PERFUME ADVERTISING IN FEMININE PRESS

IOANA VID

In feminine press, publicity is undoubtedly distinct from journalistic content. Advertisements displayed in this type of magazines, addressed exclusively to women represent a world filled with iconic symbols. The creators urge the readers or the viewers – for the accent is more on visual communication in these advertisements – to see beyond the denotative advertising discourse and think about the connotations these images convey. Advertisements in the magazines addressed to women are something special, being distinctively created for women. There is a variety of colours, forms, symbols, signs, visual artifices in these advertisements.

Image is more imperative than writing, transmitting the significance immediately, without previous analysis, and without distribution. In *Republic*, Plato gives a complex definition of image: 'I name images the shadows first, then the reflexes seen in waters or at the surface of opaque, shining or glittering structures, and all similar representations.'[1] Therefore, we might consider that the image creates the connection between us and the world, allowing not just a mere

[1] Apud Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, *Comunicarea simbolică. Arhitectura discursului publicitar*, Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1991, p.98.

BDD-A12892 © 2008 Editura Mirton; Editura Amphora
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 17:57:56 UTC)

adaptation to reality but even fitting into it and harmonizing with it. Since the beginning, the image has been associated with representation. E. Fulchignoni, analyst of image, distinguishes between two types of images: objective images, that come from sensorial data of the visual organ as a consequence of direct perception of the exterior world, and subjective images, that are 'subjective representations of the world emerged from a process of creative imagination.'[2]

Within the theory of semiotics and semiology, Charles Peirce identifies the image as a sub-category of the icon. Consequently, according to his vision, the image 'decodes a qualitative analogy between significant and referent by processing some formal qualities of the referent: forms, colours, proportions.'[3]

The image is a visual message made of different types of signs, being a form of manifestation and communication. 'We could accept the idea that an image, expressive or communicative, is a message for someone else, even if we ourselves are that someone else.'[4]

The sign has been viewed in many ways since its introduction in ancient Greek. Images, words, gestures, objects, and sounds transmit messages. 'The signs are acts or endeavours of art that refer to something else than themselves; in this way, they are structures which signify (that is, transmit information of a reality).'[5]

The symbol is an attachment, a connection, an association of two ideas or concepts, a game based on an analogy. The

---

[2] *Ibidem*
[3] *Ibidem*, p.99.
[4] Martine Joly, *Introducere în analiza imaginii*, Bucureşti: All, 1998, p.40.
[5] Dumitru Borţun, *Semiotică. Limbaj şi comunicare*, Bucureşti: SNSPA, p.46.

BDD-A12892 © 2008 Editura Mirton; Editura Amphora
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 17:57:56 UTC)

symbols can be classified into: intentional, interpretative and connotative.

Intentional symbols are, generally, the primary ones that describe the object and its quality. Their interpretation cannot generate confusion, so the significant/signified relation is a direct one.

Interpretative symbols convey certain feelings to their addressees. In the case of advertisements using these type of symbols, the colour or the form of the object, but also the symbol associated with it, are emphasized.

Connotative symbols restrict the symbols to their primary and objective sense. By means of a transfer, the product captures the qualities of the symbol associated with it. In other words, the product serves as a pretext for the symbolic creative solution.

As compared with other advertising discourses, perfume advertisements have been developing lately towards minimizing the text for the benefit, almost exclusively, of the image. It is interesting how an olfactory concept is being created, based only on visual concepts. In the case of perfumes, the creation of the advertising image also originates in the artistic design of the vial. The perfume bottle is the first trying to convey an olfactory concept.

Due to its abstract nature, perfume is essentially based on its connotative force. The characters, their clothes and colours make necessary the use of the non-verbal language.

We have chosen six advertisements for perfumes: *Echo Woman* (Davidoff), *Chance* (Chanel), *Be Delicious* (DKNY), *True Star* (Tommy Hilfiger), *Angel* (Thierry Mugler) and *Promesse* (Cacharel).

BDD-A12892 © 2008 Editura Mirton; Editura Amphora
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 17:57:56 UTC)

Perfume *Echo Woman – Listen to Your Heart* (Davidoff)

The image of a diaphanous woman outlined by an all-pink light comes out at a denotative stage. Viewed in terms of a connotative level, the image displays hidden symbols and implications. We may assume from the image of the advertisement that the product is charming, opening the way to pleasure, to happiness. The message conveyed is that the product makes us experience the quasi-universal love, the most powerful emotions and sensations. A clear sexual transgression appears in this image.

Pink is a combination of two basic colours, red and white. Red symbolizes, in this case, passion, eroticism, as white is the substitute for innocence and purity. The selection of this colour combination is not at all involuntary, the woman in the image being innocent, still capable of powerful feelings. That is why the colours of the flowers decorating her dress alternate, a white and a red one. At first, the two colours may seem contrasting; actually they join together beautifully, emphasizing the message of the image, and implicitly of the advertisement: purity and sexuality.

The body posture is one of abandonment, as if the perfume takes possession of the female body, while she is bewitched by its power. In this case, the perfume stands for the man; he is present in the heart of the young woman. It is a love declaration made by Davidoff by means of the perfume.

Intentional symbol: the perfume bottle is in the shape of a heart, while pink immediately sends to the colour of the product.

Interpretative symbol: it is the perfume that helps you in making the right decisions; pink symbolises candour but also fervent passion.

BDD-A12892 © 2008 Editura Mirton; Editura Amphora
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 17:57:56 UTC)

Connotative symbol: it brings the exotic, the wind in her hair points to the sea, to sexuality.

By placing the bottle under the dress, right to the heart, the romantic character of the product is suggested, but at the same time, it has the shape of the breast, implying an erotic image.

The hand is a hint at the social class, at a show-like attention and occasion. By hiding a hand to the back, a romantic and aristocratic look is conferred to the entire imagistic concept. The hand holding the bottle, or, symbolically, the heart, or even the breast, is flagrantly displayed in a very sexual manner.

The slogan of the perfume, *Listen to Your Heart,* has to be discussed too. The message transmitted perfectly agrees with the image, and the idea suggested by the entire package is that the product, the perfume *Echo Woman*, can offer you that delicate yet exotic allure. Even the name of the perfume is suggestive enough, for it urges us to pay attention to the voice of our heart, spreading, like an echo, across our bodies.

Perfume *Chance – The Unexpected Fragrance from Chanel*

The image of a couple is presented at a primary level, the woman obviously being brought out while the man is visible only in the background. The image that captures our attention in the foreground is the perfume bottle, which dominates the entire picture.

Golden is the central colour suggesting gold, something precious, something that you would fancy. The perfume bottle placed in the middle indicates that the authors of the advertisement have wished to emphasize the brand and the packing. To all of us Chanel implies luxury, elegance. The

BDD-A12892 © 2008 Editura Mirton; Editura Amphora
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 17:57:56 UTC)

creators exploited the celebrity of the brand and, consequently, this advertisement reinforces the brand.

Intentional symbol: the bottle is neither remarkable nor extraordinary, the brand being important in this case.

Interpretative symbol: the brand comes with an entire assortment of symbols such as luxury and elegance. The novelty of the advertisement is the suggestion that this perfume would make you an irresistible woman.

Connotative symbol: the entire image indicates the seduction game and the fact that perfume is a major means for women.

Even if the image of the perfume bottle outweighs the advertisement, the representation of a woman covered in pink flowers, is still visible in the front. The woman lies on top of the perfume bottle while a man kissing her neck is visible in the back. The woman is simply covered in pink flowers possibly suggesting the floral smell of the perfume. It is important to mention that the woman is blonde, for she perfectly identifies with the golden colour of the perfume. The crossed legs of the woman might indicate flirting, yet the sensation created by her position is of total abandonment.

The message conveyed is that this perfume would help you seduce and would offer you a touch of elegance and sophistication. The very name of the perfume, *Chance,* is an indication of the fact that this perfume is a chance of seduction by sophistication and good taste.

Perfume *Be Delicious* (DKNY)

The image displays a young woman biting a green apple. The green colour of the advertisement is what strikes most. This colour symbolizes coldness as associated with reptile colour, but life and renewal as well.

BDD-A12892 © 2008 Editura Mirton; Editura Amphora
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 17:57:56 UTC)

The main symbol in this advertisement is the apple. This fruit sends you to the primary sin, its green colour bringing with it the alluring snake as well. The apple tasted by the woman is natural, but a stainless New-age one is also included, in the lower part of the picture, among the natural ones. The upper part of this apple is silvery, reflecting the New York skyscrapers, the other one being green, reflecting the city images. Actually, the city of New York is also called the Big Apple.

The advertisement combines old with new, primary elements with recent ones, is a fusion between yesterday and today.

Intentional symbol: the bottle shape is an apple, a contemporary apple, modern and chic.

Interpretative symbol: perfume is a sin, but all is allowed at the present time.

Connotative symbol: the apple is the fruit of sin; Eve tasted it and was banished from Heaven, yet nowadays it is no longer a mere symbol of fall but of power, the power of a woman to seduce.

The attitude of the woman in the image is of nonchalance, she knows she has bitten of the forbidden fruit but she does not care. She even pushes you into tasting the pleasures offered by this new perfume.

Perfume *True Star – A Private Performance*
(Tommy Hilfiger)

It is an advertisement focused on the image of the featuring star – Beyoncé Knowles. The very name of the perfume suggests this significance, and has to be analyzed beyond the primary sense of the word *star*.

BDD-A12892 © 2008 Editura Mirton; Editura Amphora
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 17:57:56 UTC)

The picture is black and white, suggesting the intention of exhibiting a neutral image, only the brand Tommy Hilfiger is coloured in white/red/blue, the image of the star promoting the product being more important than the real product.

This is the case in which the brand is guaranteed by both the producers and the celebrity. Beyoncé brings her popularity to the brand. In this case, the celebrity and not the brand is the one who sells the product. The impact is reinforced by the fact that she conveys a positive message; a predictability of the positive effects exists in this case.

Intentional symbol: the image of famous Beyoncé who looks directly to the public and establishes, in this way, a visual contact with the potential consumers.

Interpretative symbol: the bottle of perfume comes first into view, but the one who captures the attention is Beyoncé. She adds force to the product itself.

Connotative symbol: you may become a star if you buy this product.

This advertisement concentrates primarily on young women, for Beyoncé is a celebrity of the musical world and young women aspire to become like her. It is a symbol of the successful woman, with a fabulous body and a desirable life. The entire message is focused on the question: Who would not want to be Beyoncé? You have to buy the perfume for bringing Beyoncé into your home; it will bring your idol closer to you.

Perfume *Angel – A Perfume Captured in a Star*
(Thierry Mugler)

The product seems to reach the ideal in this advertisement, being the answer to a search for the absolute. A quasi-divine, a supernatural dimension of another world is being attributed to the product. A divine, religious element is added, the creation being displayed according to the gesture code of the liturgy.

BDD-A12892 © 2008 Editura Mirton; Editura Amphora
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 17:57:56 UTC)

A woman who lies down along the edge of a high building, surrounded by the skyscrapers of a metropolis, this is the image exhibited at a denotative stage. Everything is fairy-like; the photography is taken at night, enhancing the air of mystery and luxury.

Intentional symbol: the photography is taken from above and everything looks smaller, except the star symbolised by the perfume.

Interpretative symbol: it is an image taken from a nowadays romance, featuring the perfume in the leading role.

Connotative symbol: the advertisement aims at implying that, by using this perfume, you are going to become a celebrity, with reference to the denotative sense of the word *star*.

An image taken from above will make the objects appear smaller than they are in reality, diminishing their greatness. Yet, the image of the woman is not diminished but, on the contrary, enhanced.

The way she is dressed up make us consider the stars, she herself being the very symbol of one.

The slogan is not particularly evident, being written on a red strip in the upper left. The graphic harmony is not destroyed by this vertical strip; on the contrary, it seems to be an extension of the whole concept.

The woman sitting on the edge of an extremely high building suggests the fact that this perfume would make you confident, daring, and you might feel like a star.

Perfume *Promesse – More than a Perfume, a Promise…* (Cacharel)

The image offered by Cacharel is a fairytale one, a combination of forms and colours, suggesting love and powerful sensations. The advertisement has been put together

BDD-A12892 © 2008 Editura Mirton; Editura Amphora
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 17:57:56 UTC)

in shades of mauve and pink. Mauve suggests magic and ceremonial, while pink points to passion and innocence. The colour combination is well-chosen, the advertisement standing for a ceremony of love and sexuality.

The bottle of perfume, coming in the shape of a cube and in mauve, is revealed in the foreground. The cover makes it special because of its feminine and elegant forms. A man and a woman embraced in a sort of a ritual gesture fill up the entire background.

Intentional symbol: the shape of the perfume bottle is being emphasized; the predominant colour of the advertisement symbolizes the harmony between the image and the perfume.

Interpretative symbol: the product is charming; it opens the gates to pleasure and happiness in a couple.

Connotative symbol: the promise that you will resemble the woman in the image, feminine and appealing, in case you buy the perfume.

This advertisement is intended for presentation but it also exhibits the promises made by the product. By using this perfume you will enter a magic world, the world of Price Charming and of fairies. The colours are involved, too, in creating this fairy-like setting.

The attitude of the woman is of abandonment in the arms of her lover, who is bewitched by the perfume. The atmosphere is bursting of passion and eroticism; nevertheless because of the colours employed, the feelings are not too intense but, rather, suggested in an elegant, warm manner.

The advertisement has its own language and its own world. By means of signs, of visual or verbal artifices, it succeeds in creating a special world, in which the main character is the common man, the potential customer of the advertised products. He allows himself to be seduced by the

BDD-A12892 © 2008 Editura Mirton; Editura Amphora
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 17:57:56 UTC)

magic and beauty of the advertisements, becoming, willingly or not, their slave.

By means of images, the advertisement meets our most hidden desires, our needs; it makes us enter the world of certain characters, and makes us identify with them. We become the observers of the metamorphosis of a housewife into a superstar, made possible by using a certain perfume.

The magazines are the most fertile medium for advertisements as they offer an excellent model and an instructed and well-established audience. In Romania, advertisements are likely to overcome the feminine magazines. The space for a purely journalistic text is becoming smaller and smaller, while the advertisements are likely to cover more than three quarters of a magazine.

RECLAMA LA PARFUMURI ÎN PRESA FEMININĂ

Rezumat

În presa feminină publicitatea se distinge, în mod evident, de conţinutul jurnalistic. Reclamele expuse în acest tip de reviste dedicate exclusiv femeilor reprezintă o lume încărcată de simboluri iconice şi nu numai. Creatorii îndeamnă cititoarele sau mai bine spus privitoarele – pentru că în aceste reclame accentul se pune mai mult pe comunicarea vizuală - să vadă dincolo de discursul publicitar denotativ şi să se gândească la conotaţiile pe care le provoacă aceste imagini. Reclamele din revistele adresate femeilor sunt mai deosebite pentru că sunt create special pentru femei. Există o paletă de culori, forme, simboluri, semne, trucuri vizuale pe care le întâlnim în reclame.

Publicitatea la parfumuri este o provocare pentru fiecare creator de reclame. Reclamele la parfumuri se rezumă la trei concepte: vis, lux şi statut social. Ideologia promite o societate de lux, de voluptate, în care orice muncă este absentă. Ele îndepărtează conflictele sociale, ignoră dificultăţile individuale, zugrăvesc o civilizaţie a facilităţii într-o lume fantastică.

Faţă de alte discursuri publicitare, reclamele la parfumuri au evoluat foarte mult în ultimii ani spre o hipertrofiere a textului publicitar în

BDD-A12892 © 2008 Editura Mirton; Editura Amphora
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 17:57:56 UTC)

beneficiul, aproape exclusiv, al imaginii. Este interesant cum se construieşte un concept olfactiv, având la dispoziţie doar concepte vizuale. Construcţia imaginii publicitare la parfumuri trece, de asemenea, prin creaţia artistică a flaconului. Sticluţa de parfum este prima care încearcă să transmită un concept olfactiv.

Datorită naturii sale abstracte, parfumul se bazează în primul rând pe forţa sa conotativă. Folosirea personajelor face deosebit de necesar limbajul nonverbal al acestora cât şi hainele şi culorile în care ele sunt îmbrăcate.

Prin intermediul imaginilor, reclama ne satisface dorinţele cele mai ascunse, răspunde nevoilor noastre, ne face să intrăm în pielea unor personaje, să ne identificăm cu ele. Ne transformă în martorii metamorfozei femeii gospodine care peste noapte devine un superstar doar pentru că a folosit un anumit parfum.

Revistele sunt tărâmul cel mai fertil pentru reclame deoarece oferă un tipar excelent şi un public avizat şi bine determinat. În România reclamele tind să pună stăpânire pe revistele dedicate femeilor şi nu numai.

BDD-A12892 © 2008 Editura Mirton; Editura Amphora
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 17:57:56 UTC)