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Emotive Motive: Analysis of a Campbell's Select soup ad

People can find ads just about anywhere today – magazines, billboards, grocery store checkout lines, and even on the side of the bus. Among all the clutter, advertisers must make choices they believe will strike a chord with their intended market, persuading consumers to buy their product. By taking a closer look at the process, framework, production values and context involved in a recent ad for Campbell's Select line of soups, savvy media consumers can see that Campbell's is trying to sell its product primarily by targeting the emotions of its defined audience.

Found in the Feb. 11 edition of "People" magazine, an ad for Campbell's Select line of soups features a woman sitting at her desk at work. She is in the midst of eating a bowl of soup and is sitting back with her eyes closed and a large smile on her face. Golden rays are beaming out from behind her, and she is surrounded by pastel images of flowers, butterflies and various vegetables. At the bottom of the ad, a white block contains copy that reads "Delicious and satisfying, with 32 low fat varieties at 130 calories or less." Below the copy, the Campbell's Select logo is printed with the motto "Satisfies. Restores. Lifts you up." On the right side of the white box, the ad features a picture of various Campbell's Select products and a bowl of soup surrounded by fresh vegetables. Finally, hovering above the smaller photo is a highlighted circle that says "absolutely no artificial flavors."

Like most advertisements, the Campbell's ad is meant to inform the consumer about its product and also persuade the reader to purchase it. The ad's latent function is to produce revenue for Campbell's by boosting sales of its Select line of soups. The ad attempts to achieve these goals by moving its intended audience emotionally. The market the ad wishes to target is evident from both the choice of medium – a full-page ad in "People" magazine, a celebrity tabloid popular primarily with women – and its choice of a main character. The woman featured in the ad is not a celebrity; instead, she is a working, health-conscious woman who most females can relate to. Slender, wearing a silk blouse with pearl earrings, and taking a moment to indulge herself, she's also depicted as a figure most women would aspire to be. For the image-conscious working women Campbell's is selling to, the character represents an attainable and desirable goal – a goal they can reach by purchasing Campbell's Select soup, the ad implies.

Looking at the ad's framework, one finds more implied and underlying messages in the ad that seek to trigger women's emotions. On the surface, the ad's plot is simple: woman eats soup, soup makes her happy. But there's also an implicit message. The fact that the woman is well-groomed and professional-looking implies that successful, put-together people eat this soup. Expanding on that message, people who don't eat Campbell's Select are maybe not as successful, as well-groomed, as happy and healthy. Both messages, though based on the illogical premise that something as simple as soup can impact one's life, are aimed at producing an affective response of envy and desire from consumers. This emotional response is also driven through the advertisers' choice to use a photograph instead of lots of heavy text. According to Silverblatt, "The primary

way in which we experience photographs is through the sense of sight. We tend to respond to visually oriented media in an affective or emotional way.” (28)

Taking a closer look at the ad’s photograph and layout, the ad’s production values also come into play when considering the methods Campbell’s uses to elicit an affective response from consumers. The woman and her bowl of soup are positioned directly in the center of the ad, while background elements, such as her desk and computer, are slightly faded in the background. The positioning of these elements indicates that the pressures of work and real life are far from the character’s mind at this moment; she is entirely focused on herself, her soup and the happiness the soup has created. The lighting in the photograph is also focused on the woman and her bowl of soup, with the other surrounding elements drifting off into the shadows. The warm, golden light that shines on the woman’s face is also meant to emphasize her happiness and joy. “A brightly lit photograph evokes feelings of security and happiness.” (Silverblatt, 117)

In addition to the light shining directly on the woman, golden rays shining behind her are reminiscent of sunshine and happiness, further underlining the fact that this woman is in a state of bliss. Other prominent colors used in the ad are warm oranges and pinks. These colors, according to Silverblatt, “make us feel happy, secure, positive and intensely involved.” (115) The rays evoking sunlight, as well as the images of flowers, vegetables and butterflies used in the ad, also emphasize the ad’s message that the soup is natural and, thus, healthy. The smaller picture of the canned products surrounded by fresh vegetables at the bottom of the ad further drives home this point. Additionally, Campbell’s makes sure to print the Campbell’s Select logo at the bottom the ad. The logo contains the classic colors of the Campbell’s brand, giving readers the sense of comfort

they relate to an established brand, but they're arranged in a new shape and font, letting consumers know that this isn't their Grandma's soup.

The emotions and desires Campbell's is trying to provoke with its ad play off several historical and cultural trends in the United States. The ad comes at a time when America is struggling with an obesity epidemic. Roughly 34 percent of Americans are obese ("CDC Study"), and many more are overweight. At the same time, the country is experiencing a movement toward natural food, with Americans placing greater scrutiny on what they put into their bodies. Whole Foods, a growing natural grocer, took in \$6 billion in revenue in 2006 (Lomax), and the movie "Super Size Me," which criticized the fast food industry, led many people to turn away from convenience foods (Sood). Campbell's is, almost ironically, capitalizing on both of these trends. The ad sells food as a route to happiness, but also touts its soup's low calorie count and fresh ingredients.

Culturally, Campbell's is reflecting and reinforcing the American preoccupation with weight and appearance. In America, being thin and beautiful is equated with success and happiness, so the advertisers have chosen a slender, well-dressed model to sell Campbell's soup so consumers will equate happiness and success with the product. Furthermore, the majority of the ad's text is devoted to promoting the soup's low calorie, low fat qualities. The Campbell's ad also reflects the value that is placed on "me" time in today's time-crunched information age. The woman in the ad is happy because she has taken some time for herself, to eat and enjoy. The ad's text tells consumers that Campbell's Select soup "Restores," emphasizing the soup's soothing, comforting and happiness-provoking aspects.

The advertisers behind the Campbell's Select soup campaign obviously have a clear goal in mind. Considering elements of the process, framework, production values and context involved in the ad, it's apparent the ad is meant to provoke an affective response from its audience. Geared toward image-conscious women, the ad is selling the idea that the woman who eats Campbell's Select line of soups can become a well-groomed, healthy and happy business woman who takes time for herself. While these qualities have little to do with soup, the advertisers hope consumers will be so overcome with envy and desire that those small details won't matter – at least, not until they get home from the grocery store.

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