

**MAKE IT VEGAN: HOW ADVERTISEMENTS FOR COS-
METICS CONSTRUCT VEGAN REPRESENTATION**

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<p>Abstract</p> <p>Veganismi on yleistynyt hurjasti viimeisten vuosien aikana, ja sen myötä myös vegaanisten tuotteiden mainonta. Tässä kandidaatin tutkielmassa selvitetään, että kuinka vegaanisten kosmetiikkatuotteiden mainonnassa rakennetaan ja ylläpidetään vegaani-identiteettiä. Neljää vegaanisten kosmetiikkatuotteiden mainosta analysoitiin multimodaalisen diskurssianalyysin näkökulmasta kiinnittäen huomiota eri kuvaelementteihin, kuten väreihin, sommitteluun, sekä kirjoitettuun tekstiin.</p> <p>Mainokset pyrkivät puhutella niin "tavallisia" kuluttajia kuin myös jo vegaanisuudesta kiinnostuneita. Ne loivat vahvasti konnotaatiota vegaanisuu-den ja hyvän tekemisen ympärille. Mainoskuvissa esiintyi sydänsymboleita, kielellistä retoriikkaa, sekä vaihtoehtoiskulttuuriin viittaavia elementtejä, kuten fontteja ja värivalintoja. Lisäksi kuvissa kerrottiin tuotteiden vegaanisuus eksplisiittisesti, sillä muussa tapauksessa se olisi epäselvää. Kaksi ensimmäistä mainoskuvaa sisälsivät lisäksi eniten erilaisia vaikuttamiskeinoja, ja valinnoillaan puhuttelivat suurempaa yleisöä kuin kaksi jälkimmäistä kuvaa.</p> <p>Tämä tutkielma ei kuitenkaan anna perinpohjaista tietoa mainoskuvien vaikutuksesta vegaani-identiteetin rakentumiseen pienen datamäärän vuoksi, mutta se herättää lisää mielenkiintoa vegaani-identiteetin tutkimisesta.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

Veganism is defined by the Vegan Society as “- - a philosophy and way of living which seeks to exclude—as far as is possible and practicable — all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing, or any other purpose; and by extension, promotes the development and use of animal-free alternatives for the benefit of animals, humans and the environment. In dietary terms it denotes the practice of dispensing with all products derived wholly or partly from animals,” (The Vegan Society).

The vegan ideology has become increasingly popular during the past few years. One popular way to explore the ideology is to participate in the Veganuary Campaign which “is a non-profit organization that encourages people worldwide to try vegan for January and beyond” (veganuary.com 2022). The Veganuary Campaign in 2018 got 168,542 signatures and in 2022 the number was over 629,000 worldwide. As more people have started to live without consuming or using products derived from animals, the need for vegan products has increased. The Vegan Society claims that 82% of the registrations for the Vegan Trademark took place in the last five years (2022). Moreover, the advertisements for vegan products will most likely appear more frequently, as they already do.

Even though advertisements have been studied widely, the recent wave of vegan ads have not attracted wide academic interest. My aim is to analyze four advertisements from a multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) point of view. I would like to see what kinds of “vegan-defining” elements there are in the advertisements, and what kind of portrait they paint of someone who is vegan. I presume that there is some type of a stereotype of someone who is vegan, and I want to see what this stereotype is like. Because vegan advertisements are relatively new, my research can provide some new insights into how veganism is portrayed in commercial contexts. Moreover, understanding vegan advertisements will help understanding the way in which society pictures vegan people or people interested in vegan products.

2 BACKGROUND

As stated in the Introduction, advertisements as a field of study is already quite thoroughly researched. This means that there are many academic studies to use as a source in my research into vegan advertisements. I will rely mostly on critical discourse analysis (CDA) and on multimodal discourse analysis (MCDA). As critical discourse analysis is about written and spoken language, multimodal critical discourse analysis began to raise its head when linguists began to realize that meaning is also communicated through other semiotic modes (Machin and Mayr 2012: 6). These other semiotic modes can be pictures, signs, or even colors. In other words, multimodality refers to other modes of communication in addition to written and spoken language.

2.1 Critical discourse analysis

Discourse can be summarized as how a range of people think about the world and how it works (Machin and Mayr 2012: 11). It is something that can be seen through the use of language -- how people describe and explain things. Certain groups with specific beliefs or values may have a coherent way of communicating their thoughts - they may use similar adjectives to describe things or they may use specific words. Ledin and Machin also underline in their book *How to do critical discourse analysis : A multimodal introduction* (2020: 18) that the same objects or ideas may have different connotations to different groups of people. They continue to note that discourses shape how we think and act (2020).

Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006: 14) note that critical discourse analysis (CDA) aims to show how language may convey meanings implicitly, and that even the most neutral of texts may prove to do so. These meanings are about social statuses and ideological ideas. Users of language may be unaware of what their choices of words

convey. However, by analyzing the linguistic choices, it may be possible to know more about how the person sees the world around them.

2.2 Multimodal discourse analysis

As discourse may sound something connected only to texts and spoken language, it is realized through other modes of communication as well: “-- meaning is generally communicated not only through language but also through other semiotic modes” (Machin and Mayr 2012: 6). Machin and Mayr note that the written or spoken language in, for example an advertisement is able to convey meanings efficiently, but the visual features also have a great effect on conveying meaning. Additionally, this notion can be applied to any other texts accompanied by a visual element, such as advertisements or news articles. Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) aims to show how signs (such as images or diagrams) also create meaning (Machin and Mayr 2012: 9). MCDA also underlines the decisions made by the author, who creates meaning by placing a particular sign to accompany a text and its meanings. Machin and Mayr (2012: 9) continue to point out how MCDA is a tool used to shed light on underlying assumptions in pictures and texts accompanying them.

2.2.1 Social semiotic theory of communication

Social semiotic theory of communication is an approach where the reason to use a particular word or sign is an important part of the analysis (Machin and Mayr 2012: 17). The theory emphasizes the use of language in social context and in creating societies. In other words, the system of grammatical rules of communication is not as important as the way the communicator chooses to use the semiotic resources available (Machin and Mayr 2012: 17). The theory applies also to visual communication. Thus, the visual choices made do not only represent the world and societies, but they also build and shape the world around us. This approach is based on Halliday’s ideas on how language has a societal effect on the world (Machin and Mayr 2012: 17).

Ledin and Machin (2020: 15) underline the basic idea of social semiotic theory by giving a scenario where a person is described. People can be described in many ways, by their appearance, or perhaps by their religion. However, the person who does the description chooses how to portray someone according to context, and perhaps according to how they want that person to seem like to others. In other words, social semiotics is about the choices available, and the choices made, and moreover, about the intention behind the choices. This theory is good to keep in mind while analyzing advertisements which are made to persuade the viewers as efficiently as possible.

2.3 Vegan identity in social media texts

In Jonna Kauria's (2020) Master's thesis, they pointed out how vegan identity is previously studied mainly through dietary and ethical choices. In the thesis, Kauria studies the ways in which a vegan identity is built through the language used by Reddit users who discuss veganism. Kauria found out in the study that there is not a certain definition of veganism, but it can vary from person to person (2020: 97). Kauria also notes that animal rights and veganism as a lifestyle are the most common defining elements. It is important to keep in mind when analysing the advertisements of products which claim to be vegan that veganism itself is understood differently by different people.

2.4 Vegan identities in the press

Brookes G. and Chalupnik M. (2022) studied how vegans are represented in the British press, more specifically in the tabloids and broadsheets. They studied the corpus with the use of critical discourse analysis. The study sheds light on how the British press, particularly the tabloids, present vegans negatively, while the broadsheets offer a more neutral tone. However, Brookes and Chalupnik note in their findings that even though both of the corpora presented vegans as violent by using the word "militant", tabloids used the word more often than broadsheets (2022).

The study was conducted by looking at, among other things, what kinds of modifiers and verbs occurred with "vegan(s)". These words chosen by the tabloids and broadsheets then help construct a "vegan identity" as people read the texts and perhaps incorporate the ideas into their own world views. Whether or not the words were chosen by purpose, they carry meanings which affect how people feel towards vegans.

3 RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTIONS

The aim of this thesis is to find out how vegan cosmetics are advertised in order to see if there are recurring elements which construct a vegan representation among these advertisements. The research questions are as follows: 1) what kinds of visual elements indicate “vegan” and 2) what kinds of language choices are used to construct “vegan”?

As stated in the background section, societies are run by shared ideas on how things are in the world. Based on this notion, there are perhaps ideas on what elements are connected to veganism. Are there typical visual elements to convey that a product is vegan? Perhaps through color choices or by putting a plant into the advertisement. Moreover, can it be conveyed through means of language choices.

4 DATA AND METHODS

In this chapter I will briefly discuss the data and methods of analysis.

As mentioned before, I analyzed four different advertisements for cosmetic products. They all represent products which are claimed to be vegan. I tried to choose advertisements which are seemingly distinct from each other, but which explicitly state that the product(s) in question is vegan. I gathered the pictures by searching the web with search phrases “vegan cosmetic ad” and “vegan makeup advertising”. I visited websites which came up with the search phrases to find the pictures. Purposefully looking for advertisements from the web proved to be slightly difficult because many advertisements seemed to be temporarily showcased on websites. I searched for the pictures early in the spring of 2022. Figure 1 (Love Beauty and Planet) is from a stock photo website, alamy.com. Figure 2 (The Body Shop) is a screenshot from their official Instagram page. Figure 3 (Milk Makeup) is from a site called models.com, which is a website for showcasing work related to fashion. Lastly, Figure 4 (KVD Beauty) is from an article from totallyveganbuzz.com, and it is also a screenshot.

As for the methods of analysis, I will work from the viewpoint of multimodal critical discourse analysis. Furthermore, I will look at different elements regarding composition, color choices, images or signs, and written text. Compositional elements include salience and *given* and *new* (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006). Images or signs refer to all the elements which depict a person or an object, such as a heart symbol.

The analysis of the advertisements is made with relying mostly on two books: *Reading images : The grammar of visual design* (2006) by Kress and Van Leeuwen, and *How to do critical discourse analysis : A multimodal introduction* (2012) by Machin and Mayr. Of course, these books work as a guideline, and the analysis itself is rather subjective, and I make the final conclusions by myself.

5 ANALYSIS

This chapter consists of the analysis and is followed by a discussion, where I summarize the findings and conclude the thesis. Each paragraph in this chapter begins with the image and continues with the analysis.

5.1 Fresh and clean advertising - Love Beauty and Planet



Figure 1

The person who functions as the salient object in the image is looking directly into the viewer's eyes, thus creating "demand" (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006: 118). Functioning as a salient object in the picture means that it is the most eye-catching, but also prominent as it takes almost half of the picture's space (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006: 176). Her smile and the hand holding out the product encourage the viewer to buy the product -- to make a vegan beauty resolution. The angle is on the eye-level which, according to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006: 148), creates equality between the viewer and the person depicted in the advertisement.

Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006: 181) explain that there is a concept of *given* and *new* where objects are placed either on the left or right side of the picture depending on their significance. The given is something that is already somehow similar to the viewer and the new is then something to consider. The new, placed on the right side, holds the most important information on which the viewer should pay attention to. In this case, the given are the products, placed on the left. People already know that there are different cosmetics. The new is the outcome of using these products - someone

who looks happy and healthy. So, in this case, the idea might be to draw attention to the person in the picture and kind of suggest that by using the particular products in question, the viewer will end up looking like the person in the ad - happy and healthy.

“Love” plays an important role in the picture; it is repeated both verbally and by a heart-shape. The advertisement perhaps argues that their product is something that sparks love.

The trademarked badge for being vegan is a clear indicator of “vegan”.

The formulas are in a central role as there are three separate mentions of them. The advertisement underlines the “cleanliness” of the formulas - no parabens or colorants. It also mentions ethical essential oils, further arguing that the formula is somehow clean of something, perhaps guilt as the oils are ethical. The prominent color is light blue, and this case goes well with the “clean theme”. Also, the white shirt of the woman underlines cleanliness.

There is the use of “we” pronoun. It is a way to align the viewer alongside or against an idea (Machin and Mayr 2012: 84). In this case, it may refer to the brand itself or to people in general, or to people interested in veganism. It may create the feeling of unity between the brand and the viewer. It might also affect the viewer’s thoughts - they may have not previously paid much attention to these products, but they might start thinking that they also want to “love” the things mentioned in the add. They might want to belong to something, to a group.

5.2 Personification as a rhetoric tool - The Body Shop

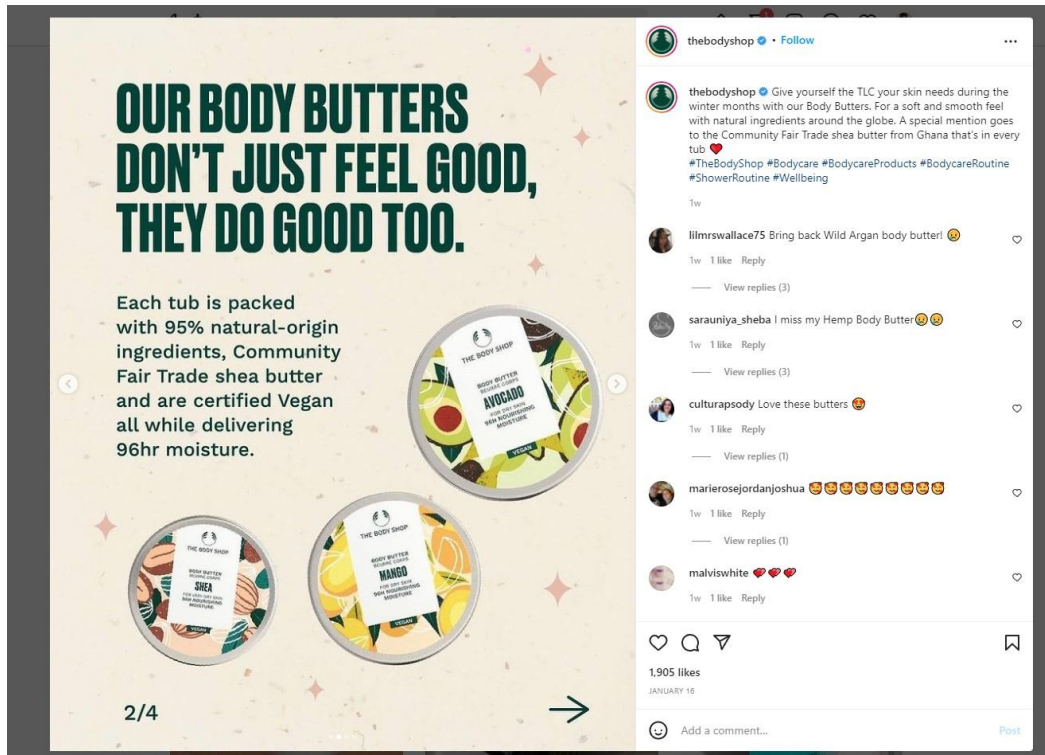


Figure 2

Distinctively different from the previous advertisement as there are no people in the picture - only the products and some text to accompany the products. However, the picture is not a typical advertisement, but a promotional picture in The Body Shop's official Instagram-page. Nevertheless, it promotes their products and thus fits into my thesis as it is an advertisement.

The first thing that draws attention is the thick green font in the upper side of the picture. It states that "our body butters don't just feel good, they do good too". The straightforward sentence uses personification by stating that the body butters "do good too", while also "feeling good" on the skin. Personification is assigning human qualities or abilities to inanimate objects or other abstractions (Machin and Mayr 2012: 171). Body butters do not necessarily "do good" by themselves, but this way the picture encourages one to buy the product in question. The product will achieve something else while also delivering its main purpose. The picture continues to describe the product to have 95% natural-origin ingredients and Community Fair Trade shea butter, and to be certified as vegan, and also moisturize for 96 hours. So, what they might mean with "do good too" is that when the viewer buys the product, they are also supporting workers and the environment, or the animals, while also receiving a

product which will additionally “do good” on the skin by being natural and moisturizing.

This advertisement also utilizes the use of “we” pronoun. In this case, it might underline the difference between “their” product over someone else’s. Their product is better than other brands’.

5.3 Laid-back persuasion - Milk Makeup



Figure 3

While the first two pictures present the products clearly, this one from Milk Makeup does not showcase the product's packaging. As the first picture also has a person depicted in the picture, this one feels more intimate because of the close shot (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006, p. 148) and because the person's face takes up most of the space of the picture, thus being the salient element. However, the picture does not create demand because there is no eye contact between the picture's person and the viewer, as compared to the first figure. Moreover, the missing eye-contact provides an offer for the viewer - some new information to either take in or not, as compared to the demand where the picture sort of captures the viewer's attention (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006, p. 119). The picture also creates equality between itself and the viewer by the angle of the shot which is on the eye-level (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006, p. 148).

There is not much text in the picture, only things which describe the product's formula - cruelty-free, paraben-free, 100% vegan, clean formula, two new shades, and "formulated with hemp-derived cannabis seed oil". The texts are very straightforward and thus they do not try to convince the viewer. However, the whole mood of the picture is to leave the decision of purchase for the viewer - the ad provides just the

basic information about the product, which is lip gloss. In addition, the product's packaging is not portrayed which makes it a little difficult to understand what the product actually is, but the person in the picture is pursing their lips and this way drawing attention to them - and to the lip gloss. Even though there is not much "persuasion", by slogans or gaze, then perhaps the persuasiveness is created by not trying to persuade. As a contrast to the Figure 1, this person has short hair and piercings. Perhaps their tactic is to seem like a laid-back brand which does not need to persuade anyone - maybe their products speak for the brand itself.

5.4 Strikingly gothic - KVD Beauty

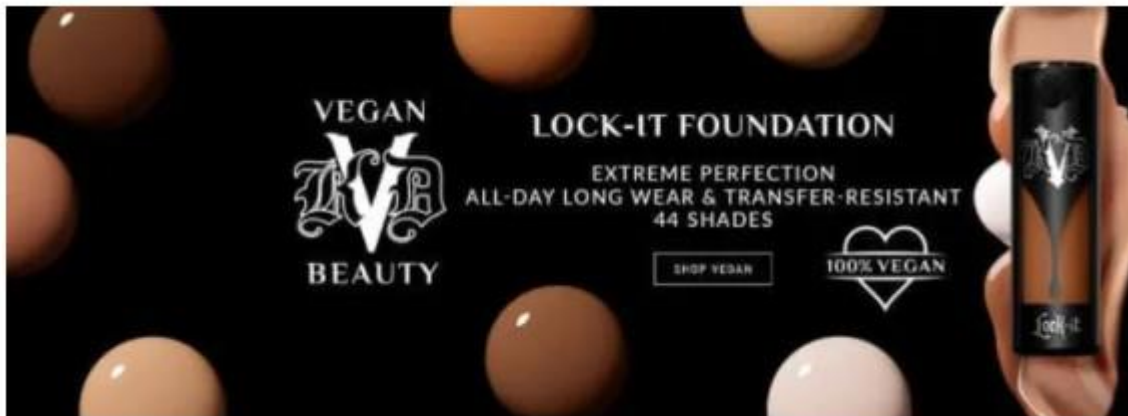


Figure 4

Perhaps the most striking of the images, the fourth one shows a black background and makeup foundation droplets around. It also showcases the product packaging in question and text to accompany all of the elements. The foundation droplets represent the shade range of the product, while the text “44 shades” further underlines the idea that the product is very inclusive regarding different skin shades. Even though the droplets catch the viewer’s eye, the salient black background takes most of the space of the image. In this case, the concept of *given* and *new* (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006: 181) is again showcased. *Given*, on the left, is the brand itself, and *new* is the product they are showcasing, on the right side of the image. For the viewer, the brand, or makeup industry, is a known element, but the product is something to consider. Similar to the Figure 1.

The advertisement mentions “vegan” three times: “vegan beauty”, “shop vegan”, and “100% vegan”. There is also the heart-shaped element, which occurred in the first figure.

Compared to the previous images, this one has the most contrast as the background is pitch black and the product has the same color on it. It also has the least elements regarding texts and other objects. The color scheme and overall look of the advertisement is loyal to the brand itself as it was established by a known tattoo artist. So in other words, this advertisement most likely speaks to viewers who are interested in “alternative” topics and themes – such as tattoos. In a way, this seems similar to the Figure 3, as it also represented someone with piercings which can be linked to alternative cultures.

6 DISCUSSION

Three of the advertisements refer to their product(s)'s formulas by being natural or free of something, or that they have a special ingredient. This creates the image of a special kind of product. It also makes the viewer think that by buying these products, they are doing something good for others in addition to themselves.

The first two images are the most persuasive ones, as they utilize the most rhetoric elements. They are also the most appealing to a larger audience, as the last two images showcase elements which are more "alternative", something that is divergent from the larger masses. Things which point to being more appealing are muted and rather neutral, but in a way "happy" colors, light blue and light yellow. The light blue reminds of the sky or water, and yellow on the other hand reminds of sunshine. Things which are "alternative" are piercings and the color black. Additionally, the last advertisement's logo's font is quite ornamental and perhaps "gothic" which then suits the overall theme of the brand.

One reoccurring element is connecting "vegan" with love and doing acts of good. Figures 1 and 4 showcase a heart symbol, while Figures 1, 2, and 3 somehow mention something to do with good deeds. The Figure 1 has the phrase "small acts of love", Figure 2 argues that their products "do good", and the Figure 3 underlines that their product is "cruelty-free". Figure 4 has the phrase "100% vegan" inside a heart symbol. All these elements connect their vegan product to be perhaps better than regular products in terms of pampering oneself while taking care of the environment or making sure that the product is ethical. This may be what appeals at least to many vegans as some might turn to veganism in order to avoid unethical choices concerning animals and the environment. Furthermore, to compare with the article from Brookes and Chalupnik (2022), these advertisements are creating a connotation between veganism and love, as the tabloids were doing the opposite - connotating veganism and violence. It is a conscious choice to add the heart symbol into the advertisements and thus create the connotation between love and veganism.

The last two advertisements, Figures 3 and 4, are perhaps most appealing towards more “alternative” audience. The piercings and striking black color are not much showcased in beauty magazines or television. Moreover, as mentioned previously, the KVD Beauty was founded by a tattoo artist, which most likely attracted people outside of mainstream. Figures 1 and 2 on the other hand may be towards the more general population. They have brighter colors, and the first figure showcases a very “ordinary” person, someone with natural-looking hair, makeup and clothes.

Three out of four of the advertisements underline how the products’ formulas are somehow “clean”, or that they have natural ingredients. Additionally, all of the advertisements underline explicitly that their product in question is vegan. Otherwise it would not be clear as there are no other elements in addition to “vegan” to signify that.

As there are only four advertisements in this analysis, it is clear that they do not provide enough information to draw conclusions about what is seen as “typical vegan”. It would need more examples to make more firm conclusions about how vegans are represented in the field of cosmetics advertisements. Moreover, all of the examples used in this study did not provide much to analyze concerning text. In the future, it would be wise to choose advertisements with more content text-wise, or even something with spoken content as those may provide more and deeper information on discourse connected to veganism.

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