs to a more exciting identity (Old Spice, 2010).

The sea, shirtless spokesman, and confident movement draw on familiar images of luxury and romantic escape. The advertisement uses these cultural associations efficiently because it does not need to explain them. Viewers recognize the setting as desirable before they consider how impossible the transition is.

Tickets, Diamonds, and Provision

The oyster containing “two tickets to that thing you love” represents attentiveness and provision. The phrase remains intentionally vague so that each viewer can imagine a preferred event or destination. The spokesman appears to know and satisfy desire without needing detailed instruction. When the tickets become diamonds, the commercial intensifies the traditional association between romantic love, expensive gifts, and commitment (Old Spice, 2010).

The original essay argues that the sequence suggests a man capable of providing everything a woman wants. That interpretation is accurate as a description of the advertisement’s fantasy, but the gender assumption should be recognized rather than endorsed as universal. Women do not all define love through material provision, and men are not valuable only as providers. The commercial uses a familiar cultural commonplace because it can communicate quickly. Its humor makes the stereotype feel playful, but the stereotype still organizes the appeal.

Ethos: The Credibility of the Old Spice Man

The original essay says the advertisement relies less on ethos. It does not use a scientist, dermatologist, athlete’s documented expertise, or customer testimonial. Nevertheless, ethos is present through the spokesman’s performed character. He appears self-assured, clean, physically strong, composed, and in control of every transformation. His voice and direct address establish authority. He behaves like someone who has never doubted his desirability (Aristotle, 2007; Old Spice, 2010).

This is constructed credibility rather than evidence-based expertise. Mustafa’s character does not prove that Old Spice cleans better than competitors. He embodies the identity that the brand wants viewers to associate with the product. Advertising ethos often works in this way: a spokesperson’s lifestyle and personality become reasons to trust the brand even when they do not demonstrate technical quality (McQuarrie & Mick, 1996).

The continuous-shot performance strengthens ethos because it appears effortless. The camera does not visibly cut while the setting, clothing, props, and position change. Viewers may appreciate the coordination and production skill even if they do not consciously analyze it. The polished execution suggests that the brand is creative and confident.

Logos: The Commercial’s Limited Logic

The advertisement contains a simple logical claim: the viewer’s partner cannot become the Old Spice Man, but using Old Spice can make him smell like the Old Spice Man. The structure acknowledges the impossibility of total transformation and then offers a smaller, achievable benefit. This concession

gives the joke a logical center. The product cannot provide the lifestyle, but it can provide the scent associated with it (Aristotle, 2007; Old Spice, 2010).

The logic is associative rather than scientific. No ingredient, laboratory result, price, duration, or comparison is presented. Viewers are not shown evidence that the body wash performs better. Instead, the ad assumes that scent contributes to attraction and that the spokesman represents an attractive scent. The conclusion is emotionally plausible even though the premises are not demonstrated.

The audience strategy also contains marketing logic. A men's product is promoted to women who may purchase it or encourage its use, while male viewers receive an aspirational message. The ad's effectiveness came partly from reaching both groups without dividing them into separate campaigns.

Sex Appeal

Sex appeal is central but is handled differently from a purely serious display of the body. Mustafa's muscular appearance attracts attention, yet his exaggerated confidence and impossible speech turn him into a comic character. The advertisement invites admiration while signaling that it knows how unrealistic the ideal is (Old Spice, 2010).

Sex appeal can fail when viewers perceive manipulation, objectification, or irrelevance. In this commercial, it relates directly to a body-care product and is integrated with humor. The spokesman's body represents the result of an idealized masculine lifestyle, while the product offers the accessible element of scent. The viewer cannot buy his body or boat, but can buy the bottle.

The ad still reinforces narrow standards of attractiveness. The ideal man is tall, muscular, heterosexual, wealthy, adventurous, and emotionally untroubled. The commercial's comic tone encourages viewers not to take the image literally, but repeated idealization can influence expectations. Rhetorical analysis should identify both persuasive success and cultural limitation.

Gender Commonplaces

The original essay observes that the advertisement relies on common assumptions about gender. A commonplace is a belief or value the audience is expected to recognize without explanation. Here, women are imagined as interested in romance, diamonds, travel, attractive men, and personal upkeep. Men are imagined as needing improvement and as competing through appearance, scent, wealth, and confidence (McQuarrie & Mick, 1996; Old Spice, 2010).

The opening comparison is effective because many viewers recognize the familiar joke that a partner does not resemble an advertising ideal. Women are positioned as evaluators, while men are positioned as products being evaluated. This temporarily reverses a common advertising pattern in

which women's bodies are presented for male judgment. Yet the woman remains largely invisible and is defined through desires the spokesman supplies.

The commercial succeeds because it compresses these assumptions into a fast, self-aware performance. A modern analysis should avoid repeating them as facts about all women and men. They are rhetorical resources chosen by the advertiser.

Kairos: Timing and Market Context

Kairos refers to the opportune time and situation for a message (Aristotle, 2007). The campaign appeared in 2010, when online video sharing and social-media conversation were becoming increasingly important to advertising. The commercial's speed, humor, and surprising final image made it suitable for replay, parody, and discussion. It did not depend on one viewing to communicate every detail.

The original essay links kairos with the Super Bowl. The advertisement debuted around the 2010 Super Bowl period, but it is better understood as benefiting from the broader advertising environment surrounding the event and the rapid growth of online sharing rather than claiming that its entire success resulted from one game broadcast. Super Bowl advertising culture had trained audiences to expect memorable, humorous commercials, while YouTube enabled the campaign to continue circulating after television exposure.

The timing was also appropriate for the brand. Old Spice needed to appeal to younger consumers and compete in a growing men's grooming market. The ad transformed an established brand into an internet-era personality. Later personalized response videos extended the same character and demonstrated how a television concept could become interactive social-media communication.

Visual Rhetoric and the Continuous Shot

The commercial's visual design carries much of the argument. The camera appears to move continuously while the set changes behind the spokesman. This creates a sense of effortless control. He remains centered and calm even as the environment becomes increasingly impossible. The visual stability of the man contrasts with the instability of the world, reinforcing his authority (McQuarrie & Mick, 1996; Old Spice, 2010).

Props function as compressed symbols. The shower establishes hygiene, the boat establishes adventure, the tickets establish attentiveness, diamonds establish luxury, and the horse provides a final image of masculine fantasy. The audience does not need a narrated explanation because each prop carries cultural meaning.

The bottle appears clearly at the end, ensuring that the spectacle leads back to the product. Without

that visual return, viewers might remember the joke but forget the brand. The packaging becomes the tangible object connecting the ordinary bathroom with the fantasy sequence.

Language and Repetition

The advertisement's language is rapid, imperative, and second-person. "Look at your man. Now back to me." The commands control the viewer's imagined gaze just as the spokesman controls the scene. Repetition creates rhythm and prevents attention from wandering. The audience is continually instructed where to look and what comparison to make (Old Spice, 2010).

The phrase "sadly, he isn't me" uses mock sympathy. It insults the partner lightly while maintaining a comic tone. The following phrase offers repair: he could at least smell like the spokesman. The insult creates a problem, and the product solves it within seconds.

Effectiveness and Ethical Evaluation

The advertisement was effective because it created strong recall, renewed attention to Old Spice, and became culturally recognizable. Its persuasion does not depend on a detailed product demonstration. It builds a memorable identity that consumers can retrieve when they see the brand in a store.

Ethically, the commercial is relatively transparent about its fantasy. No reasonable viewer is expected to believe that body wash creates diamonds or horses. The greater ethical issue lies in the gender stereotypes and body ideals it uses. Humor reduces their seriousness but does not erase them. A viewer can appreciate the creative rhetoric while recognizing that attraction, masculinity, and female desire are more diverse than the ad suggests.

Conclusion

The Old Spice advertisement uses pathos, ethos, logos, kairos, sex appeal, humor, gender commonplaces, and visual rhetoric to sell a men's body wash to women and men simultaneously (Aristotle, 2007; McQuarrie & Mick, 1996). Pathos dominates through desire, romance, surprise, and laughter. Ethos appears in the spokesman's performed confidence, while logos is limited to the claim that a partner can at least smell like the ideal man. Kairos helped the campaign reach an audience prepared to share and replay unusual advertising.

The boat, tickets, diamonds, and horse transform a basic hygiene product into a symbol of adventure and desirability. The advertisement's continuous-shot style makes the transformation appear effortless and keeps the spokesman in control (Old Spice, 2010). Its gender assumptions are narrow, but its self-aware humor makes them rhetorically effective.

The commercial demonstrates that successful advertising rarely sells function alone. It sells a story about who the consumer could become and how others might respond. Old Spice's achievement was to make that story so exaggerated, concise, and entertaining that viewers remembered both the fantasy and the bottle.

References

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