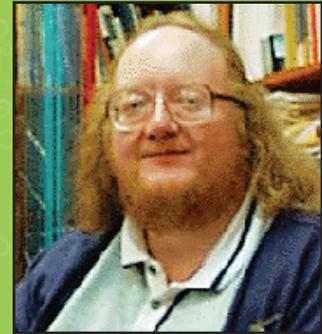


“Get A Mac”: Mac versus PC TV Spots



William L. Benoit
Professor of Communication Studies
Ohio University



Jeffrey Delbert
PhD Student in Communication
University of Missouri

In May of 2006, Apple began releasing a series of TV spots featuring two actors personifying rival computers and operating systems (“Get a Mac”). Justin Long portrayed Mac, typically dressed in casual clothes, while John Hodgman portrayed PC, usually dressed in a suit and tie. This campaign, with some modifications to the ads and with some unique spots, ran in several other countries (including Australia, Canada, England, and Japan). The ads were humorous and the use of personification was interesting (Long and Hodgman were not simply Mac and PC users; they were Mac and PC). This essay investigates the persuasive strategies employed in these ads and evaluates the effectiveness of this ad campaign.

Watch Mac ads here:
<http://www.apple.com/getamac/ads/>

Criticism, attack, or *kategoria* has not received as much attention in the literature as persuasive defense.¹ Pomerantz explains that “blamings” or complaints have two key elements: an offensive act must have occurred and the target of the complaint is alleged to be responsible for that act.² Benoit and Dorries identify six strategies for increasing the perceived offensiveness of the act: extent of damage, persistence of effects, effects on the audience, inconsistency, victims were innocent/helpless, and perpetrator had a special obligation to protect the victims (e.g., no one should abuse a child, but it seems worse for a priest to do so).³ They also articulate four strategies for increasing apparent responsibility for the act: the accused committed the act before, the accused planned the act, the accused was aware of the consequences of the act, and the accused benefited from the act.⁴ Benoit and Dorries analyzed a persuasive attack in a television show (*Dateline NBC*) criticizing Wal-Mart; Benoit and Harthcock investigated newspaper advertisements from the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids⁵; Benoit, Klyukovski, McHale, and Airne identified criticisms of Bill Clinton, Ken Starr, and Congress in political cartoons on the Monica Lewinsky affair.⁶



This study investigates television spots from the advertising campaign which criticized PCs (IBM-compatible personal computers) and their principal operating system (Windows XP and Vista) in the form of comparative ads. We located 47 ads from this campaign on the Apple web page (<http://www.apple.com/getamac/ads/>). We watched the ads repeatedly to identify recurrent themes; specifically, we looked for drawbacks to PCs/Windows/Vista and advantages of Macs. The authors met to discuss the themes and organize them by idea.⁷ We looked both at surface arguments (pros and cons) as well as the way in which Mac and PC were portrayed in the commercials’ personification.

Analysis of Ads

What follows is a textual analysis of the 47 ads. They will be discussed in four broad themes that emerged during analysis. First, we will discuss the drawbacks of PCs, then advantages of Macs, and finally PC’s and Mac’s traits as personified in these ads. Of course, because these ads are explicitly comparative, a disadvantage of PCs is also an advantage of Macs; still, some ads focused more on PC weaknesses and some on Mac strengths, and we organize the themes in accordance with these emphases. The tables provide summaries of the themes found in these ads.

Drawbacks of PCs

Many of the Mac commercials focused on the drawbacks of PCs, which is the subject of this section.

Table 1 Themes in the “Get a Mac” Advertisements: Drawbacks of PCs
1. PC susceptible to viruses (Viruses 06; Counselor 06)
2. PCs susceptible to spyware (Trust Mac 06)
3. Upgrading to Vista expensive, difficult (Surgery 07; Podium 07)
4. Upgrading PCs difficult (Tech support 07)
5. Problems with Vista (Security 07; Cart 07; Party is over 07; PR lady; Yoga 08; Group 08; Sad Song 08; Calming teas 08; Bean counter 08; V word 08; Bake sale 08; Choose a Vista 07; Party is over 07)
6. PC OS, hardware from different sources (Breakthrough 08)
7. PCs not designed for kids (Meant for Work 06)

Viruses. One aspect of this theme centers upon the idea that PCs are more susceptible to viruses than are Macs. For instance, in the commercial “Viruses” PC is sneezing throughout the entire commercial. “With over 114,000 known viruses to PCs last year,” PC suggests that Mac “shouldn’t play the hero” by trying to help him and risking getting the virus. However, Mac wipes PC’s nose, fearlessly saying “I’ll be fine,” thus demonstrating to the audience that normal “sicknesses” do not affect Mac’s operating system (OS). The susceptibility of PCs to viruses should be considered during one’s purchasing decision, a consideration that favors Macs.

Spyware. PC’s susceptibility to spy ware provides a further extension of this theme. “Trust Mac” begins with “Hello I’m a Mac and I am *no one* [PC dressed in a trench coat with a fake mustache and glasses].” PC then begins to explain he is hiding from “spyware” following him wherever he goes. His disguise attempts to conceal himself from their pursuit. When he offers his extra pair of glasses with supplied mustache, Mac declines because OS 10 is not vulnerable to spy ware. Spyware is a constant nuisance to PC users and so ridding one’s life of such a hassle (by getting a Mac) could be beneficial.



Vista. The next set of themes all center around the Windows OS, such as Vista’s expensive, problematic, and difficult upgrade. For instance, “Surgery” displays PC in a surgical gown announcing he is going in for an upgrade, obviously not a simple procedure. The experience is so risky, he tells Mac he can “have his peripherals” if he does not pull through. In “Podium” PC announces many programs or peripherals may not work with a Vista upgrade, requiring purchase of new products (such as printers) to be able to use Vista. PC declares, “Ask not what Vista can do for you; ask what you can buy for Vista!” Overall, this third characteristic of the drawbacks of PCs indicates that upgrading to Vista is very costly to users. This appeal centers on the assumption that upgrading to the new operating system should be an easy task, however, PC users can expect painful equipment surgeries to upgrade to Vista.

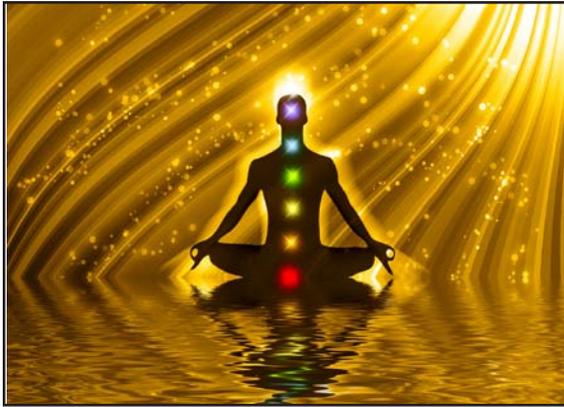
Upgrading PCs. This attack persists more generally in “Tech Support” where the ads indicate that Windows are machines difficult to upgrade generally. During the ad an IT technician attempts to install a webcam on PC’s head with duct tape, which indicates the shoddy and unstable nature of the installation. Eventually the man indicates that Macs actually come pre-installed with an iSight camera. This obviously frustrates PC, who walks off screen with tape streaming behind him before completion of his camera installation. Not only does this attack PC’s petty and competitive nature, but it also highlights the fact that Macs have readily available equipment that PCs do not. Macs provide an all in one deal, which appeals to the senses of users who might like a computer that has “thought of everything.”

Vista problems. The most consistent attacks throughout the ad campaign centered upon Vista’s many problems. For instance, in “Calming Teas” when Mac asks if PC is going to fix Vista, PC says no. Instead, PC is providing some stress relief with “his new line of calming teas. Here’s crashy time chamomile, or if Vista’s making your applications run slow there’s pomegranate patience.” In effect, it appears PC is hoping users will learn to tolerate problems (rather than fixing them).



One can also see this theme demonstrated in “Bean Counter.” During the ad PC has a huge pile of money on a card table reserved for marketing and a much smaller pile for R&D to fix Vista. Mac observes that such a small amount of money would not be enough to fix Vista (reinforcing the idea that Vista has many problems). In response, PC pushes the R&D pile into the marketing heap. PC obviously cares more about selling his product, even in light of the problem’s manifest nature, instead of customer satisfaction. Knowing about this problem and still ignoring the issue only increases the severity of the attack against PCs, as he willfully neglects the needs of paying customers.

In “Yoga,” PC’s customer is left helpless after deciding to purchase a new PC for her yoga studio. In the midst of her yoga session with PC she begins to exclaim, between bangs of the gong, “Forget that Vista still doesn’t work right. Forget that it has caused so many problems. Forget that you could’ve switched to Mac but instead you stuck with PC and now your Yoga studio billing is completely screwed up.” Not only has her business suffered needlessly but PC also seems unmoved after she smashes the gong to the ground and walks out. Instead he suggests, “Maybe I should switch to pilates.” The attack is strong because of its emphasis not only on PC’s cold character but also on the fact that when knowledge of a problem arises for PC, he will not do anything to correct its impact. This willful ignorance incites



users to consider what sorts of assistance a computer company should offer to one of its customers.

Different hardware and software sources. Another criticism of Vista surfaces in “Breakthrough.” A woman playing the role of counselor tells PC that it is not his fault his software comes from so many sources (and software sources that are different from the manufacturer of the computer hardware). PC not only accepts this argument but seems to find immense solace in its implications: “It’s not my fault.” Then, PC irrationally decides that it is Mac’s fault. Again, PC is aware of the problems he is causing his customers and uses an excuse to absolve himself from fixing such problems. The commercial, thus, seeks to illuminate the drawback

that PCs will do nothing to fix their drawbacks. In fact, PC confides to Mac at the end of “Podium” that he “switched back to XP three weeks ago,” hardly a ringing endorsement of Vista.

Kids. In addition, “Meant for Work” illustrates how PCs are not designed for kids (or for fun). PC complains that he is up all night making blogs, websites, and lacks the ability to upkeep anyone’s inbox. Apple’s attack seeks to enunciate the fact that all users may not want a computer that is strictly for work. In this case, the appeal seems to direct itself at a younger generation that listens to “emo” (emotional) music and stays up late into the night. PC would rather “cry himself into sleep mode,” instead of adapt to the abilities that Mac users generally desire. In a sense, PC’s resistance to change bars him from being able to fulfill the obligations most companies seek to satisfy. PCs are all work and no play.

Advantages of Macs

Another set of themes that emerged from the analysis centered on the advantages of Macs, explored in this section.

Video editing. “Better Results” demonstrates that although initially PC may believe he has the upper hand in video editing, the final product speaks for itself. In the commercial Mac also just created a home movie. He brings out a beautiful young woman (model Gisele Bundchen) with an accent who says, “Hi I’m Mac home movie.” However, when PC displays his home movie, which was only after some prodding from Mac, the result is a man in drag wearing the same dress as Mac’s home movie. A difference in ability is clearly shown with the aesthetic differences amplified. Mac creates a prettier, more enthusiastic movie, whereas PC’s home movie is shoddy.

Table 2
Themes in the “Get a Mac” Advertisements: Advantages of Macs

1. Mac better video editing (Better Results 06)
2. Macs easy to create photo album (Gift exchange 06)
3. Macs are fun (Goodwill 06; Work 06)/ PCs are boring (Work 06; Angel Devil 06)
4. Macs easy to use (Boxer 07)/ PCs are hard to use (Podium 07; Now what 07)
5. Mac runs Vista faster than PC (Misprint 07)
6. Mac automatic backups (Time Machine 08)
7. Macs ready to go out of the box (Box 06)/ PCs must download drivers, remove trial software, read manuals (Box 06; Counselor 06)
8. Mac best selling laptop on campus (Pep rally 08; Pizza box 08)

Photo albums. Furthermore, in “Gift Exchange” Mac gives PC a photo book, which he claims took him no time at all to create with iPhoto. The comparative nature here forces the audience to consider what abilities they desire in a computer. Mac’s advantage is the ease of which he can create aesthetically pleasing collections of both photos and home movies.

Fun. Macs can also be fun for all ages. In “Work,” PC really shows that he is boring, whereas Mac has more fun. Mac says, “I’m into doing fun stuff like movies, music, podcasts, stuff like that.” PC responds with, “I’m into doing fun stuff too like timesheets, spreadsheets, and pie charts.” Although Mac suggests the difficulty of capturing a family vacation with a pie chart, PC demonstrates how the chart can illustrate one area representing family time, whereas another indicates, “Just kicking it.” “Yea, I feel like I was there” Mac sarcastically responds. Again, PC does not seem to understand his customer base, as indicated by his overly white utterance of “just kicking it,” whereas Mac understands fun. The commercial’s argument sets up the versatility of Mac’s use. Macs purportedly understand the needs of the customer base, which is creating fun on their computer at home. Something users probably cannot do at their place of employment.



Additionally, “Angel/Devil” demonstrates the boring nature of PC. After Mac hands PC a carefully crafted photo book of their interactions over the past year, PC can only tersely respond that the art is “good.” PC can neither take the rebellious advice of the devil to “rip it in half” nor that of the angel to “loosen his necktie once in a while.” Ultimately, PC seems to take the devil’s side that believes play causes “pain and frustration.” Clearly this ad seeks to force consumers to directly consider these two “brands” of computers and the abilities each would be able to provide to their customers.

Easy to use. These advertisements also sought to force consumers to consider the ease of a computer’s use. “Boxer” exemplifies this theme as PC, who is dressed in boxing robes, claims he must do this stunt because “your [Mac’s] sales are through the roof.” Mac claims, “this isn’t a competition. Some people just want a computer that’s easy and intuitive.” Comparing their abilities in this way implies that PC’s are not easy to use, and that fighting back will prove to be a fruitless endeavor, as users apparently know what they want.

“Now what” continues this campaign as PC tries to peddle his new books *I want to buy a computer, Now what? and I just bought a computer, Now what?* Mac seems confused about why buying a computer is not just as easy as walking into an Apple store where individuals are standing by to help you buy a computer that is right for you. Or why a company would not provide free seminars after the purchase to teach how to use the new computer. The attack centers around PC’s inability to deal with the concerns of his customers, which Mac seems obliged to do.

PCs not only require extra books, which cost more money, but also consume time to read. Ease of setup on a Mac may be something a user does not know is possible if they have only had PCs. Companies, such as Geek Squad or Fire Dog, make a lot of money based on the complexity of PC setups, which is underscored in “Fat.” Here PC comes into the scene dressed in the suit Violet wears in *Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*. All the “startup” and trial software PCs come with makes PC bloated, while Mac claims to not understand as he only comes with the software people need. This argument presents Mac as having the advantage is setup time, when compared to other types of computers. However, this advantage does effectively limit customization, as Mac’s argument implies that there is no other software needed than what I, Mac, have provided to you. Thus, consumers are left to decide whether setup time or customization leaves them with the most positive computing experience.

Faster. However, not only can Mac run Windows but it can do more effectively. “Misprint” emphasizes an article written in *PC World* which declares that Mac was the best machine to run Windows Vista. The ad shows PC calling up the magazine to report a “serious misprint” but eventually finds out that is untrue, something he considers “against the laws of nature.” The ad indicates that a Mac is as good as, if not better than, a PC.

Automatic backup. One feature PC “has to admit is pretty awesome” is demonstrated in “Time Machine.” Time machine is a feature introduced in Leopard where the OS automatically backs up a user’s files. Instead of relying on third party software for backup, this feature is integrated into the OS. The attack in this ad elaborates on a feature that is non-native to PCs.

Ready to use. Apple’s ads also argue the ability of Macs to be ready to go right out of the box. For example, in “Box” Mac states that out of the box he can immediately begin “playing with his built in camera” or “make some home movies.” PC, on the other hand, has “a lot of manuals to read” plus needs to “download all the new drivers and delete the trial software.” Mac jumps out of the box, as he is “ready to go” and leaves PC saying, “actually the rest of me is in some other box.” The comparison leads consumers to ponder how quick a computer should be able to be used.



Campus best seller. Apple’s ads also seek to emphasize the idea that Macs are the best selling laptop on college campuses. “Pep Rally” attempts to capture this feeling with PC running out in the introduction with a group of cheerleaders. PC chants he is ready to “fight, fight, fight [said with the cheerleaders]” even though Mac has been “selling in record numbers” and is “the number one notebook on college campuses.” Afterwards, the cheerleaders mistakenly cheer, “Mac is number one,” which they change to “PC is number two” once PC reminds them they are supposed to be cheering for him. The attack again seeks to create a divide in the market by emphasizing the difference in demographics of those who may use the Mac. Attracting a young group of users could carry into the future, presuming the young folk who switch are satisfied with their purchase.

PC really seems to be frustrated by this trend but also unable to respond properly. Again, instead of demonstrating how PCs may have better abilities than Mac, or why one should continue to use a PC, PC resorts to using cheap marketing tricks. Hiding inside of a pizza box, via a cutout in the floor, PC disguises himself as pizza a means to coax college students to pick him (Pizza Box). Mac eventually asks, “whatever happened to people choosing their computer?” PC sadly responds, “They’re choosing you.” Thus, this bandwagon appeal seems to suggest that because some are choosing Macs, that eventually all students will switch.

Mac Abilities

We also found a group of themes we called Mac’s abilities, discussed in this section of the paper.

Runs Windows. Macs not only have the ability to run Mac programs and operating systems, but since the new Intel chip was introduced Macs have become even more compatible with PCs. The first instance this theme centers upon Mac’s ability to run Windows OS. In “Touche,” after the normal introductions Mac adds “and I’m a PC too.”

Table 3 Themes in the “Get a Mac” Advertisements: Macs Abilities
1. Macs can run Windows (Touche 06)
2. Leopard superior OS (Referee 08)
3. Macs can run Microsoft Office (Self pity 06; Office Stress 08)
4. Easy to switch to Mac (Genius 07; Throne 08; Off the air 08)

Mac tells PC that he can now run Windows. The ad seems to be saying “I can do anything you can do.”

Leopard. Even if users choose not to run Vista as their OS, they can still choose Mac’s Leopard, which many regale as the superior OS. The ad “Referee” portrays PC as a smug individual hoping to catch Mac in a lie that Leopard is actually not the better OS. Using what looks like an NFL referee with instant replay, he eventually says, “the ruling on the field stands,” which indicates that Mac’s OS is indeed better. Appeals such as these, with independent arbitrations, constantly inundate Apple’s ads, such as in “Yoga,” “PR Lady,” and “Counselor.” The comparisons indicate that even someone who starts off in PC’s corner is liable to recognize Mac’s operating superiority.



Runs Office. Also, as indicated in “Self Pity” above, Macs have the equal ability of using Microsoft Office, which increases his compatibility with computer users around the world. The ad shows Mac wearing a full suit. Claiming he has just returned from a meeting, PC seemingly cannot handle the news, probably because he has no way to deal with this new ability. Mac’s abilities present a problem to PCs because PCs have put no effort into being able to run Mac programs. This is due largely to their superior market share.⁸ Thus, the comparisons also seek to educate consumers that switching to a Mac would still allow one to be able to share files and fun with PC users, while retaining some of Mac’s special abilities.

Easy to switch. Finally, the ads offer the idea that there is a low cost to users for switching to a Mac from a PC. “Off the Air” makes it clear that the Genius Bar is standing by at any time to help former PC users transfer files to their new machine. PC is incredulous as “fear of switching is the foundation of loyalty for PCs.” “Genius” also emphasizes how easy it is to switch to a Mac. After answering a series of questions about her intellect from PC, the Mac “Genius” seems to meet the approval of PC. Here Macs knowingly provide a great service to former PC users, a service even PC knows is worthwhile. Thus, the comparison seeks to illustrate the no cost offers Apple provides as a benefit users may not have seen before, which is contrasted with PC’s offering of no free help setup services. Plus, if the difficulty of switching was a concern, the “Geniuses” will take care of those problems. Again, PC has no response but to try and “banish” Mac from his kingdom (“Throne”). Overall, Mac simply provides abilities that PC cannot offer. Providing unique abilities, such as their own OS and “i” programs, as well as running PC’s programs, gives Mac a unique niche for users to consider.

Traits of PC

Apple’s commercials also seek to emphasize character differences between the two types of computers. In fact, Debbie Williamson, a senior analyst at research firm eMarketer, says, “Apple continues to succeed with witty, hip advertising and deft copy-writing, while Microsoft comes off like a bald guy with a bad comb-over.”⁹ These character differences are important to discuss because these traits are another, more subtle, level of contrast between the computers and their operating systems.

Arrogant. One trait exemplified by PC is his arrogance, which “Better Results” illustrates. As discussed above, PC’s home movie is outshone by Mac’s, who is played by a beautiful woman with an accent. His initial arrogance about completion of a home movie (“I doubt if its [Mac’s home movie] as excellent as mine”) does not disappear after this display, as he simply claims the man in

Table 4 Themes in the “Get a Mac” Advertisements: Traits of PC
1. Arrogant (Better results 06; Throne 08)
2. Slow (Touche 06; Trust Mac 06)
3. Boring (Work 06; Cart 07; Flashback 07; Genius 07; Party is over 07)
4. Mean (Counselor 06; Goodwill 06; Genius 07; Holiday 07; Referee 08; I can do anything 08)
5. Self-pity (Self Pity 06)
6. Nerd (Gift exchange 06; Meant for work 06)
7. High pressure (Sales pitch 06)/greedy (Bean counter 08)
8. Deceptive (Sabotage 07; Podium 07; Misprint 07; Pizza box 08; Bake sale 08)
9. Image over substance (PR lady 07; Pep rally 08; Calming teas 08 Bean counter 08; V word 08)
10. Unreasonable (Breakthrough 08)

drag is a “work in progress.” In “Throne” he says his “subjects” will never leave because of the hassle of switching brands. He also attempts to banish Mac after finding out the ease of switching. Just the conception that PC has a kingdom indicts him of thinking he is much more important to the computer market than in reality. PC’s arrogance not only blinds him to the changing forces of the market, but also the needs of users PCs do not address.

Slow-witted. PC is also portrayed as slow-witted. “Touche” provides an example with PC never truly grasping the definition and true use of the word. Even after a lengthy explanation from Mac, PC cannot grasp the concept of responding to a claim before using the word “touche.” Furthermore, in “Trust Mac” we see PC hiding from spy ware with a disguise. After making this clear to Mac, he says, “You never saw me.” Mac joins in and replies in a whisper, “Never saw who?” However, PC gets confused and tells Mac his name before realizing that Mac was playing along with PC’s disguise.

Boring. PC is also portrayed as boring in this ad campaign. “Work” portrays PC as thinking of vacations in terms of pie charts, instead of family photos and videos. In “Flashback” we see PC not wanting, or perhaps not knowing, what to do with Mac’s pictures or photo book and instead “calculates how much time you [Mac] just wasted.” Both of these instances give viewers a sense that PC may be a little bit out of touch or basically a square.

Mean. Many of these ads portray PC as a nasty individual as well. For instance, in “Counselor” when asked to say something nice about Mac, PC says, “I guess you are a little better at creative stuff” but then adds a jab “even though it’s completely juvenile.” Also, in “Goodwill” he cannot get through the entire holiday ad, meant to be a celebration of good will, without telling Mac what he does is a waste of time. One of the worst examples, however, is in “I can do anything.” PC regales Mac with a tale that he loves the holiday season because if he wants he can fly, he build things in fast motion, or even talk to animals. When speaking to the rabbit, however, PC discovers the animal is heading towards the “Apple store for some last minute gifts.” Upon hearing the news PC pushes the snowman’s head onto the top of the bunny. Such a cruel act reflects PC’s nasty nature.

Self-pity. When PC is not being mean, he is portrayed as feeling sorry for himself. “Self-Pity” illustrates this nature well, as PC “faints” melodramatically when he discovers Mac just returned from a meeting. Again, PC seems to have an inability to deal with Mac’s success, which may indicate to viewers that PC would rather complain about the state of affairs rather than take action to create a superior product. His complacency breeds stagnant products, or so these comparative ads seem to imply.

Nerd. Furthermore, the ad campaign portrays PC as a nerd. “Gift Exchange” exemplifies this theme perfectly as PC wishes, as Mac hands him a holiday gift, for a C++ programming guide, which is a middle language for programming computers. Mac, to PC’s dismay, provides PC with a photo book of their year together. PC’s gift to Mac, however, is an actual C++ Programming guide. PC’s nerd-like qualities blind him from being able to see what “normal” people would enjoy having or learning, and rather resorts to providing things he thinks people would enjoy. This fact is further highlighted when he is unwilling to create the blogs and websites for the child users of his new owners in “Meant for Work,” as he would rather be managing inboxes or creating spreadsheets.

Greedy. PC is also shows as using high pressure tactics. For instance in “Sales Pitch” PC employs some “buzz marketing” because PC’s trend tracking tells him Mac is “selling like hot cakes,” which means he needs to step up his



game. The ad ends with two bright red cut outs on each hand reading “amazing” and “totally cool” to get people to “buy a PC.” Fully aware of what he is doing, PC employs marketing before being fixing the problems with his OS or hardware. This severe attack by Apple seeks to make users feel uncomfortable “falling” for cheap gimmicks offered by PCs, which could be a free printer or whatever else a company may be offering. The ads may be fortifying for the attack against the increased price to purchase a Mac as opposed to a PC. With PC putting so little money towards its OS, as illustrated above in “Bean Counter,” PC would rather pile all his money into marketing rather than resolving OS complexities. Thus, purchasing a cheap product, such as PC, who pressures individuals in to sales, one is not paying for a product so much as for their marketing campaigns.

Deceptive. This leads into another trait of PC’s, is his deceptive nature. Since PC is both slow witted and lacks the ability to launch a proper counter offensive, he creates a fake ad in “Sabotage.” After the Mac imposter begins by stuttering that he’s a Mac, PC asks “why so down?” The Mac imposter’s scripted response is, “it’s because you’re so much better than me.” During many of the imposter’s lines, PC is also mouthing the words, which demonstrates he most likely wrote them. However, when discovered PC says nothing is going on. PC’s fruitless attempts to take Mac down, often fall short of their intended goal. His deception, however, seeks again to highlight PC’s high pressure sales technique to get people to buy a computer against their better interests.



Certainly this is also demonstrated in “Pizza Box” where PC tries to sell computers to college age kids dressed as a pizza box, or in “Misprint” where he pretend to be Mac and say his product is terrible. However, the worst of the bunch is in “Bake Sale” where Mac, trying to be nice, offers to help PC out from his money crisis by buying a cupcake from his sale. PC conceals the price of the dessert until Mac has taken a bite, to which he then says the price is \$10 million. Thus, PC’s deceptive attempts to raise money or sell computers means to support a nasty marketing habit. The ad forces consumers to consider what they are paying for when they buy a PC, especially knowing PC actively ignores errors that pop up from everyday use.

Image over substance. In fact, it appears that PC cares more for his image than for substance, which is contrary to Mac’s nature. As mentioned above in “Calming Teas,” PC would rather calm a user down to forget about her problems, rather than attempting to fix the errors occurring. “V Word” also accents PC’s willful ignorance towards fixing problems as he simply begins to “buzz out” any mention of the word Vista. His image will suffer if people begin to associate him with Vista, so he will simply pretend that word does not exist.

“PR Lady” makes clear that PC cares about his image more than the substance of his parts. As PC begins to explain why she was hired, the PR person corrects what he says into more politically correct language. For instance, PC says, “I hired a PR person, you know after that whole Vista problem.” She corrects PC, saying “By problem he means, that some early adopters have faced some minor challengers.” PC acknowledges that some users “even started downgrading back to XP.” Again, the PR spokeswoman says “By downgrading, he means they are upgrading to an older, more familiar experience.” The ad argues that PC relies on PR “double talk” to fool customers.

Unreasonable. Finally, PC is painted as an unreasonable fellow. As touched on briefly above, “Breakthrough” shows PC relying on nice comments, such as “It’s not your fault,” rather than trying to truly grasp a situation. Ultimately, PC decides that his problems are Mac’s fault; hardly a reasonable conclusion.

Traits of Mac

As these commercials were created for the benefit of Apple, Mac’s character contains more favorable traits than those attributed to PC.

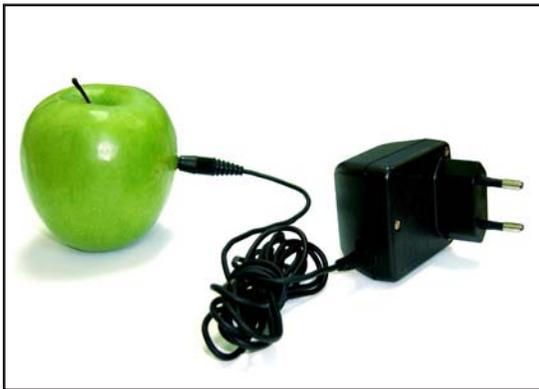
Nice. The first trait is that Mac is nice, caring, and helpful in all situations. “Viruses” is one of the first ads to show this trait, as Mac stops at nothing to help out PC during his cold. In “Counselor” Mac does not hesitate to tell

PC that he's "really good with numbers and you dress like a gentleman." In "Goodwill" he is able to overlook PC's insults and still "pull it into hug harbor." Or even in his competitors time of need, when he could try to stamp out his competition, Mac offers to help out PC by purchasing a cupcake (Bake Sale). These traits seek to emphasize to users that Apple not only understand its consumers' needs but also is always willing and able to help. Juxtaposed with PC's selfish, mean, sometimes self-pitying nature, Mac looks like an upstanding gentleman. This is someone who one would like to do business with.

Table 5 Themes in the "Get a Mac" Advertisements: Traits of Mac
1. Nice, caring, helpful (Viruses 06; Counselor 06; Breakthrough 08; I can do anything 08; Tree trimming 08; Bake sale 08)
2. Energetic (Box 06)
3. Cool (Goodwill 06)

Energetic. This is bolstered with Mac's energetic persona. Without sufficient energy, how could Mac ever keep up with all the requests of his customers. "Box" demonstrates Mac's desire to get straight to play or work and to not waste any time, contrary to PC's attack. Mac is able to operate at any time of night, which suits some users better, and is ready straight from when one picks it up at the store.

Cool. In "Goodwill" Mac demonstrates his ability to overcome the nasty words of PC, as he indicts Mac as a time waster, and uses arguably "cool" phrases as "pull it into hug harbor." Mac seems to understand what it takes to be hip and realizes fun is not fighting but rather getting along during the holiday season. Mac is much more cool and hip, an impression fostered by the two characters' words, dress, and demeanor.



Overall, contrasting Mac's traits with PCs, users are forced to consider the type of company they would like to do business with. On the one hand you have a company that only cares about the bottom line, whereas with the other you have someone who cares about your computing needs. Caricaturing the brands makes it easier for viewers to immediately contrast

personalities and give a face to generally anonymous companies.

Evaluation

The advertising firm responsible for creating the "Get a Mac" advertising campaign won awards for these messages. Solman reports that TBWA/Media Arts Lab received the Sweepstakes Prize and the Grand Effie for advertising effectiveness; the firm "was also voted the best television campaign and won honors for several ads in the series."¹⁰ In January 2007, Nielsen IAG reported that one of these ads (where the IT person duct-tapes a camera to PC's head) was one of the top ten most-liked new ads.¹¹ Consistent with these accolades, in our judgment, the ads were generally clever and well-executed. A variety of product-related arguments were presented in the ads, with some ideas repeated across ads. Personification made a more subtle argument in favor of Mac and against PC. Of course, we realize that these ads were not equally persuasive for everyone but they should appeal to many in the audience.

In fact, sales of Mac computers increased 36% in the first quarter of 2007, over three times the industry average of 11%.¹² Bulik reported that Mac's share of the computer market doubled: "While Mac adoption is being

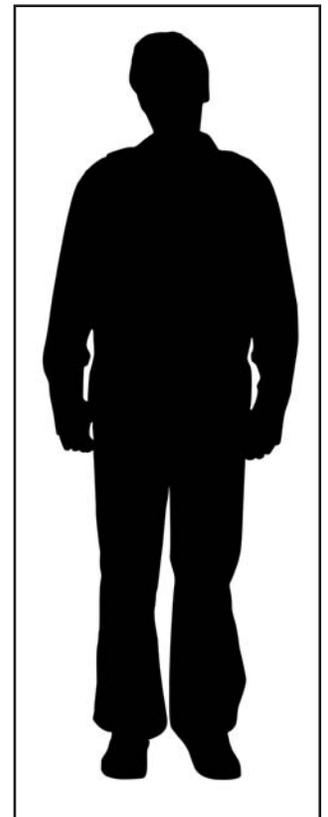


propelled by several forces— such as the iPod halo effect, along with the dismal reception of Microsoft Vista, aided by Mac price drops and feature extensions—Apple’s clever and consistent marketing also deserves credit.”¹³ The ads eventually provoked a response from Microsoft, first with “two weeks of teaser ads ‘about nothing’ featuring Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates and comic Jerry Seinfeld” and then to “I’m a PC” ads featuring a testimonials from PC users and a statement from an actor dressed like “PC” who declares: “Hello, I’m a PC and I’ve been made into a stereotype.”¹⁴ Petrecca observes that the ads received “mixed reviews from bloggers and ad pros”¹⁵ and declares that Microsoft’s campaign was the “most conspicuous waste of money;”¹⁶ nevertheless, the Microsoft ad response can be seen as another indicator of the effectiveness of the “Buy a Mac” ad campaign. Microsoft felt compelled to respond to these attacks. In fact, York suggests we may have “entered a new era of attack ads,” possibly due to “the influence of those masterful and highly effective Mac vs. PC spots.”¹⁷ This ad campaign merits a generally favorable evaluation. We should notice that reactions were not universally favorable. Some considered the Mac persona to be arrogant, for example.¹⁸ Of course, Macs versus PCs *is* a competition despite Mac’s dismissal of that idea in “Boxer.” But the persona cultivated for Mac in these ads is not one of a cutthroat competitor.

Overall, Apple’s comparative ad campaign sought to both illustrate the computing differences between the brands, as well as create two distinct personas to compare of the companies. PC seems to be a more selfish brand concerned mainly with the bottom line. Apple contrasts this with the young, hip Mac, who is always willing to help and has a wealth of abilities. Not only can he do things unique to him, but he can also adopt the roles of PC, which is something PC is unable to accomplish.

These ads used a common frame. They began with a Mac on the viewer’s right and PC on the left. Each introduced himself (which by the way, established that these actors were not spokesmen for, but personifications of, the competing brands). Generally, Mac dressed casually while PC wore a sport coat and tie. The set was bare, forcing viewers to concentrate on the actors and any props that were present. These common features functioned as a script¹⁹ which made interpretation of these texts easy. It also meant the unique features of each ad (the particular attacks, for instance) stood out. Deviations from the norm heightened the point being made. When PC appeared in a surgical gown, this break from the norm signaled something important was happening (arguing that PCs are hard to upgrade, “Surgery”). In “PR Lady,” the spokesperson introduced PC, “He’s a PC” rather than PC saying “I’m a PC.” The technician who tried to duct tape a camera to PC’s head also caught the viewers’ attention as another new character in the dramas.

Perhaps the most interesting feature of this series of ads from a rhetorical point of view was the way personification of the competing products reinforced the product features comparisons advanced. Mac was nice and helpful; PC was arrogant, slow-witted, boring, nasty, and deceptive. The humor in the ads was another highlight. Overall, the ads provide a means for individuals to further evaluate these brands before their next computer purchase.



ENDNOTES

- ¹ See, for instance, W. L. Benoit. 1995. *Accounts, excuses, and apologies: a theory of image restoration strategies* (*Suny series in speech communication*). Albany: State University of New York Press; W. L. Benoit, and A. Pang, *Crisis communication and image repair discourse*, ed. T. L. Hansen-Horn & B. D. Neff, (Boston: Pearson, 2008), 244-261; and B. L. Ware and W. A. Linkugel, "They spoke in defense of themselves: On the generic criticism of apologia," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 59 (1973): 273-283.
- ² A. Pomerantz, "Attributions of responsibility: Blamings," *Sociology* 12 (1978): 115-121
- ³ W. L. Benoit and B. Dorries, "Dateline NBC's persuasive attack on Wal-Mart," *Communication Quarterly* 44 (1996): 464-477.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ W. L. Benoit and A. Harthcock, "Attacking the tobacco industry: A rhetorical analysis of advertisements by The Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids," *Southern Communication Journal* 65 (1999): 66-81.
- ⁶ W. L. Benoit et al., "A fantasy theme analysis of political cartoons on the Clinton-Lewinsky-Starr affair," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 18 (2001): 377-394.
- ⁷ Our approach roughly resembled the method of constant comparison. See B. G. Glaser and A. L. Strauss, *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. (Chicago: Aldine, 1967).
- ⁸ C. Edwards, "Are Apple's ads pitch-perfect?," *Business Week*, no. 4034, May 14, 2007, 14.
- ⁹ L. Petrecca, "Which ads rose above bad times in '08? And which ones fell flat in a big way?," *USA Today*, December 29, 2008, 3B.
- ¹⁰ G. Solman, "Get a Mac" rules Belding Awards," *Adweek.com*, (June 8, 2007), http://www.adweek.com/aw/eseach/article_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1003596603 (accessed October 30, 2009).
- ¹¹ "Top Spots," *Advertising Age*, (February 12, 2007): 2.
- ¹² C. Edwards, "Are Apple's ads pitch-perfect?," *Business Week*, no. 4034, May 14, 2007, 14.
- ¹³ B.S. Bulik, "Mac owners just like, well, the Mac guy; Study: Apple users less modest but more open than general (read: PC) population," *Advertising Age*, (January 28, 2008): 6.
- ¹⁴ L. Petrecca, "Microsoft's new Windows commercials take a short at Apple," *USA Today*, September 19, 2008, 6B.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ L. Petrecca, "Which ads rose above bad times in '08? And which ones fell flat in a big way?," *USA Today*, December 29, 2008, 3B.
- ¹⁷ E.B. York, "Brand vs. brand: Attack ads on the rise; Dunkin', Burger King, Microsoft latest to go directly after their rivals," *Advertising Age*, (October 27, 2008): 1.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ See for example, R. C. Schank and R. P. Abelson, *Scripts, plans, goals, and understanding: An inquiry into human knowledge structures*. (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1977).