

**Using the advertisement of early Macintosh computers to analyze how Apple envisions its
users**

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On my honor as a University student, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment as defined by the Honor Guidelines for Thesis-Related Assignments.

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Introduction

Prior to 2010, Apple released a multitude of computers, including the Macintosh and the iMac. Apple's choices in advertisements and marketing for these computers, and its company in general, has led to some controversy about the company's intentions. Many scholars believe that Apple's advertisements of the early Macintosh computers were intentionally designed to include religious themes in order to create a new religion, which they call the cult of Apple. However, they focus on what the religious themes are, rather than what the religious themes say about Apple's target demographic. By only considering what religious themes are included in these advertisements, society is left uneducated about how companies embed ideas about their target users in marketing of the product as well as the product itself. I will argue that Apple strategically used advertisements about early Macintosh computers to embed a set of ideas about its users, including that users desire competition, community, and simplicity.

I will examine multiple advertisements, both print and video, of Apple's early computers using the science, technology, and society (STS) framework of user configuration. The concept coined by Steve Woolgar emphasizes how designers often embed their ideas about their users in the products themselves (Woolgar, 1991). I will use this concept to demonstrate how Apple has embedded the three ideas of competition, community, and simplicity into its products.

Literature Review

There is a great amount of research analyzing Apple's marketing techniques as well as how the company is structured. A lot of this analysis focuses on how Apple has created and advertised its company as a new technological replacement for religion. The early advertisements of the Macintosh computers are often used as evidence to support this claim.

None of these, however, analyze how these advertisements demonstrate Apple's ideas about its users, and how these ideas are embedded into its products.

In *Appletopia*, Brett T. Robinson provides a detailed analysis on how Apple draws on religious themes from Christianity and Buddhism. From the iconic partially bitten apple in the logo, to the launch of new products and its advertisements, Robinson argues that they all can be tied back to religion. Two of Robinson's main points are how Apple creates a religion that celebrates the individual and how users of Apple products develop a deep love for the company. To support his first point, Robinson uses Apple's well-known 1984 Super Bowl commercial to argue how the Macintosh computer can be used to express individuality. In a world set in George Orwell's dystopian *1984*, a woman is shown smashing through the mind-controlled crowd giving the crowd the freedom to make their own choices. Choosing a Macintosh computer becomes a choice for individuality. Robinson then goes on to argue how Apple's users have started to form an obsessive community in which people are willing to stand in line for hours to get a new product as soon as it's released and will be more inclined to support the company through any controversy that arises. He ties this back to how religious followers often refuse to accept beliefs outside of their own (Robinson, 2013).

Similarly, to Robinson's analysis, Russell Belk's *The Cult of Macintosh*, argues that the Macintosh and its users make up an equivalent religion. He conducts interviews of different Macintosh users to see what they have in common. The main theme is that most users can recite the story of the company's origin, much like how people of religious faith can explain the creation of the world. He also discovered that many of them referred to founder, Steve Jobs, as their "hero" and further analyzes how Steve Jobs' story closely aligns with the structure of a mythical hero (Belk, 2005).

Both Robinson and Belk agree that Apple uses religious themes through the creation and advertisements of its Macintosh computer. Neither, however, analyzes the type of people Apple envisions its users to be. In this paper I will analyze the word choice, imagery, and themes used to argue how Apple has intentionally embedded ideas about who it believe its users are in the advertising of Macintosh computers released before 2010.

Conceptual Framework

My analysis of Apple's expectations of its users through its early computer advertisements draws on the science, technology, and society (STS) concept of user configuration. I will use the concept as laid out by the English sociologist Steve Woolgar. Woolgar defines the term user configuration as "defining the identity of putative users and setting constraints upon their likely future actions" (Woolgar, 1991). The first part of this definition means designers have preconceived ideas about who their potential users will be, which, whether intentionally or unintentionally, will get embedded in their technology. These ideas can be embedded through decisions the designer makes concerning both the design itself and the marketing of the technology. The potential user can be defined and configured in a multitude of ways including physical characteristics such age, gender, and race as well as nonphysical characteristics like hobbies, interests, religious or political views, or employment. The second part of Woolgar's definition explains how designers also set up constraints on their users. Woolgar additionally states that while the designers know everything about the machine, "users have a configured relationship to it, such that only certain forms of access/use are encouraged" (Woolgar, 1991). The designer sometimes makes conscious decisions of what the user can and cannot do. This can be anywhere from limiting access to certain features,

controlling what modifications can be made to the technology, or rejecting certain users that do not have a need for the technology.

I will use user configuration to argue that Apple has intentionally embedded its ideal user as someone who desires competition, community, and simplicity, in its advertisements of Macintosh computers released prior to 2010. By advertising the computer in specific ways, Apple limited certain forms of use while specifically encouraging other uses, which in turn appeals to a very specific type of user.

Analysis

In the following sections I will analyze a range of Apple computer ads, released before 2010, to demonstrate how Apple strategically constructed these ads to appeal to the specific type of user it envisioned. I argue that Apple envisioned its users to have a desire for competition, community, and simplicity.

Competition

Apple envisioned the users of its early Macintosh computers as having a desire for competition, which is shown through its early advertisements of these products. Apple tried to appeal to people who wanted to *be* the best, not necessarily have the best product. This was done through advertising that computer choice is a “reflection of one’s personality and way of looking at the world” (Robinson, 2013) rather than a selection of technological preference. I will demonstrate how both the “Get a Mac” and the “historical figures” campaigns support this view of computer choice.

From 2006-2009 Apple ran a series of commercial advertisements under the “Get a Mac” campaign. There were 66 different commercials in total, all of which had the same basic setup:

Two men standing against a white background personifying Apple's Mac computer and its competition, Microsoft's PC computer.



Figure 1: PC and Mac from 'Get a Mac' commercials

On the right side of Figure 1, “Mac” is depicted as a young man, dressed casually with a sweatshirt and jeans, a longer hairstyle, and standing relaxed and at ease. “PC” in contrast is depicted on the left as a much older man, donning a suit, fresh haircut, and glasses while standing stiffly and uncomfortably. Apple’s choice to personify both Mac and PC rather than just personifying Mac, inherently creates a sense of competition in the audience. If it was just Mac standing there, someone watching might think that Mac does not relate to them and move on. However, with both characters Apple gives the watcher an ultimatum: they are either Mac or PC and nothing in between, which forces them to relate to a character and choose the “best” one.

The stark difference in appearance alone demonstrates a clear “winner” of the competition between the two men before anything is said but, once the characters begin talking, the outcome becomes even more clear. In multiple commercials PC stumbles over his words and seems out of touch with reality while Mac speaks clearly and confidently while correcting PC. For example, in the ad “Touché,” PC is shown repeatedly misusing the word touché despite

Mac's attempts to explain what it means (Apple, 2006). Apple's choice to focus on something like this, rather than the computer capabilities, attempts to relate to its users' competitive nature and desire to be better than everyone else.. It compares the choice to buy an Apple computer as the choice to be more knowledgeable, relaxed and have more fun..

Similarly, Apple compared computer choice to a reflection of personality through a series of print ads in the 1980s which I will refer to as the "historical figures" ads. Each of these ads was themed around an important historical figure like Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, and others of similar stature. These historical figures were then compared to the reader.

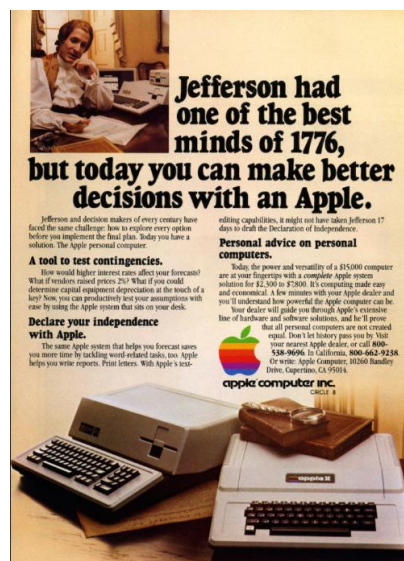


Figure 2: Jefferson Print Ad

One of these print ads is titled "Jefferson had one of the best minds of 1776, but today you can make better decisions with an Apple" (Apple, 1981). There are two main points to be made about this phrase. First, I want to draw attention to "you can make better decisions." Once again, Apple has turned the act of buying a Macintosh computer into the result of character choice, rather than technical preference. The advertisement, then suggests that if a user buys a Macintosh, that user is going to be able to make better decisions than someone who chooses otherwise. This appeals to the competitiveness in the user who wants to be the best because they

are going to choose the option that reflects their character better, which in this case is the ability to make better decisions. The second point I want to make about this ad is the comparison to incredibly famous historical figures. Thomas Jefferson is arguably one of the most important figures of the 18th century and Apple is claiming that the everyday user of its Macintosh can now be better than Jefferson. This thought of not only matching the intelligence of someone like Thomas Jefferson, but even being better than him, once again appeals to someone who imagines them self as being the best, imagines themselves as beating Thomas Jefferson. Apple could have easily said something along the lines of “Just like Thomas Jefferson you can make great decisions with a Macintosh” but instead Apple’s word choice put Thomas Jefferson in competition with the user as well as putting the user in competition with everyone else who chooses not to buy a Macintosh. The choice of phrasing in this ad demonstrates how Apple envisions its users to be competitive.

Overall, Apple structured the “Get a Mac” and the “historical figures” campaigns to appeal to users who desire to compete and to be the best. By catering its ads to people like this, Apple demonstrates that it envisions its users to be competitive.

Community

Apple imagines that its users desire to be part of a community, which is shown through the original commercial for the first Macintosh computer. This well-known Superbowl commercial, *1984*, is structured to show that a choice to buy Apple’s computer is a choice to be a part of an enlightened community.

This commercial alludes to George Orwell’s dystopian novel, *1984*, showing hundreds of men dressed in the same dull clothing, and haircut sitting in an auditorium listening to an authority figure, presumably “Big Brother”, give a speech. The men seem to be entranced by his

words, almost as if they were mind controlled. Then a woman, wearing brightly colored clothes, comes running through the crowd of men with a sledgehammer. She swings it at the screen, which shatters and releases a light that spreads across the room that releases all the men from the mind control. The ad ends with the line “Apple Computer will introduce Macintosh and you’ll see why 1984 won’t be like ‘1984’” (Apple, 1984). There are two important allusions that appear in this commercial, the Christian story of Adam and Eve as well as Apple’s biggest competitor, IBM, both of which support the notion of Apple being the source of a new community

Before analyzing how this commercial relates to Adam and Eve, it is important to understand how religion is related to community. To do this, I will use sociologist Emil Durkheim’s perspective of religion as summarized below:

"In fact, for Durkheim religion had two very important functions: first, it made people get together, and so was a form of social glue that created social solidarity. And second, it gave people a way of understanding and seeing society, since it was through religious identities that people came to have social identities" (Nye, 44-45).

According to Durkheim, religion functions as a way for people to come together as well as to understand society. More specifically he explains how it “enables people to express the deep emotions which anchor them to their community” (Pals, 107). Community itself is defined as “a feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals” (Oxford, 2020). So, for many people, religion is a way for them to feel like they are a part of a community.

In Christian belief the story of Adam and Eve begins with God specifically forbidding them to eat from this one tree, “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Genesis 2:4-3:24). So long as Adam and Eve follow this rule, humanity will essentially be perfect. Eve, however, disobeys God by taking a bite out of an apple from that forbidden tree. Once this happens, God

condemns humanity to a life with sin. In other words, the act of disobeying God brought suffering to the rest of humanity.



Figure 3: Woman from 1984 commercial

In the 1984 commercial, the woman has an apple on her shirt, shown in Figure 3, therefore making her a representation of Eve. Her throwing the sledgehammer and breaking “Big Brother’s” screen signifies her disobeying God, and the white light that appears after is the “knowledge of good and evil.” So, in contrast to the Bible version, Eve’s disobedience gives humanity the freedom to be creative, a positive consequence rather than a negative. The use of a well-known religious story in the commercial makes Apple seem like a new religion, one brought about by enlightenment. This tells the users that they too can be a part of this enlightened community, if they buy Apple’s computer.



Figure 4: Crowd of Men in 1984 commercial

Another big aspect of this commercial highlights the competition between Apple's main competitor, IBM. Apple has designed this commercial so IBM, also known at the time as "Big Blue", is essentially "Big Brother" and all the mind-controlled men are IBM's current users. As seen in Figure 4, these men are all dressed the exact same with the same haircut with little emotion in their expression, signifying that they are being forced to act a certain way by IBM. The woman is representing Apple and freeing all the users from IBM's control, allowing them to be creative and a part of this enlightened community.

Now, some might argue that it is a stretch to think that those nuanced comparisons made to IBM in the commercial were intentional on Apple's part. However, in a key note from 1983, *immediately* before an early showing of this commercial was aired to a select group of people, Steve Jobs says "Dealers now fear an IBM dominated and controlled future and they are increasingly and desperately turning to back to Apple as the only force that can ensure their future freedom"(SocialThink, 2009). He is literally saying that IBM will have all computer users under its complete control unless dealers start supporting Apple which will take down IBM and give users the freedom they desire, which falls very closely inline with the allusion described

earlier. Apple's allusion to IBM show users that if they want the freedom to have control over their computers, they must join the Apple community.

With both allusions, Apple wants to get the message across that a choice to buy an Apple computer is a choice to be a part of this free, creative, and enlightened community. Apple is once again advertising what type of person an Apple user is, someone who desires to be a part of said community, rather than advertising how good its product is. Apple could have released a commercial demonstrating all the cool and useful things the Macintosh could do, but instead chose to cater towards a specific characteristic of its envisioned user.

Simplicity

Apple's print campaigns for the first Macintosh demonstrate how Apple also envisions its users as desiring simplicity. Apple's users are not the people who want to spend a lot time figuring out how to put something together, or to tinker with something to customize it meet their needs. Rather they would prefer their technology to come ready to use without having to do anything on their own to make it fully functional. I will use two different print ads for the first Macintosh to show how Apple focused its marketing towards people who prefer simplicity in technology.



Figure 5: "If you can point, you can use a Macintosh" Ad

The first ad to be analyzed is shown in Figure 5 with “If you can point, you can use a Macintosh” at the top of the page (Apple, 1984b). From the title alone it is clear that Apple wants to get the message across that the Macintosh will be incredibly easy to use. The ad continues to state, “If Macintosh seems extraordinarily simple it’s probably because other computers are extraordinarily complicated.” This line shows that Apple’s Macintosh will be easier to use than all the other existing computers on the market. A lot of computers at the time forced the user to type lines of code in the command window to get any application to run, but Apple created its computer to have an interface where the user can simply move a mouse and click on the application they wish to run. This shows that Apple’s target demographic does not want to spend time customizing their computer or figuring out how to use it, but rather have Apple do all of the coding for them and be able to immediately start using the product once unpacked from the box. By such advertising, Apple is rejecting all the tech savvy users who may enjoy coding and customizing their computer to meet their personal needs.



Figure 6: "Introducing Macintosh. For the rest of us." Ad

The second print ad I will analyze is shown in Figure 6. This ad dawn's the title “Introducing Macintosh. For the rest of us” (Apple, 1984c). Once again Apple is trying to make

the point that other computers currently on the market at that time were more complicated and only used by those people who knew how to code. By using the phrase “for the rest of us”, Apple is capturing the attention of all the non-technologically savvy people, saying that no matter how familiar they are with technology, they will be able to use it. The ad continues to say “It’s so easy to use, most people already know how,” emphasizing that there is no longer a need to spend hours reading a manual to figure out how to code a computer because the Macintosh is so simple everyone already knows how to use it.

Because both these ads express how simple and easy it is to use a Macintosh, while poking fun at the more complicated computers on the market, Apple is intentionally rejecting the more tech-savvy users from its envisioned userbase. Apple is making no effort to appeal to those people who want to be able to write their own code, customize their own computers, stuff that is all still possible on a Macintosh. Instead, Apple’s target user is someone who desires simple technology. The frequent use of words like “extraordinarily simple,” “as easy as pointing,” “you already know how to use it” appeals most to users who do not currently have a computer due to not knowing how to use any of the computers currently on the market.

Conclusion

Through analyzing a range of both print and television ads for Apple computers released prior to 2010, I argue that these ads were constructed specifically to cater to the ideal user Apple envisioned, a user that is competitive, community-driven, and less tech-savvy, while also ignoring all other users that did not fit this criteria. Based on word choice, imagery, and religious themes, Apple has embedded these ideas about its users into its advertisements as an attempt to appeal to the character of the user rather than promoting the technical capabilities of its computer. With this awareness in mind, the general reader will be more cognizant of Apple’s

advertisements and how said advertisements might be more focused on the character of the consumer, rather than the product itself.

Word Count: 3393

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