THE RHETORIC OF ORGANIC FOOD PACKAGING

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By

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ABSTRACT

THE RHETORIC OF ORGANIC FOOD PACKAGING

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Organic food products are grown or created without the use of chemicals, and their producers engage in sustainable resource management. To recoup the increased cost of alternate production methods, organic food products are significantly more expensive than conventional items. Through a generic analysis of 26 organic and conventional products, I demonstrate that organic food producers employ unique marketing strategies that constitute a genre of food product packaging. Organic food producers use an array of visual and verbal rhetorical strategies to make ethical, logical, and pathetic appeals to persuade the consumer to purchase their products, and through a critical rhetorical analysis of two representative organic products, I explicate how these strategies work. Such rhetorical moves may be responsible for the so-called “health halos” that result from organic labeling and consumer misconceptions about what the term organic truly means.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 2011, organic food product sales grew by 9.4% from 2010 for a total $29.22 billion in sales (Organic Trade Association [OTA]), and there has been continuous growth in the industry since 1997 (Lin et al.). This growth is due in part to an increasing awareness on the part of the consumer of pesticide residues in food items, particularly produce (Lin et al. 465; Thompson and Kidwell 277; Environmental Working Group [EWG]). The EWG oversees government testing of 45 of the most popular fruits and vegetables for pesticide residue after the samples have been washed and peeled, and 68% of the samples in 2011 contained detectable levels of various pesticides. All samples of imported nectarines tested positive for pesticide residue, and 98% of apples (domestic and imported) did as well (EWG). More disturbing is the fact that this year, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) tested 190 samples of commercially produced baby food and found that

Green beans prepared as baby food tested positive for five pesticides, among them, the organophosphate methamidiphos, which was found on 9.4 percent of samples, and the organophosphate acephate, on 7.8 percent of samples. Based on our calculations, a 22-pound child eating one four-ounce serving of green beans sold as baby food with the maximum
methamidiphos level found would consume 50 percent of EPA’s acute risk value, a measure of allowable risk. (EWG)

Though there have not been comprehensive, long-term studies examining the effects of pesticide ingestion on human health, and generations of people have grown up eating produce contaminated with pesticides, a number of epidemiological studies have demonstrated that prenatal exposure to certain organophosphates (through neighborhood pest control programs, for example) can lead to intelligence deficits in children ages six to nine (EWG). Since organic produce is that which is grown without the use of chemicals (Organic Foods Production Act [OFPA] of 1990), shoppers are increasingly purchasing organic produce and other food items instead of their conventional counterparts in order to avoid further exposure.¹

Another reason for the continued growth in the purchase of organic foods is the successful advertising efforts of the organic foods industry (Loureiro, McCluskey, and Mittelhammer 405). Since a potential customer first interacts with a product’s packaging before the product itself, the packaging can be considered as a form of advertising as well. For this reason, organic food product packaging—specifically, organic produce and dairy packaging—is the text under consideration in this study.² An attentive shopper may notice subtle differences in the packaging between organic and conventional products. The foremost difference is the “USDA Organic” seal, which can only be displayed on “products that contain at least 95% organic ingredients (by weight, excluding water & 

¹ *Conventional* is the term used among researchers and organic industry members (see Mazar and Zhong, OTA, and Thompson and Kidwell for example) to refer to products that are not certified organic and may have been grown or produced via the use of pesticides and other chemical processes.

² I selected the categories of produce and dairy to study because together they constitute 55.6% of all organic food sales, though they are far from even in sales volume. Fruit and vegetable products make up 40.5% of the market, and dairy products make up 14.6% (OTA).
The remaining contents can only be natural or synthetic ingredients approved by the National Organic Standards Board. These extra ingredients must not be available in an organic form” (OTA). According to a survey conducted by the OTA of companies involved in some level of organic production, 65% of surveyed companies display the seal on their packages.³

In terms of other differences, many organic product packages contain multiple images (either photographic or artist-rendered), rather than just one or none, as is the case exemplified by organic and conventional milk. A half-gallon of Organic Valley milk comes in a paperboard carton with a multitude of pastoral images; whereas the majority of conventional milk sold in large grocery stores is packaged in gallon and half-gallon semi-opaque plastic jugs with only a small sticker or printed area containing the brand name and required nutritional information.⁴ Another difference in organic product packaging is the frequent presence on the packages of narratives of varying length about the company or farm where the item was produced or grown. Uncle Matt's Organic Grapefruit Juice is sold in a clear plastic bottle with a label on the back containing a photograph of Uncle Matt’s father and a narrative of seven sentences about the company.

³ This figure is an average and varies according to sales volume: companies that net under $1 million in sales display the logo 53% of the time, companies earning $1-5 million display it 67% of the time, and companies that net over $5 million display it 79% of the time (OTA). The difference is due to the number of products these companies make that qualify at the 95% or greater level (Haumann). Some companies produce products that contain between 70-95% organic ingredients, which allows them to display a “Made with organic” statement on the box, and some companies produce products that contain less than 70% organic ingredients, which only allows them to list the particular ingredient as being organic in the ingredient panel.

⁴ As someone who has lived in 11 different states, traveled extensively, and shopped at approximately five dozen different grocery stores (ranging from small markets to discount wholesale clubs, like Sam’s) and over 100 convenience stores across the country, I draw on my personal experience to make generalized observations about the packaging of certain types of grocery items. All products discussed in specific detail can be found listed in Appendix 1 along with the retail store of purchase. All products were purchased in July 2012.
The narrative discusses the inspiration for the company, mentions scientific research that supports the benefits of grapefruit juice, and touts the chemical-free nature of the product.

This paper will argue that such differences between organic food product packaging and conventional food product packaging constitute a unique genre in the advertising/product-packaging community. First, however, in order to better frame my study, I will explain the difference between what the organic label *denotes* according to the USDA and what it *connotes* to the consumer, as demonstrated in a number of studies.

**The Meaning of Organic**

In order for a company or farm to claim its product is organic, the operation must be certified organic by an accredited certifying agent, a process involving multiple inspections that include various testing protocols and analyses (e.g., of soil, waste water, plant tissue, and processed product) (Pittman et al. 4). As discussed above, once an item is certified organic, it can display the USDA Organic label. That label then denotes that the item is produced by farmers who emphasize the use of renewable resources and the conservation of soil and water to enhance environmental quality for future generations. Organic meat, poultry, eggs, and dairy products come from animals that are given no antibiotics or growth hormones. Organic food is produced without using most conventional pesticides; fertilizers made with synthetic ingredients or sewage sludge; bioengineering; or ionizing radiation. Before a product can be labeled “organic,” a government-approved certifier inspects the farm where the food is grown to make sure the farmer is following all the rules necessary
to meet USDA organic standards. Companies that handle or process organic food before it gets to your local supermarket or restaurant must be certified, too. (USDA)

When a consumer purchases an item with the USDA Organic label, he or she is assured that the product does not contain any chemical ingredients, including artificial hormones, and was not grown or produced via the use of chemical pesticides. According to the Food and Drug Administration, no such guarantee is applicable to the label natural, a seemingly similar term but one that is not governed by extensive regulation as is the term and label organic (FDA.gov). The labels non-GMO, meaning the product was made without genetically modified organisms, and rBST-free, indicating that the dairy ingredients in the product came from cows that were not given Recombinant Bovine Somatotropin (a hormone that increases milk production), may be present on both organic and conventional food products. However, their presence on organic products is unnecessary, as organic certification precludes the use of such products and ingredients (FDA.gov). It is not uncommon for conventional farmers and companies to eschew such additives and chemical substances but still not qualify for or seek organic certification, so the consumer needs to be aware that simply because a product is labeled non-GMO and/or rBST-free does not mean that it is organic; it could in fact contain or have been produced with other chemical substances.

Despite the nearly ubiquitous presence of information about and advertising of organic products on the internet and in chain stores such as Trader Joe’s and Whole Foods, which have numerous locations across the country, a number of studies have

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5 Companies may reference the absence of r-BST or r-BGH on their packages. BGH is an acronym for bovine growth hormone and a generic term for BST (OrganicValley.com).
demonstrated that the average consumer is not fully informed about what various food labels mean. According to the 2012 Organic Industry Survey, “consumer confusion over the benefit of organic versus natural versus non-GMO versus local continues to be a big issue that often works against the organic industry” (OTA, italics mine). A controlled study conducted by Jonathon P. Schudt and Norbert Schwarz indicated that a significant number of consumers believe the organic label implies nutritional information as well, and study participants judged cookies labeled organic to be lower in calories than cookies not labeled as such. Schuldt and Schwarz note that “strong associations exist between the concepts ‘organic’ and ‘healthy’ in contemporary America, associations that are promoted by marketers and reflected in survey data in which most Americans endorse organics as healthier” (144). Many people believe that because a food is demonstrated to have one particular positive attribute—that it is produced without chemicals—it must have other unclaimed positive attributes as well. This effect on beliefs is known as a “health halo.” Health halos extend both from obviously nutritional-content-related labels such as “low fat” (Wansink and Chandon 605) and less-obvious or unrelated labels such as “organic” (Schuldt and Schwarz 144) and even “fair trade” (Schuldt, Muller, and Schwarz 1), a label that indicates how the workers who grow and process the ingredients of the product are treated and has nothing to do with the make-up of the product.

To the average consumer, organic connotes ideas such as “healthy,” “good for you,” “good for the environment,” and “green” (in the ecologically-conscious sense). Further, because it does connote such things, purchasing organic items is seen as a good deed and “affirms individuals’ values of social responsibility and ethical consciousness” (Mazar and Zhong 3). By purchasing products that are certified organic, the somewhat
more informed customer knows he or she is supporting farmers who treat their animals more humanely and do not inject them with chemicals. The less-aware customer simply believes he or she is buying healthy food for his or her family, an action still considered responsible and “good.” Recent studies have demonstrated that such confirmation of moral self-identity that is provided by purchasing organic products can license subsequent immoral behavior and result in harsher moral judgments (Mazar and Zhong 10; Eskine 2). Essentially, the customer feels that he or she has already done his or her good deed for the day and that it is okay to then engage in less-positive behavior.

Why does the packaging of organic products connote such things? How do the images, statements, and other elements convince the consumer to overcome reservations about price and purchase them—how do they persuade the customer? After all, price is a major factor in the choice between organic and conventional, given that organic products range from being 20% to 175% more expensive than their conventional counterparts.6 How do producers convince potential customers to pay the extra money for organic products?

**Theoretical Grounding**

One way to understand the persuasive appeal of organic packaging can be found in the discipline of rhetoric and the study of semiotics. Semiotics is the study of signs or representations of concepts and what they convey pioneered by Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and American philosopher Charles S. Peirce. Saussure stated that

Language is a system of signs that express ideas . . . The linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image . . .

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6 Both Lin et al. and Thompson and Kidwell discuss the role of price difference in the choice to purchase organic products and estimate price differentials between organic and conventional items.
propose to retain the word sign [signe] to designate the whole and to replace concept and sound-image respectively by signified [signifie] and signifier [signifiant]; the last two terms have the advantage of indicating the opposition that separates them from each other and from the whole of which they are parts. (16, 66, 67; italics original)

Sausseur believed the relationship between the signifier and signified is arbitrary in that there is no inherent relationship between the collection of sounds or lines and shapes that make up a word and the concept it represents, but once an association is made, convention dictates that the signifier will always represent the particular thing signified until society as a whole (not a particular individual) adapts the relationship in some way. The signifier organic signifies or represents the concept of chemical-free and environmentally-conscious farming and food-processing practices. When a consumer sees the word on a package, the conventional associations—provided that he or she has learned them through at least minimal previous exposure—should come immediately to mind.

Peirce’s conception of semiotics expanded upon the idea of visual signs and presented the academic community with the terms icon, index, and symbol to represent the three types of visual signs. Peirce wrote,

I define an Icon as a sign which is determined by its dynamic object by virtue of its own internal nature . . . I define an Index as a sign determined by its Dynamic object by virtue of being in a real relation to it . . . I define a Symbol as a sign which is determined by its dynamic object only in the
sense that it will be so interpreted. It thus depends on a convention, a habit . . . . (391)

As Asa Berger elucidates, an icon is an image that resembles the tangible concept it represents (49). A photograph of Elsie the cow is an icon of that cow because though it is not Elsie in being, one could recognize her in real life after seeing her picture. An index is a sign that is logically related to a concept, such as through a cause-and-effect relationship. While smoke is a three-dimensional index of fire, imagery can also be indexical, in addition to being iconic. An orange is an indexical image in relation to the juice inside a bottle; the orange was the cause of the juice. The third type of Peircean sign is the symbol, which is an image associated with a concept purely by convention; there is no logical connection between the two. A national ensign is a symbol of a given country. Though there may exist historical reasons for the chosen elements of a particular flag, its design does not physically resemble the thing it represents, nor is there a cause-and-effect relationship. Peirce’s work can be used to explain the use of certain images on packages of organic products. A carton of organic milk may feature indexical images of cows, and a bottle of orange juice may feature an image of an orange. Neither image is an exact representation of what is inside, but they do indicate what was the cause or origin of the product inside, and that origin is a natural source, not a chemically-contrived one.

Semiotics allows the analyst to understand what images and words represent or connote, and theories of rhetoric enable the explication of why advertisers employ such elements and how they persuade the customer. According to Aristotle, “Rhetoric may be defined as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion” (Rhet. bk. 1, ch. 2, 181). Since the goal of advertising is to persuade the customer to
purchase a product, a rhetorical analysis of the packaging of organic food products is an ideal way to examine how certain companies convince consumers to purchase their organic products rather than the conventional counterparts sold by other companies. Aristotle posited that “Of the modes of persuasion furnished by the spoken word there are three kinds. The first kind depends on the personal character of the speaker [ethos]; the second on putting the audience into a certain frame of mind [pathos]; the third on the proof, or apparent proof, provided by the words of the speech itself [logos]” (Rhet. bk. 1, ch. 2, 181). Though Aristotle refers here to spoken rhetoric, his principles are applicable to the study of written and visual texts as well. An organic company can persuade a consumer to purchase its product by establishing its character in the mind of the individual through elements of the package design, such as a narrative like the Uncle Matt’s juice bottle displays. The company can also make a logical appeal through the presentation of facts about the nutritional content or make-up of the product, and it can attempt to win the consumer’s affection through an emotional appeal in the form of carefully selected images and statements.

The discipline of visual rhetoric focuses on how images and other visual objects communicate information and persuade an individual. In the words of Sonja K. Foss, it is “a theoretical perspective that involves the analysis of the symbolic or communicative aspects of visual artifacts. It is a critical-analytical tool or a way of approaching and analyzing visual data that highlights the communicative dimensions of images or objects” (305-6). Using a visual rhetorical perspective, an analyst seeks to describe the nature of the artifact, attending to both its presented and suggested elements, determine the function the artifact fulfills for the customer, and evaluate the artifact in terms of its
success in communicating the intended message (307-9). The USDA Organic label is a visual message to the customer that the food item does not contain chemicals or artificial additives. Bucolic images of fruit trees or sunrises over farms are a visual attempt at a pathetic appeal and can induce a sense of nostalgia and happiness in the consumer. As rhetorician Hugh Blair reminds us, the “passions are the great springs of human action” (Lect. XXXII, 957) and by inducing a positive emotional response in the potential customer, the company may succeed in attaining persuasion in the consumer to buy the product.

**Toward an Understanding of Organic Food Advertising**

As discussed above, it is clear that organic food products differ in two primary ways from conventional food products: they are produced without the use of chemical additives, and they are more expensive. It would seem then that farms and companies growing and producing organic food products need to employ a different strategy than conventional food producers use to market their products in stores to convince potential customers that this alternate method of production is a better way and worth the additional cost. Through a generic analysis of the packages of 20 organic produce and dairy products, I hope to demonstrate that a distinct organic food packaging genre exists and delineate its identifying characteristics. It is not enough to simply identify the elements, however. Through a critical rhetorical analysis utilizing Aristotelian, visual, and semiotic perspectives, I also explicate how the visual and verbal elements of organic food packages work together to foster certain impressions and persuade the customer to purchase. My analysis builds on previous research on inaccurate impressions caused by
product packaging and labeling and presents potential explanations for why such conceptions result in the mind of the consumer.

The paper is organized in the following way. Chapter 2 consists of a detailed discussion of genre theory and generic criticism, as elaborated by Foss, and a generic analysis of 20 organic produce and dairy products, with six conventional counterpart products for comparison and control. By analyzing the selection of products, I hope to show that a genre of organic food product packaging exists and that it consists of a specific set of characteristics, which I describe in the next section. Such an understanding will guide the research of this thesis in particular and research in the field of organic food advertising in general. Chapter 3 consists of a detailed rhetorical analysis of two organic products (one dairy and one produce) based on theories of verbal and visual rhetoric and semiotics. By analyzing the specific rhetorical moves of two organic food companies whose product packages epitomize the organic food packaging genre, I illustrate how the organic food industry persuades customers to purchase their products and provide a possible explanation for the phenomenon of health halos that result from exposure to and purchase of such products. Chapter 4 provides a summative discussion and conclusion, along with suggestions for future research.
CHAPTER 2
A GENRE OF ORGANIC FOOD ADVERTISING

Given that a genre can be defined as “a distinct group, type, class, or category of artifacts that share important characteristics that differentiate it from other groups” (Foss 137), it is reasonable to label the various forms of food advertising as separate genres. Television, magazine, and radio advertisements, as well as food product packages each constitute a different genre of food advertising, as they employ varying rhetorical strategies in their advertising mission and are marked by specific identifying characteristics, such as their mode of transmitting the data. These genres can all be broken down further into a broad range of genres, with genres based on demographics such as age or income level. Walter Gantz et al. analyzed food advertisements on television that were targeted specifically at children and found that the ads made appeals based on taste, fun, and contests or premiums (such as toys included in the box) and often included a well-known children’s tv or movie character as a spokesperson or promoter (3). These elements are all features that marked food advertisements aimed at children as a genre separate from food advertisements aimed at adults.

7 Though some may question whether product packaging is truly a form of advertising, multiple studies address the role of food product packaging in consumer choice and selection in the grocery store. Consumers frequently select items based on brand recognition (as displayed by/on food packages) and package design. See for example Garber and Hyatt; Dickinson and Maugh; and Moriarty and Rohe.
Organic food products are distinguished from conventional food products by the absence of harmful additives. They are grown or made without the use of chemical pesticides, fertilizers, and preservatives during any stage of growth and processing and are produced using environmentally sustainable means; because of this, they cost significantly more money. Therefore, it is highly likely that a different strategy is needed to promote such products and that organic food product packaging comprises a genre distinct from that of conventional food product packaging.

Generic analysis is a particularly apt framework for discerning whether a unique genre exists across a range of organic food product packages. In order to determine the presence of a genre, the analyst must first select specific items for analysis and determine whether the items under consideration “share situational, stylistic, and substantive strategies as well as an organizing principle that binds them together” (Foss 138). Such commonalities may include similar “metaphors, images, sentence structure, failure to enact arguments or an infinite variety of other elements” (141-2). In using the technique of generic description, the analyst employs inductive logic to identify a genre from a selected set of artifacts; however, he or she must begin the process with a specified set of features to examine to give focus to the analysis (140). In the following pages, I distill such features from a consideration of the organizing principle of the organic foods industry and a preliminary review of the artifacts to be examined in depth. I also identify a genre of organic food product packaging that is distinct from that of conventional food products.

In the case of organic food package design, the organizing principle is the fact that the product contained within, either in its entirety or at some percentage (in the case
of multi-ingredient food items), was produced without the use of chemicals and in a manner that took into consideration the needs of the environment as laid out by the National Organic Program (USDA). Because organic products are frequently more expensive than conventional products, I believe one identifying feature of the organic food package genre is that companies use the organic status of the product as a selling point and display the USDA Organic seal (see Figure 1) in a prominent location, or if the content is less than 95% organic, call attention to its organic content in some other way.

A second identifying feature is that the packages of organic products tend to be made from recycled materials or be recyclable in some way, and further, that this fact is stated in some way on the package. Annie’s Macaroni and Cheese, which is made with organic pasta, comes in a box that is made from 100% recycled paperboard, as stated on the package, while Kraft Macaroni and Cheese, a conventional brand, comes in a box that does not state that it is made from recycled content. It seems unlikely that a company concerned about providing a food product made without chemicals and in a sustainable way would package that product in materials that lead to increased waste by being nonrecyclable.

Figure 1. USDA Organic seal.

www.usda.gov

I identify a greater number of images, particularly pastoral ones, used on organic product packages as the third feature of the genre because images in advertising are highly communicative and can be used to great rhetorical effect (Scott 252). Logically-
related indexical imagery, such as cows on milk jugs and fruit trees on juice bottles, emphasizes the organic and natural origins of the items, and I propose the companies are likely to utilize such imagery to a great extent. Advertisers will use other pastoral and natural imagery as well, however, in order to emphasize a connection to the earth and environment.

Fourth, the packages contain short, impactful statements touting the organic status and other positive attributes of the product on the front of the package, which is the side the customer sees first on a store shelf. There also tends to be a longer, narrative statement on the origin of the product or the history of the farm or company that produced it elsewhere on the package (such as on the back or lid) so as to introduce the farm or company to the public and describe its mission and motives, and this is the fifth feature. Small organic companies do not have the brand recognition that many conventional food companies do, and their products are priced higher, so they will want the chance to say more to the customer than just “Organic” and “rBST-free!” on the front.

Finally, because organic products are associated with “green,” or environmentally-conscious, movements and living, a sixth identifying feature is that organic food packages will utilize the colors green, blue, and brown, because these are associated with nature (Dickinson & Maugh; Moriarty & Rohe; Garber & Hyatt), to a greater extent than conventional product packages do.

Methods

To conduct my analysis, I selected 10 different brands of dairy products and 10 brands of produce products, with one item from each brand, for a total of 20 organic products. Each product contained at least one organic ingredient as identified by the
ingredient list on the package. My emphasis was on selecting different brands of organic products, in order to identify a genre utilized by organic producers in general. By focusing on selecting 20 unique brands rather than 20 unique products, I was able to analyze the strategies of the greatest number of producers to determine whether they all employed the organic packaging genre or whether my preliminary observations were simply an artifact of one brand’s advertising strategy. Because I could locate only ten unique brands of dairy products in the local area, the analysis that follows can be considered highly representative of the package advertising methods of at least the regional, if not the national, dairy industry. The selection of ten organic produce brands is also representative of the organic produce industry, as I was able to obtain samples from all the major brands that sell organic produce products. As a control to determine whether a given element was indicative of a universal advertising strategy for the particular category or type of product rather than a trend of the organic industry, I selected six conventional products that were the best-selling items in their category and type and analyzed them to see if they presented the same elements I expected to be present on the majority of the organic products’ packages.

I removed the contents of the packages as necessary so as to observe all surfaces of each of the various products’ packages. The features I looked for are as follows: 1) type of organic labeling; 2) recycled or recyclable packaging materials; 3) nature-connoting colors (blue, green, brown); 4) images; 5) narrative statements; and 6) positive impact phrases on the front of the package. I placed my observations of the organic

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8 The focus on brands is the reason I examined four packages of yogurt. As addressed in Chapter 1, note 2, organic dairy makes up only 14.6% of the organic foods industry, and between the three stores from which I obtained products (Dorothy Lane Market in Oakwood, OH, Kroger on Stroop Road in Kettering, OH, and Trader Joe’s on Stroop Road in Kettering, OH), yogurt offered the largest selection of brands. For some of the products, like the whipped topping, only one brand made an organic product in that category.
products in Table 1 to facilitate a review of the potential identifying characteristics of the genre as I continue with my discussion. The control data are presented in Table 2.

Following the tables is an analysis of my observations.

Table 1. Organic Food Package Design Elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Products</th>
<th>Organic status notation</th>
<th>Nature-connoting colors</th>
<th>Images</th>
<th>Recycled / recyclable packaging</th>
<th>Narr.(^a) state., # of words</th>
<th>PIP(^b)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uncle Matt’s Organic Grapefruit Juice</td>
<td>USDA organic seal (^c)</td>
<td>Small blue &amp; green labels; green writing, grass, &amp; leaves</td>
<td>Grapefruit tree, sun, US map, fruit crate, Matt’s dad</td>
<td>Recyclable plastic bottle</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexia Organic Green Peas [frozen]</td>
<td>USDA organic seal</td>
<td>Green peas, writing, banners in different sizes</td>
<td>bowl of peas, other Alexia products</td>
<td>Non-recyclable plastic bag</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muir Glen Organic Diced Tomatoes</td>
<td>USDA organic seal</td>
<td>Green leaves, banners, borders, &amp; writing</td>
<td>Tomatoes &amp; plants, salt shaker, hands</td>
<td>Recyclable aluminum can</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Cruz Organic Apple Sauce</td>
<td>USDA organic seal</td>
<td>Green writing, 1 green leaf</td>
<td>2 large whole apples</td>
<td>Recyclable glass jar</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ella’s Kitchen Strawberries &amp; Apples [puree]</td>
<td>USDA organic seal</td>
<td>2 green apples, small green banner</td>
<td>2 apples, 4 strawberries, 1 lemon</td>
<td>Non-recyclable pouch/cap</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earthbound Farm Organic Baby Lettuces</td>
<td>USDA organic seal</td>
<td>Large green writing on front and for narrative</td>
<td>Rising sun, tiny image of bottle</td>
<td>Recyclable plastic, made from recycled bottles</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cascadian Farm Organic Blackberries [frozen]</td>
<td>USDA organic seal</td>
<td>Medium-sized green banner; green leaves, crops, trees</td>
<td>2 farms, fresh blackberries &amp; pie; leaf</td>
<td>Non-recyclable plastic bag</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodstock Organic Kosher Dill Pickles</td>
<td>USDA organic seal</td>
<td>Green lid, writing, &amp; pickle; blue writing; tan background</td>
<td>Pickle on fork</td>
<td>Recyclable glass jar</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naturipe Organic Blueberries</td>
<td>USDA organic seal</td>
<td>Blue label &amp; writing, green background</td>
<td>Blueberries and leaves</td>
<td>Recyclable plastic container</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Name</td>
<td>USDA Organic Seal</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Packaging</td>
<td>Recyclability</td>
<td>Word Count</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerber Organic Banana Mango [puree]</td>
<td>USDA organic seal</td>
<td>Green background, lettering, &amp; lid</td>
<td>Bananas and mangos, babies, bird, &amp; nest</td>
<td>Non-recyclable pouch/cap</td>
<td>12 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organic Valley Organic Cream Cheese</td>
<td>USDA organic seal</td>
<td>Small patches of green grass/blue sky</td>
<td>3 small farms, girl &amp; cow in field</td>
<td>Recyclable paper box, non-recyclable foil wrap</td>
<td>52 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alden’s Blackberry Ice Cream</td>
<td>USDA organic seal</td>
<td>None other than in USDA seal</td>
<td>Man with farm, small ice cream cone</td>
<td>Recyclable paperboard</td>
<td>90 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truwhip the Natural [frozen whipped topping]</td>
<td>USDA organic seal</td>
<td>Almost none: 1 small/thin green cherry stem</td>
<td>3 mounds of whipped cream, 2 raspberries, 1 cherry</td>
<td>Recyclable plastic tub</td>
<td>N/A 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizon Organic 2% Reduced Fat Milk</td>
<td>USDA organic seal</td>
<td>Blue banner, label, cap, &amp; writing; blue &amp; green globe</td>
<td>Cow &amp; globe on front &amp; cap</td>
<td>Recyclable plastic jug</td>
<td>N/A 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Valley Organics Blueberry Yogurt</td>
<td>USDA organic seal</td>
<td>Green leaves, banners, &amp; writing; blueberries &amp; blue writing</td>
<td>Blueberries w/ leaves, cows on a hill</td>
<td>Recyclable plastic container</td>
<td>43 9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siggis Icelandic Style Vanilla Yogurt</td>
<td>USDA organic seal</td>
<td>Small green leaves</td>
<td>Vanilla flower and leaves</td>
<td>Recyclable plastic container</td>
<td>331 13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stonyfield Organic Raspberry Yogurt</td>
<td>USDA organic seal</td>
<td>Green trees, borders, grass; brown cows; blue writing, banners, sky</td>
<td>Cows in fields, raspberries, small sun and globe</td>
<td>Recyclable plastic container</td>
<td>45 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wallaby Organic Maple Australian Low Fat Yogurt</td>
<td>USDA organic seal</td>
<td>Brown leaves, background blocks, &amp; writing</td>
<td>Maple leaves and outline of wallaby</td>
<td>Recyclable plastic container</td>
<td>78 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tradespoint Creamery Cottage Cheese</td>
<td>USDA organic seal</td>
<td>Green blocks, brown wheat &amp; cow</td>
<td>Cow in wheat field</td>
<td>Recyclable glass jar</td>
<td>N/A 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trader Joe’s Organic Shredded Mozzarella Cheese</td>
<td>USDA organic seal</td>
<td>Teal borders &amp; backgrounds, small patch of green grass &amp; blue sky</td>
<td>Cow in field at sunset; cow-print blocks; hand w/ cheese in near farm</td>
<td>Non-recyclable plastic bag</td>
<td>N/A 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Narrative statement in number of words.*
Positive impact phrases. Only phrases located on the front of the package, the side the customer first sees in the store, were recorded here.

All products that bore the USDA Organic seal also stated the name of the certifying agency somewhere on the package.

Table 2. Conventional Food Package Design Elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Products</th>
<th>Nature-connoting colors</th>
<th>Images</th>
<th>Recycled / recyclable packaging</th>
<th>Narrative statement</th>
<th>Positive impact phrases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BeechNut Fruities Apple, Peach, Strawberry Puree</td>
<td>Some blue lettering, 1 blue banner, green apples</td>
<td>Lightning McQueen, apples, peaches, strawberries</td>
<td>Non-recyclable pouch/cap</td>
<td>No narrative</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birdseye Steamfresh Sweet Peas [frozen]</td>
<td>Blue background, some blue lettering, green peas</td>
<td>Microwave, peas, steamer bag, other products</td>
<td>Non-recyclable plastic bag</td>
<td>No narrative</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simply Grapefruit [juice]</td>
<td>Green lid, small green sticker on lid, 1 green leaf</td>
<td>Whole large grapefruit, grapefruit slice</td>
<td>Recyclable plastic bottle</td>
<td>No narrative</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kroger 2% Reduced Fat Milk</td>
<td>Small blue label &amp; cap</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Recyclable plastic jug</td>
<td>27 words</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia Original Cream Cheese</td>
<td>Blue lettering, small blue banner</td>
<td>Small award, slice of cheesecake</td>
<td>Recyclable paper box, non-recyc. foil wrap</td>
<td>No narrative</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoplait Thick &amp; Creamy Low Fat Vanilla Yogurt</td>
<td>Small green leaf, small brown vanilla bean</td>
<td>Vanilla flower and bean; other flower</td>
<td>Recyclable plastic container</td>
<td>No narrative</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

A number of findings are apparent from the observations recorded in Tables 1 and 2 and demonstrate the existence of a distinctive organic food packaging genre. The prominent display of the USDA Organic seal and use of the word *organic* are a distinguishing feature of organic product packages; they mark the product as a unique item. Eighteen out of 20 products with organic ingredients displayed the seal. The
remaining two companies—TruWhip and Siggi’s—did not meet the threshold of 95% organic content to be able to display the seal but labeled the ingredients that were organic as such in their ingredient lists. (TruWhip also stated on the front of its container that it was “70% organic.”) Though the jug of Kroger milk had the following statement on its label: “Our farmers pledge not to treat their cows with rBST,” Kroger’s milk suppliers do not meet the rigorous standards of organic certification. Therefore, Kroger can only display that brief statement on its label, not the much more visible green, black, and white USDA Organic seal presented in Figure 1.

The seal is the most prominent feature of the organic food packaging genre. The next most prominent feature is the narrative. Fifteen out of 20 products (75%) contained a narrative, ranging from 12 to 331 words, with an average of 82 words per narrative, while only one conventional product presented a narrative. The narratives contained statements emphasizing the role of the farmers in providing the contents of the packages and discussed the company’s origins and production practices. The narrative on the Organic Valley Organic Cream Cheese package mentions “family farms” twice, and the Naturipe Organic Blueberries carton claims the berries are “hand selected by our farmers.” These phrases connote positive, comforting ideas to the customer and suggest the idea that the food they are about to eat was created in small batches and treated with care, which sounds much better to the customer than food that is mass-produced in a big factory or harvested by machine. A reference to an earlier time was also a frequent feature of the various narratives. Muir Glen Organic Diced Tomatoes begins its narrative with the heading “Tomatoes your grandmother would love” and references the growing practices of the company founders’ grandparents. The narrative on the Uncle Matt’s Organic
Grapefruit Juice bottle notes the founder’s father’s practice of drinking a glass of fresh-squeezed grapefruit juice every morning. These statements engender a sense of nostalgia and longing, as many people believe things were better in an earlier time and have fond memories of the way mom, dad, grandma, or grandpa made things. The companies hope such feelings will translate into a decision to purchase their products.

In terms of colors and imagery, the organic products did in fact display the colors blue, green, and brown to a great extent and include a large number of pictures. Only one product, Alden’s Blackberry Ice Cream, did not contain any of the colors (aside from the green in the USDA Organic seal). The Ella’s Kitchen package was predominantly red because it contained strawberry applesauce (and the company traditionally matches the color of the package to the flavor of the item within [www.ellaskitchen.com]), but it also included some green apples. The blue, green, and brown in the banners, background, and writing on the packages suggest nature and natural processes and products, rather than artificial or manufactured products. Since organic companies try to distinguish themselves from their conventional counterparts based on their greater concern for the environment, the inclusion of such colors is to be expected.

The organic and conventional cream cheeses were both packaged in predominantly gray paperboard boxes; however, the Organic Valley package presented on its front and sides three small images of farms and an image of a girl walking through a field with a cow. According to a study by Sandra Moriarty and Lisa Rohe, images of people and animals together are an element that is particularly attractive to vegetarians and, by logical extension, people in general who are concerned about the environment and the way animals are treated. The drawing of the cow is an indexical image, as cow’s
milk is the main ingredient in cream cheese and other dairy products, and the indexical image helps show the origin of the milk, a cow in a pasture as opposed to one confined on a muddy or concrete feedlot. Six of the ten dairy product brands presented images of cows on their packaging, while none of the conventional dairy products did. The Philadelphia cream cheese package contained a very small image of an award that the company had won on the front, which is an attempt at establishing ethos, and a slightly larger image of a piece of cheesecake on the back (something you can make with cream cheese), but neither image has anything to do with how the product is produced or where it came from.

The majority of the organic products (75%) were in fact packaged in recyclable containers such as glass jars, aluminum cans, and paperboard boxes; however, the conventional products were as well, so this is not an identifying characteristic unique to the organic foods packaging genre. Further, and surprisingly, only one of the products—Earthbound Farm Organic Baby Lettuces—noted that its packaging was made from recycled materials. One company, Santa Cruz Organic, did indicate its use of green energy at the plant where the apple sauce is produced though. In the case of the impact statements, while the average number displayed on the front of the packages across the total amount of organic products was 3.15, and the number displayed by the conventional products was 2.33, the sample size was not large enough in this case to claim the difference is significant.

It is clear from the data in Tables 1 and 2 that there are in fact distinct differences between organic and conventional food packaging. Large conventional companies typically rely on an established logo design and certain colors on their product packages
to generate sales—consider Coca Cola’s simple red and white cans and labels (Garber and Hyatt 321). This finding was reinforced by the data in Table 2. Smaller organic companies, however, rely on other strategies, such as use of the official USDA Organic seal, colors that connote nature, indexical images of cows and plants with ripe produce, and narrative statements about how they are doing business in a better, more sustainable way. In the following chapter, I provide a rhetorical analysis of the Uncle Matt’s Organic Grapefruit Juice and Stonyfield Organic Raspberry Yogurt containers to show how the features referenced above work together to persuade the customer.
CHAPTER 3

A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF ORGANIC FOOD PACKAGING

Regular Hershey’s milk chocolate bars, as opposed to their bars with nuts or their cookies-and-cream bars, come in a plain, dark brown wrapper with silver lettering. There are no pictures and no special phrases other than “Since 1894” in tiny letters. Why is this? All of the products presented in Table 1 make use of bold or pastel colors on their packaging, and 25 of 26 (Kroger milk being the exception) use at least one picture. All of the conventional products and 18 of the 20 organic products also use at least one impact phrase on the front of the package. Phrases like “70% Organic,” “Cultured! Great Taste & Easy to Spread,” and “No Preservatives” are selling points and highlight the special features of the products.9 Someone who had never heard of Hershey’s and walked into a store looking for chocolate would learn almost nothing about the product from its package. Therein lies the issue, however; it would be difficult to find someone in the United States who has never heard of Hershey’s. Hershey’s has been selling chocolate worldwide since 1894 and to market its milk chocolate bars relies almost solely on brand recognition. As Saussure would put it, the brown and silver wrapper signifies a brand people know and trust and buy for those reasons. The phrase “Since 1894” is an ethical

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appeal that reminds customers that Hershey’s has been in business for over one hundred years and knows exactly what it is doing.

Fewer people, however, have heard of Stonyfield Organic Raspberry Yogurt or the company’s other dairy products, even though Stonyfield is one of the most popular and widely distributed organic brands in the US (www.stonyfield.com). Far fewer have heard of Uncle Matt’s Organic juices, such as their grapefruit juice, because Uncle Matt’s is a small company that has only been in business since 1999 (www.unclematts.com). Such companies cannot simply rely on a plain container with their brand name on the front; they need to use their containers to market their products in a different way than a company like Hershey’s does. Various visual and verbal rhetorical strategies enable them to do this. Elements such as images and narrative statements allow the company to make ethical, logical, and pathetic appeals that suggest or connote positive information about the company and its product and persuade the customer to purchase it. In this chapter, I address visual rhetorical techniques first and verbal techniques second as marketing tools that organic companies can avail themselves of. In the sections that follow, I provide a rhetorical analysis of two organic products that effectively represent the rhetorical strategies of the organic companies that sell them, examining the effects and results the rhetoric produces.

Visual Rhetoric

Why do Uncle Matt’s and Stonyfield include pictures on their product packages? Aristotle provides one answer in his *Metaphysics*:

All men by nature desire to know. An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses; for even apart from their usefulness they are loved for
themselves; and above all others the sense of sight. For not only with a view to action, but even when we are not going to do anything, we prefer sight to almost everything else. The reason is that this, most of all the senses, makes us know and brings to light many differences between things. (bk. I, ch. 1, 1552)

Because people enjoy looking at things and through observation come to know more about the world, advertisers of organic products provide a visual feast for customers in the hope of inducing pleasurable feelings and putting them in a more receptive state of mind to take in specific ideas communicated by the companies.

What types of images invoke such pleasurable feelings? According to 18th century rhetorician Hugh Blair, “We are pleased, through our natural sense of beauty. . . . Wherever, in works of taste, any resemblance to nature is aimed at; wherever there is any reference of parts to a whole . . . there the understanding must always have a great part to act” (957, Lecture II, italics mine). While it is debatable whether a container of Stonyfield Organic Yogurt or a jug of Uncle Matt’s Organic Grapefruit Juice can be considered “works of taste” in Blair’s terms, Stonyfield and Uncle Matt’s do aim to please the reader through references to nature. By attempting to put the reader/customer in a pleasant frame of mind, the companies are making a pathetic appeal that they hope will sway the individual to purchase their products. In the next section, I discuss Stonyfield’s use of visual rhetorical strategies, and following that, I present the case of Uncle Matt’s.
Stonyfield Organic Raspberry Yogurt

Stonyfield Organic Raspberry Yogurt comes in a six-ounce, opaque container that features a blue sky arching across the top of the cup, with a line of hills and trees immediately below, and a pasture with grazing brown cows (see Fig. 2). At the bottom edge of the pasture, there are approximately 16 whole and partial raspberries sitting atop a dark blue and light green border. Superimposed on the center of the sky is the Stonyfield logo with a picture of a light brown Jersey cow in the center. The USDA Organic seal appears on the left side of the cup’s front, superimposed on the grass above the raspberries. On the cup’s lid, along with a tiny rendering of the company logo, there is a large image of a Holstein cow with a message superimposed on a white patch on its flank. On the rear of the cup is a globe approximately ¼ of an inch in diameter and a rising sun and cow’s head that are both approximately ½ of an inch in diameter. On the
rear of the cup, there is a panel of nutritional information, an ingredient list that is labeled with the wording “our family recipe” (instead of the standard “ingredients”), a short narrative about the company, and the address and website of the company.

The grazing cows on the front and lid and the three other cows on the container are, drawing from Peirce’s semiotic theory, indexical images that are logically related to what is inside the yogurt cup. Though there is not an actual cow inside the cup, a cow is necessary to create what is inside—yogurt made from real cow’s milk. The presence of images of cows, particularly cows grazing in an open pasture, suggests to the customer that Stonyfield yogurt is a natural product, that it is made from fresh, unprocessed milk. Charles Hill discusses the finding that images to a greater extent than verbal statements foster presence, a concept “that refers to the extent to which an object or concept is foremost in the consciousness of the audience members” (28). Further, Hill reflects that “the rhetor’s goal is not merely to create some presence where before there was none, but rather to endow the elements in the situation that are favorable to the rhetor’s case with as much presence as possible” (28-9). The Stonyfield Organic logo visually gives presence to the idea of chemical-free, sustainable practices, and the USDA Organic seal makes the idea more real and official to the customer. The seal has the potential to make all three types of rhetorical appeals. For customers who are less informed about what organic means, the seal makes an emotional appeal: they see the word organic and think “this is good for me,” based on the positive coverage organic products are getting in the media and the societal emphasis to “go organic.” For customers who are more informed about the terminology, the seal also makes logical and ethical appeals. Through its presence, they know that the content is organic and better for them because it does not contain
chemicals. At the same time, Stonyfield presents itself as a company is environmentally responsible, thus making its products worthy of purchase on both counts.

The whole, fresh-looking raspberries and the nine cows on the container, with six grazing in open fields, further increase the presence of the concept that Stonyfield yogurt, as compared to other yogurts, is made from fresh, natural, organic ingredients. These images and ideas are a calming emotional appeal and should leave the customer in a positive frame of mind. While conventional yogurts from popular brands with which consumers grew up may have a pleasant, familiar taste, a customer in the store considering whether to purchase organic products will receive stronger cues of freshness, naturalness, and organic content from the Stonyfield container than they would from the Yoplait container described in Table 2.

Uncle Matt’s Organic Grapefruit Juice

Uncle Matt’s Organic Grapefruit Juice comes in a 59-ounce, clear plastic bottle with a dark pink lid and labels on the front and back; there are no labels on the sides (see Fig. 2). The front label has a white background with part of a grapefruit tree at the top and bottom of the label. There is a patch of grass towards the bottom of the label, with a wooden crate labeled “Family Owned” filled with grapefruit in the center. There is a small outline of the United States filled in to resemble the American flag with the words “All USA Fruit” surrounding it. The USDA Organic seal is superimposed on the grass to the right of the crate. There is a sun with a smiling face attached to a green banner that says “organic” in the center of the label, with “Uncle Matt’s” in purple lettering above. At the bottom of the front label, there are purple and dark pink banners with white lettering. Above the main front label, there is a small blue label with a phrase in white
and yellow writing. The label on the back of the bottle contains a portion of a grapefruit tree, nutritional information, a photo of Uncle Matt’s father and accompanying narrative, four small seals indicating various things about the contents or packaging, and a pink banner with a green logo and white writing.

Though the sole ingredient in Uncle Matt’s Organic Grapefruit Juice is organic grapefruit juice, the images of the grapefruits on the front and back labels can still be considered indexical, because there are not actual whole grapefruits—consisting of peals, pith, stems, seeds, and leaves—inside, only the juice. Unlike the majority of the food products described in Table 1, this juice is packaged in a clear bottle, so technically, pictures are not necessary to show what is inside the package; the customer can see for him or herself. Like Stonyfield, however, Uncle Matt’s included the indexical images to show the origin of the juice, which is the plump, fresh grapefruits grown on trees, not water and juice from concentrate or artificial flavoring, like some companies sell. The USDA Organic seal, clear bottle, and indexical imagery together signify that there is nothing in the bottle but pure grapefruit juice untainted by chemicals. The clear bottle connotes honesty on the part of the company; Uncle Matt’s has nothing to hide and lets its product speak for itself. The US map decorated in the pattern of the American flag is a symbolic image designed to evoke feelings of patriotism. The words “All USA Fruit” explain why the map is there, and the customer will feel good knowing that he or she has supported the American economy by buying this product. Particularly in the wake of the terrorist attacks of 2001 and the current depressed state of the economy, Americans have demonstrated an increasing desire to “buy American,” and by including the US map,
Uncle Matt’s is attempting to tap into that market in addition to the growing organic market.

The image on the back of the bottle of Uncle Matt’s father, a smiling, white-haired gentleman wearing glasses, makes a distinct ethical appeal for the company. First, it puts a human face on the company; Uncle Matt’s is not just a faceless corporate entity, there are “real” people who work there. Second, the glasses and white hair connote wisdom. The image suggests to the customer that Uncle Matt is someone who knows what he is doing and that his educated and experienced father helped raise him properly and taught him about things that are good for him. Overall, after contemplating the photo and reading the narrative, the combined elements engender the sense of nostalgia and longing discussed above that the company hopes will translate into a decision to purchase.

Both Stonyfield and Uncle Matt’s include a large proportion of the colors blue and green in their packages. These colors have been demonstrated to be generally preferred by people over other colors, and blue in particular is considered soothing (Garber and Hyatt 317-9). Grocery shopping can be a stressful experience for people, particularly if they are hungry or tired when they are doing it, if they are shopping after work or during some other crowded time of day, or if they are accompanied by their children who may be grabbing at or asking for certain products in an insistent manner. A package that displays swaths of blue and green and peaceful, pastoral imagery is likely to attract attention and be preferred over something that has bright, “loud” packaging. Research by Moriarty and Rohe into cultural palettes, or collections of specific imagery and colors, preferred by certain demographic groups indicated that mothers of young
children and vegetarians—people likely to be buying products such as yogurt and grapefruit juice—prefer images of animals, plants, the sun, and landscapes and colors such as varying shades of blue, green, and purple (125-6). Such colors and imagery appeal to such people based on the things that are important in their lives, and products that display these elements on their packages are more likely to be strongly considered and purchased than products that do not.

The colors and images on the two packages primarily make an emotional appeal, working on the customer’s enjoyment of natural scenery and attractive, calming coloring. However, these pleasant feelings can be short-lived and need to be supplemented by more substantive logical appeals in the form of factual statements (Hill 36; McQuarrie & Mick 206). Such statements will be analyzed in the following section.

Verbal Rhetoric

Stonyfield Organic Raspberry Yogurt

The lid of the Stonyfield yogurt container features a picture of a cow with a textual message on its flank that reads as follows: “Toxic Persistent Pesticides aren’t in my diet. Make sure they’re not in yours either.” Those 14 words together make quite a number of rhetorical moves. First, the company is making an emotional appeal by attempting to scare the customer with the word toxic. Slightly more subtle than the word deadly, which would be seen as a blatant scare tactic and turn the customer off, the use of a word meaning poisonous brings home an awareness of what an organic product is—one without potentially harmful chemicals. Second, the capital Ps on “Persistent Pesticides” create another alliterative scare tactic. The use of a capital letter on a word that does not begin a sentence gives it the connotation of a name, an identity, making the chemicals
more real and present to the customer. The use of the repeated first letter draws attention
to the phrase and aids in memory retention. Alliteration is a tactic in common use in the
food industry, particularly in the category of children’s food items and cereals, such as
Count Chocula, Cookie Crisp, and Golden Grahams, because it helps people remember
product names and information at the grocery store. A fourth rhetorical strategy is the use
of personification by superimposing the words on an image of a cow and phrasing the
statement as if the cow herself is offering the caution statement. It is an empathetic
emotional appeal and forces the reader to consider things from an animal’s point of view.
It should foster a minor sense of revulsion towards conventional products by suggesting
that if even a cow would not ingest those chemicals, a human certainly should not.

The narrative on the back of the yogurt cup reiterates the fact that all participants
in the company—cows, farmers, and owners—eschew the use of chemicals. The
narrative states that “Organic Valley family farmers Guy and Beth Choiniere, whose milk
goes into our yogurt, tell us the whole family has been healthier since they converted
their farm to organic. Learn more at Stonyfield.com” It is signed by Gary, the company’s
founder. Immediately below that, next to a small image of a globe, is the phrase “We give
10% of our profits to the planet. Our Organic Promise: Made without the use of
antibiotics, synthetic growth hormones, and persistent pesticides.” Stonyfield is a fairly
large company and has operations in the US, Canada, and Europe. By mentioning some
of the suppliers of the main ingredient in its product by name, Stonyfield is making the
individual farmers more present to the customer. Reading the statement on the yogurt cup
is as close to going out to the farm for themselves as most Stonyfield yogurt consumers
will get, but it does allow consumers to say they know where their food comes from, a
reassuring feeling. Logically speaking it indicates nothing; it is simply an emotionally persuasive tactic designed to make the customer feel good about the company. The statement about giving 10% of their profits to the planet is also an emotional appeal that evokes a feeling of altruism and an ethical appeal because it communicates something about the company. The statement suggests to the customer that Stonyfield is a caring company that is doing something to help the environment, an idea of which the customer will likely approve and want to support.

Still needing to convert the potential customer’s good feelings into a decision to purchase, the company makes a final logical appeal by listing the specific chemical substances that it does not use to produce its product. Because the average customer does not know exactly what the word *organic* means or indicates when it is present on a food package (as discussed in Chapter 1), Stonyfield spells it out carefully on the back of the container. To the potential customer who is not really sure what organic means but thinks it is a good idea, Stonyfield provides the technical information that converts the positive feelings into a lasting belief that its yogurt is a good product to buy. This can also be viewed as an ethical statement in that it connotes honesty on the part of the company; the customer can trust the company because it will tell him or her what is in and not in its products.

**Uncle Matt’s Organic Grapefruit Juice**

Reading from the top of the bottle down, the first verbal rhetorical move Uncle Matt’s makes on this package is the use of a sticker to display the phrase “Included in 99 Diet Foods Dr. Oz. wants in your shopping cart!” near the top of the bottle. This brief phrase employs all three Aristotelian rhetorical appeals. It is an ethical statement because
a respected physician recommends it; the product has reached his level of awareness and met with his approval. That the product is associated with such a notable person may give the juice and the company more cachet in the eyes of the customer. The statement is also an emotional appeal because it references a currently popular figure and his latest trendy diet recommendations, and many people like to feel they are keeping up with current trends. Having the latest goods and keeping up with the latest eating trends gives a number of people a sense of personal satisfaction. Finally, the statement is a logical appeal, because it identifies the grapefruit juice as a health-food item, something the consumer may not have been certain about. The inclusion of the statement is not the strongest of moves, however, because it does associate the juice with a trend, and when the trend is over, or if Dr. Oz falls out of favor with the public eye, the sticker may turn the potential customer off or away from the product.

More successful and designed to curry lasting favor with the customer is the narrative on the rear of the package that accompanies the picture of Uncle Matt’s father. The narrative begins with the alliterative phrase “Grapefruit greatness!” As discussed above, the repeated initial letter draws the reader’s attention to the phrase; the assonance of the long-\textit{a} sound in each word performs a similar role and doubles the effect. The narrative itself begins with a recounting of the daily morning habit of Uncle Matt’s father of drinking a glass of grapefruit juice. This statement produces the dual effects of causing the customer to reminisce about his or her own parents (or other beloved relative) and putting a human face on the company. Though the company already seemingly has a human face based on its name, “Uncle Matt” could be similar to “Aunt Jemima” or “Uncle Ben” and simply be an attempt to link a large company to a figurehead. Seeing a
photo and hearing a description of a real relative of the actual founder of the company increases the customer’s perception of the company as small and family-run, both positive conceptions.

The next few sentences of the narrative statement provide a logical appeal in the form of facts about the nutritional content of grapefruit juice. Capitalizing on the “what’s in it for me?” mentality of the average person, Uncle Matt’s provides that exact information: “vitamin A, calcium, folic acid, and potassium.” The customer may not know exactly what those things do for him or her, but since they are all vitamins and minerals, which have the connotation of being “good for you,” the listing of such information aids in building the potential customer’s confidence in the product. The penultimate sentence builds that confidence further by stating “We pick our USDA certified organic grapefruit and [sic] the height of flavor and never use harmful pesticides or synthetic fertilizers” (emphasis original). The use of “we” suggests that Uncle Matt views himself as part of the team of workers and cares about the running of the company and the product he puts his name to, something that cannot necessarily be said about the CEOs of a number of larger corporate entities. That feature will appeal to people fed up with the current trend of corporate misbehavior that seems to be wrecking the economy. The statement in bold is redundant, as organic means those things are not used, but the average customer will see it as reassuring. The final sentence refers back to Uncle Matt’s dad and reminds people in non-scientific language of how good grapefruit juice is for them. The choice to end an argument with an emotional appeal is a successful one. As Blair writes, “most writers assign the pathetic to the peroration or conclusion, as its natural place; and, no doubt, all other things being equal, this is the impression that
one would choose to make last, leaving the minds of the hearers warmed with the subject, after argument and reasoning had produced their full effect . . .” (Lect. XXXII, 976) The narrative began with a pathetic appeal, moved to a logical, and ended with a pathetic, which, in conjunction with the effective use of imagery and color, should translate into a decision to purchase, provided the customer is not turned off by the multiple grammatical errors in the Uncle Matt’s labels.\(^\text{10}\)

Images and words are used together to successfully make a range of rhetorical appeals. Imagery on food packages exerts a calming influence on a customer in a crowded grocery store and provides a pleasant scene to view. As Aristotle discussed in *Metaphysics*, people enjoy simply looking at things, hence the widespread enjoyment of activities like “people watching” and “window shopping.” Blair believed that people prefer natural scenes to all others, hence the reason the companies present pictures on their packages of the farms that supply their ingredients and not factories, employees, or delivery trucks, for example. The verbal statements provide additional ethical and logical appeals by supplying information about the company and its practices and about the contents of the package or absence of certain additives. Companies that do not have a long history of successful operation like Hershey need to use such strategies to communicate that they are reliable and trustworthy and that their products are worthy of purchase. In the next chapter, I will explore how these strategies may have the additional

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\(^{10}\) Research by Richard E. Petty and John T. Cacioppo indicates that the quantity of arguments may have a greater effect on persuasion than the quality when a person is not highly involved with or particularly attentive to what he or she is reading (69). A person glancing at the Uncle Matt’s narrative to see what it says with no particular desire to become more deeply educated may notice it makes approximately six arguments and be satisfied with the quantity alone. Such a reader may not notice or care that the word *and* should have been *at* in the sentence quoted above, that the second half of the first sentence was not logically related to the first half, or that the writer started a sentence with *and*, an impropriety in formal grammar. According to Petty and Cacioppo, a reader who is concerned about argument quality may be negatively affected by such inconsistencies (69).
inadvertent effects of causing health halos and will conclude with a discussion of the limitations of this research and ideas for future work.
When using various rhetorical strategies, a rhetor generally has a specific persuasive goal in mind. In the case of organic food producers, it can be reasonably assumed that the goal of their package design is to evoke a favorable impression of the company and product and persuade the customer to purchase the product. There can be additional unintended effects that result as well, however. By including the term organic somewhere on its package, a company is hoping to persuade customers that the product is better for them because it is made without chemicals. It is not attempting to say that the product is also lower in fat, salt, and calories than conventional products, yet customers frequently infer such things anyway. Schuldt and Schwarz, in their study on consumer perceptions about organic labeling, write “Labeling a food as ‘organic’ entails a claim about its production but is silent on its calorie content. Nevertheless, people infer that organic cookies are lower in calories and can be eaten more often than conventional cookies . . . These inferences are observed even when the nutrition label conveys identical calorie content . . .” (144). Even though the research subjects read the nutritional content labels, which showed the exact same calorie content and recommended serving size for both organic and conventional cookies, they still judged the organic cookies to be lower in calories with a higher allowed serving size.
Why does the label “Organic” foster such beliefs? One possible explanation is the combination of the imagery and text on the packages of many organic food products. In trying to promote their own specific product with pastoral imagery; popular, calming colors; stories about parents and grandparents; and catch-phrases or impact statements that say that Stonyfield organic yogurt or Uncle Matt’s organic grapefruit juice is good, producers are also promoting the concept of organic in general. On the Stonyfield yogurt container, the word organic is present 15 times, while Stonyfield is only present six times. The Uncle Matt’s juice bottle displays organic 10 times and Uncle Matt’s only three times. By being repeatedly exposed to the techniques of the organic food packaging genre, customers are coming to learn not only that a specific company’s products are better, but that organic food in general is better too. Even if they are not intimately familiar with the growth and production guidelines of the National Organic Program and the requirement that sustainable agricultural and production methods be employed, most people are aware of the idea that organic means “no chemicals.” Because chemicals are generally seen as “bad,” organic products are “good” because they do not contain them.

The lack of chemicals and “goodness” of organic food is connotated and emphasized over and over again in narratives, impact statements, and pastoral imagery on organic food packages. The combination of the emotional and logical appeals creates a lasting and strong belief in the goodness of organics. It is this general idea of the goodness of organic food products connoted by their packaging that likely leads to such beliefs that the products have other good attributes too, such as being lower in fat and calories. The reasoning or heuristic (Schuldt and Schwarz 147) in the customer’s mind goes something like this: “Things that are good for me are not high in fat, salt, or calories.
Organic is good for me, so it must be lower in fat, salt, and calories.” It is the interplay of emotional response to packaging images and statements and the cognitive processing of factual information presented therein that causes the general belief in the goodness of organic products.

Through this thesis, I examined 20 organic and six conventional food product packages to determine whether there is a unique genre of organic food product packaging. The products surveyed do in fact constitute a genre, and the features of said genre consist of such elements as the inclusion of the USDA Organic seal, nature-connoting colors, indexical and other imagery, and narrative statements on the company and its practices. Such elements are used to visually and verbally persuade customers that the products are a better choice over conventional products.

This research contributes to the body of literature on organic food marketing and genre analysis. One potential limitation of this research, however, is the sample selection and size. It is possible that organic foods in other product categories, such as snack foods, condiments, and alcoholic beverages, do not employ such strategies, though this is unlikely, given that organic products are more expensive, and companies will need additional justification to persuade the customer. It is also possible that other brands of conventional products than those present in Table 2 do in fact employ most of the same strategies as organic companies in designing their food packages. However, they would not legally be allowed to use the USDA Organic seal or identify items as organic if they were not certified as such. Natural By Nature Whipped Cream (not described in Tables 1 or 2) comes in a predominantly light blue canister and lists its first four ingredients as being organic, and according to company sales representative Jay Totman, it would
qualify to display at least the “Made With Organic Ingredients” label on the front, if not the USDA Organic seal. However, because it contains a greenhouse gas as a propellant, it is not an organic product and cannot use either of those marketing strategies. The use of the USDA Organic seal may be enough to constitute the genre on its own. For instance, at a Kroger grocery store in Kettering, Ohio, all foods with the USDA Organic seal are displayed in their own section of the store, indicating that use of the seal is enough to mark the products as different.

Possible future research could include an examination of a larger selection of product types and brands, such as various organic alcoholic beverages and non-food products, such as organic cotton clothing or organic cosmetics, to determine whether the entire organic products industry employs a similar strategy. Such a finding would confirm that the marketing of organic products as a whole is a unique genre in advertising. Additional analysis on the rhetorical strategies of a wider sampling of organic products may illuminate the phenomena of moral licensing as caused by green purchasing and further elucidate the concept of health food halos addressed in this study.
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APPENDIX

ALPHABETICAL LISTING OF PRODUCTS BY STORE OF PURCHASE

Dorothy Lane Market, 2710 Far Hills Avenue, Oakwood, Ohio

Alden’s Blackberry Ice Cream - $6.99
Cascadian Farm Organic Blackberries [frozen] - $5.99
Earthbound Farm Organic Baby Lettuces - $2.99
Green Valley Organics Blueberry Yogurt - $1.89
Hershey’s Milk Chocolate Bar - $1.99
Natural by Nature Whipped Cream - $5.69
Organic Valley Organic Cream Cheese – missing receipt
Organic Valley Milk – did not purchase; observed in store
Siggis Icelandic Style Non-Fat Vanilla Yogurt - $2.99
Stonyfield Organic Raspberry Yogurt - $1.89
Tradespoint Creamery Cottage Cheese - $4.99
TruWhip the Natural [frozen whipped topping] - $1.99
Wallaby Organic Maple Australian Low Fat Yogurt - $1.49

Kroger, 530 East Stroop Road, Kettering, Ohio

Alexia Organic Peas [frozen] - $2.69
Annie’s Macaroni and Cheese - $1.67
BeechNut Fruities Apple, Peach, Strawberry Puree - $.99
Birdseye Steamfresh Sweet Peas [frozen] - $1.69
Ella’s Kitchen Strawberries & Apples [baby food] - $1.79
Gerber Organic Banana Mango [puree] - $1.39
Horizon Organic 2% Reduced Fat Milk - $5.99
Kraft Macaroni and Cheese - $.94
Kroger 2% Reduced Fat Milk - $2.89
Muir Glen Organic Diced Tomatoes - $1.49
Philadelphia Original Cream Cheese - $2.18
Santa Cruz Organic Apple Sauce - $3.99
Simply Grapefruit [juice] - $3.77
Uncle Matt’s Organic Grapefruit Juice - $6.19
Woodstock Organic Kosher Dill Pickles - $5.69
Yoplait Thick & Creamy Low Fat Vanilla Yogurt - $.50

Trader Joe’s, 328 East Stroop Road, Kettering, Ohio

Naturipe Organic Blueberries - $2.49
Trader Joe’s Organic Shredded Mozzarella Cheese - $4.29