

**WHEN ADVERTISING CROSSES BORDERS: TRANSNATIONAL  
ADAPTATION IN ENGLISH AND FRENCH COSMETICS  
ADVERTISING / QUAND LA PUBLICITÉ TRAVERSE LES  
FRONTIÈRES : ADAPTATION TRANSNATIONALE DE LA  
PUBLICITÉ DES COSMÉTIQUES EN ANGLAIS ET EN  
FRANÇAIS<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract:** *This paper aims to examine the discourse of women's cosmetics advertising through a contrastive analysis of English and French advertisements. The study focuses on strictly equivalent ads, seeking to identify not only the similarities in both editions, but above all the discursive and visual differences that distinguish them. My analysis foregrounds textual, visual, stylistic, and argumentative variations in advertising, with a particular focus on how certain elements of discourse are absent, omitted, or substituted in either version. Drawing on a series of case studies, this study demonstrates how brands adjust their discourse to target audiences, linguistic and cultural contexts, as well as regulatory frameworks, using distinct stylistic and visual elements. The differences identified within this study illustrate the diverse strategies of adaptation at play in transnational advertising.*

**Keywords:** *advertising discourse, cosmetics, multimodality, advertising adaptation.*

**Résumé :** *Cet article a pour objectif d'étudier le discours publicitaire relatif aux cosmétiques féminins à travers une analyse contrastive de publicités anglaises et françaises. Nous nous intéressons à des publicités strictement équivalentes afin d'identifier non seulement les similitudes, mais surtout les différences discursives et visuelles qui les distinguent. Notre analyse met en évidence les variations textuelles, visuelles, stylistiques et argumentatives dans la publicité, tout en tenant compte de la manière dont certains éléments du discours peuvent être absents, omis, ou substitués dans l'une ou l'autre version. S'appuyant sur une série d'études de cas, cette étude montre comment les marques adaptent leur discours aux publics cibles, aux contextes linguistico-culturels, et aux cadres réglementaires, par le biais de choix linguistiques et visuels spécifiques. Les différences identifiées dans le cadre de cette étude illustrent les différentes stratégies d'adaptation mises en œuvre dans la publicité transnationale.*

**Mots-clés :** *discours publicitaire, cosmétiques, multimodalité, adaptation publicitaire.*

### **Introduction**

As beauty brands expand worldwide, their advertising messages seldom cross linguistic and cultural boundaries unchanged. This brings to the fore a central question in transnational advertising communication: can the same beauty product carry an identical message and be promoted in the same way across distinct markets? To examine how this issue unfolds in practice, I undertake a contrastive analysis of cosmetics advertising discourse using data drawn from French and British women's magazines, namely *ELLE*, *Vogue*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Marie Claire*, published between 2019 and 2024. From these sources, I compiled a corpus of advertisements selected according to specific equivalence criteria. The corpus advertisements were chosen because they are fully equivalent in terms of both product and brand. My selection criteria required not only that the brand be identical in both versions, but also that the promoted product be strictly the same, thereby ensuring optimal comparability for analysis. This selection process yielded seventeen advertisements<sup>2</sup> sharing common characteristics, three of which are examined in detail in this article. For practical

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<sup>2</sup> As an exception and supplement, two American advertisements meeting the selection criteria for the corpus have been included in the overall study.

reasons, the study focuses solely on static advertisements. Print advertisements can, in fact, be reproduced in their entirety and, to a large extent, in their original form. “*Printed advertisements and billboards are ideal for the analysis of word and image relations; they provide a complete word and image text in a very limited space/time span*” (Forceville, 1996: 71). The value of this contrastive study lies in its ability to reveal differences in communication strategies and contextual adjustments implemented by brands in advertising campaigns. By comparing the English and French editions, I examine not only the modifications introduced but also what these stylistic changes could tell us about the texts and their broader contexts. This approach makes it possible to identify variations that might have been overlooked in a more general analysis, thereby contributing to and enriching the existing literature on the subject. The main objective of this analysis is to investigate the ways in which brands choose to maintain or adapt their advertising content and formats across France and the United Kingdom. More specifically, this study seeks to highlight the linguistic, visual, and argumentative variations underlying these advertising adaptations, while examining the extent to which these adjustments reflect communicational, cultural, and regulatory differences between the French and British markets. To conduct this study, I adopt a qualitative, non-tool-based approach; given the nature of the data and the emphasis placed on the specificities of each text, a tool-based or statistical method proves less suitable. Approaching advertising communications as a dynamic meaning-making vehicle, this analysis draws mainly on frameworks and analytic perspectives of advertising discourse (Cook, 2001; Adam & Bonhomme, 2012) and multimodality (Forceville, 1996; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006).

### 1. Advertising adaptation

First and foremost, it is useful to introduce the concept of *advertising adaptation*, defined by the *Dictionary of Marketing (Dictionnaire du Marketing, n.d.)* as follows:

*Advertising adaptation is the practice of tailoring an advertising message to the characteristics and culture of a particular target market. It is an essential tool for increasing response rates and improving the relevance of advertising messages. It involves the use of various media, such as cultural and linguistic varieties, the tone or content of an advertisement, and the characteristics of the relationship between the market and the brand. [my translation]*<sup>1</sup>

This definition provides a valuable framework for the present study and underscores the importance of adjustments in ensuring the success of a marketing campaign, especially in cross-cultural contexts. A telling example of the importance of advertising adaptation is the failure of Volvo’s 1990 campaign, which sought to promote its product with a standardised message across Europe, disregarding the specific local values of each country. As reported by Goddard (1998: 80), “*the campaign was soon dropped through lack of response, and Volvo went back to some previously accepted traditions – promoting the car’s safety to Swiss and UK audiences; its status to French audiences; for Swedish audiences, its economy; and for Germans, its performance*”. This example demonstrates that adaptation constitutes a crucial strategy for navigating cultural specificities and optimising the reception of advertising messages.

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<sup>1</sup> Original quote: “L’adaptation publicitaire est la pratique consistant à adapter un message publicitaire aux caractéristiques et à la culture d’un marché cible particulier. Il s’agit d’un outil essentiel pour augmenter les taux de réponse et améliorer la pertinence des messages publicitaires. Elle implique l’utilisation de médias divers, comme les variétés culturelles et linguistiques, le ton ou le contenu d’une publicité, et aussi les caractéristiques de la relation entre le marché et la marque.”

*The ultimate goal of all advertisements is to present the information about the product or the services and persuade the potential consumers to buy them. The advertising language is only a means to achieve this purpose. Therefore, what we need to do is to adjust the translation to the target language and target culture so that the target audience could accept it and get action. (Wang & Zhao, 2011: 522)*

Given the market-specific considerations, the adaptation of advertising requires a thorough understanding of the targeted demographic context. As Vandal-Sirois (2016: 31-32) explains,

*[...] the advertising translator must also consider the specific context of the demographic targeted by the translation. For instance, is the original ad featuring a product that is well-known in the source culture, but new to the target culture? Is the product facing well-established local competitors in the target culture that do not exist in the source culture? Will the arguments and the incentives of the source ad be as efficient in the target culture?*

This underscores the importance of adaptation in producing not a mere equivalence that reproduces the original text, but rather a lively form of communication tailored to the target audience. Ultimately, whatever the underlying reason for adapting an advertisement, these choices shape the way the equivalent text is decoded and interpreted.

## 2. Case study (1): linguistic tailoring to the target country



Figure 1: Estée Lauder “Double wear fond de teint” - Marie Claire FR March 2023



Figure 2: Estée Lauder “Double wear foundation” - Vogue UK Novembre 2021



Figure 3: Estée Lauder “Double Wear Foundation” - Vogue USA April 2023

A comparative analysis of advertising for the same product in three different countries shows how the advertising message is adapted to the target audience. This adaptation is particularly evident in the taglines “Fini mat velours. Laisse la peau respirer.”<sup>1</sup> (FR), “The UK’s #1 Prestige Foundation. Tested. Trusted. Loved.” (UK), et “#1 Foundation in the US. Cashmere matte. Breathable. Whisper soft.” (US). From a commercial perspective, the strategic use of claims to superiority (#1) present in the British and American versions is a process of “subjective dissemblance” that shows superiority without explicit comparison to competing products. This discursive strategy “creates a blinding effect whose purpose is to divert consumers’ attention away from a similar product or one that shares the same attributes as the product promoted on the

<sup>1</sup> English translation: “Velvety matte finish. Lets skin breathe”.

market”<sup>1</sup> [my translation] (Ahmed, 2021: 36). This marketing approach serves to maintain consumer focus on the advertised product, direct attention towards its superiority, and limit cognitive diversion to potential competitors. From a linguistic perspective, the adaptation of content according to the country underscores the importance of textual “relevance” in advertising communication. According to Sperber and Wilson (1986: vii), “the principle of relevance is essential to explaining human communication’ [...]” (Forceville, 1996: 83). Importantly, relevance is always relative to a specific receiver, as Forceville (1996: 89) notes:

*Since time, place, and circumstances are ultimately less important than (or rather: subservient to) the identity of the addressee, the fact that ‘relevance’ is always ‘relevance-to somebody’ and, even more specifically, ‘relevance-to-an-individual’ (see Sperber and Wilson 1986:142 ff.) is vitally important.*

The relevance of a message thus depends on how well it is anchored in the cognitive environment of the target audience. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 184) assert, “Meaning is always meaning to someone. There is no such thing as a meaning of a sentence in itself, independent of any people”. In the advertising examples under consideration, “The #1 UK’s Prestige Foundation. Tested. Trusted. Loved.” (UK), and “#1 Foundation in the US. Cashmere matte. Breathable. Whisper soft.” (US), are not neutral statements, but rather markers of socio-cultural belonging that are only relevant to distinct groups of individuals. The “#1” ranking acts as an ostensive stimulus that signals to the audience that the information deserves their attention precisely because it is customised to their specific cultural context. This strategy goes along with the logic of “localization [that] allows for more customized and in all likelihood more applicable target texts. With many kinds of source documents, the extra time, energy, and dollars invested in creating numerous local versions often result in a better overall reception in the target culture” (Vandal-Sirois, 2016: 29). In fact, “an argument is always only relatively effective. Depending on the addressee it is directed at, it can be devilishly powerful or hopelessly impotent. Effective with some people. Ineffective with others.”<sup>2</sup> [my translation] (Viktorovich, 2023: 72). For example, the mention of “#1 in the US” in UK communications would not have the same relevance for a British audience. Rather, it might give rise to questions such as: which product ranks first in the UK? Why is this product number one in the US but not in the UK? This observation ties in with Sperber and Wilson’s theory, according to which a message is relevant if it triggers certain effects in the receiver’s cognitive environment.

*But while an act of communication always comes with the presumption of relevance, this does not entail that relevance is in fact always achieved. A message is relevant to the addressee if it triggers certain effects in his cognitive environment without costing undue energy to process it; if this does not happen, no relevance has been achieved (Forceville, 1996: 90).*

Moreover, the place adjunct “in the US” constitutes an instance of spatial deixis, whereby a specific geographical reference is used to establish the spatial context of the statement. Spatial deixis refers to the use of linguistic means to indicate the anchoring of the utterance in space (Stockwell, 2002: 45). In this case, the prepositional phrase “in the US” functions as a spatial deixis because it delimits the geographical scope of the

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<sup>1</sup> Original quote: “[...] crée un effet d’aveuglement dont le but est de ne pas orienter l’attention du consommateur vers un produit similaire ou qui partage les mêmes qualités que le produit proposé dans le marché commercial”.

<sup>2</sup> Original quote: “Un argument n’est toujours efficace que de manière relative. Selon la personne qui en est destinataire, il peut se révéler diablement percutant, ou désespérément impotent. Efficace face à certains. Inefficace face à d’autres”.

statement, provides a frame of reference, and implies a comparison with other unmentioned geographical areas. Similarly, spatial deixis is implicitly present in the phrase “the UK’s #1 Prestige Foundation”, where the genitive marker in “the UK’s” indicates that the claim is bounded with the spatial framework of the United Kingdom. This use of spatial deixis contextualises claims of product superiority by specifying the market or geographical area in which the product is ranked as number one within a given communication context. For a British reader/consumer, the statement “the UK’s #1 prestige foundation” is more likely to enhance the perceived relevance of the message, whereas for a consumer outside the United Kingdom, the effect may differ; it can highlight the prestige of the British market and/or narrow the scope of the claim. It is therefore crucial for brands to create their message starting from the target rather than from themselves.

Furthermore, the taglines used in UK and US advertisements emphasise the superiority and reputation of the product in their respective markets, thereby exemplifying the concept of “transediting”, which encompasses not only translation but also the adaptation of content to the cultural context of the target audience. The term “transediting”, first used by Stetting (1989), denotes that translation often includes some sort of editing. “[The] term has been coined to refer to ‘the grey area between translating and editing’ [...] the term recognizes the fact that a ‘certain amount of editing has always been included in the translation task’ (Stetting cited in Schäffner 2012: 867), particularly in translations aimed at the target reader” (Pillière, 2021: 52). Stetting (1989: 374) further distinguishes three areas within transediting, namely:

*Adaptation to a standard of efficiency in expression: ‘cleaning up transediting’.*

*Adaptation to the intended function of the translated text in its new social context: ‘situational transediting’.*

*Adaptation to the needs and conventions of the target culture’s ‘cultural transediting’ (Ibid.).*

In the adaptation of the advertising texts under scrutiny, two types of transediting are identified: situational and cultural transediting. Situational transediting is present in references to the product’s superiority in the market of the target country (“UK”, “US”). Cultural transediting is also reflected in the way the products are described. The French version foregrounds the product’s benefits for the skin (“laisse la peau respirer”; “lets skin breathe”), whereas the British and American versions use different qualifiers (loyalty rhetoric “Tested. Trusted. Loved” - UK / sensory experience and accessible luxury “Cashmere. Breathable. Whisper soft” - US). Taking the target reader into account allows us to select and frame information accordingly and create messages that fit perfectly into the local context. This approach also helps to create an identity for the female reader-consumer. As Cameron and Panović point out (2014: 75),

*Creating an identity for the consumer, which can be expressed through a certain product or brand, is therefore part of the business of the advertising text. The more we identify with the positions advertisers construct for us textually, the more likely we are to see their products as appropriate and desirable expressions of our individual tastes and personalities.*

### **3. Case study (2): Adaptation of the rhetorical approach**



Figure 4: Avène “Hyaluron Activ B3” - Vogue UK November 2023 / ELLE Fr 9 March 2023

A comparative analysis of Avène advertisements for the product Hyaluron Activ B3 reveals distinct communication strategies in terms of visual layout, textual content, and argumentative techniques used in each market. At first glance, the divergence in visual and textual emphasis is striking. The English advertisement favours an approach focused on the product and its effects, featuring less textual amount of information than its French equivalent. The photograph of the model, common to both versions (a close-up  $\frac{3}{4}$  profile) establishes visual complicity and positional alignment between the subject and the viewer, an effect that Machin and Mayr (2012: 99) associate to this particular angle: “if we see a photograph of a person side-on but very close-up, this can connote a close alignment and sharedness of position”, “[...] If we see them further away, there is a greater sense that we are a more remote observer of the scene.” Although the photograph of the model remains identical in the two versions of the ad, the visual presentation varies significantly in its composition and symbolic scope. The English version prominently features the product jar alongside a concise and direct message: “INNOVATION HYALURON ACTIV B3, Skin looks firmer from 2 weeks.” This strategy emphasises the visible and rapid effects of the product by using the comparative adjective “firmer”, creating presuppositions that the skin initially appears less firm, while simultaneously implying that increased skin firmness is desirable. Next to the jar, the phrase “Hyaluron Acid & Niacinamide / Acts on the cause & visible signs of ageing” reinforces the idea of targeted and effective action. The addition of a QR code with the question “Need some expert advice?” introduces an interactive and personalised dimension to the ad, while maintaining simplicity and accessibility. This QR code functions as a technological call-to-action that acts as a semiotic bridge linking the print advertising text to additional content within another semiotic modality, that of the digital web.

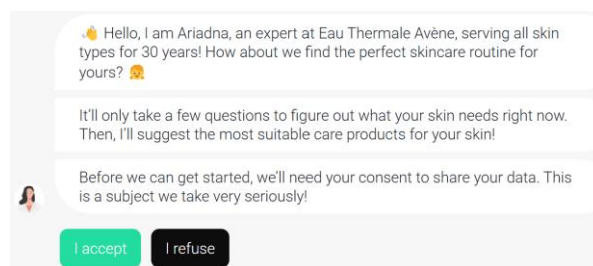


Figure 5: Where the QR code leads - Avène “Hyaluron Activ B3” ad - Vogue UK November 2023

This configuration is an example of mixed media communication, where printed material is extended to include digitised<sup>1</sup> components. The QR code in the English version, linked to the interrogative statement “Need some expert advice?”, facilitates a more personalised and advice-oriented interaction and provides a more immersive experience for the reader. Compared to the French version, the English advertisement adopts a more concise outline while offering prospective consumers the opportunity to access additional content via the QR code. This approach may reflect a cultural preference in the English-speaking market for more direct and interactive communication, while granting readers the liberty to explore additional information according to their individual needs and interests. Thus, the QR code serves as an alternative to the higher information density that characterises the French advertisement. This allows the English version to maintain conciseness and avoid linguistic overload that could seem overwhelming for an advertising communication, while satisfying consumers seeking more detailed information.

In contrast, the French version takes a much more developed and explanatory approach. The advertisement opens with a rhetorical question: “Des actifs anti-âge connus peuvent-ils encore nous étonner? Démonstration avec HYALURON ACTIV B3, soin concentré en Acide Hyaluronique et Niacinamide, créé par le LABORATOIRE DERMATOLOGIQUE AVENE pour offrir une nouvelle jeunesse à la peau.”<sup>2</sup> This wording invites the reader to engage in reflection and highlights the laboratory’s expertise, particularly through the capitalisation of the product and laboratory names. As Ahmed (2021: 40) points out, “We can say that advertising makes extensive use of questions that do not require prior answers from the recipient. The main purpose of these questions is to arouse curiosity and capture the reader’s attention regarding the nature of the product and its qualities.” [my translation]<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, the French version features an image of a cell resembling illustrations commonly found in experimental science textbooks, highlighted alongside a thorough text explaining the cellular ageing process, which is notably absent from the English version: “Certaines cellules font vieillir la peau. C’est une découverte majeure qui révolutionne la science anti-âge: les cellules vieillissantes contaminent les cellules

<sup>1</sup> The term *digitised* here refers specifically to the technical conversion from analogue to digital media, distinct from *digital*, which broadly denotes the use of digital technologies.

<sup>2</sup> English translation: “Can well-known anti-ageing ingredients still surprise us? Find out with HYALURON ACTIV B3, a concentrated treatment with hyaluronic acid and niacinamide, created by AVENE DERMATOLOGICAL LABORATORIES to rejuvenate skin”.

<sup>3</sup> Original quote: “Nous pouvons dire que la publicité recourt beaucoup à l’emploi des questions qui n’exigent pas de réponses préalables de la part du destinataire. Le but principal de ces questions est d’éveiller la curiosité et de capter l’attention du lecteur sur la nature du produit et ses qualités”.

jeunes, propageant ainsi le vieillissement autour d'elles"<sup>1</sup>. This approach differs significantly from the English version in both the level of detail and the density of scientific vocabulary. As cited in Forceville (1996), Barthes asserts that the text plays a crucial role in anchoring visual information and limiting the range of possible interpretations of the accompanying visual elements.

*Barthes (1986/1964) argues that in advertising verbal information 'anchors' visual information: the former, that is, not only helps identify elements in the latter, but also restricts the number of interpretations it might give rise to. Even though Barthes's view had to be qualified in that, particularly in modern advertising, pictures may 'anchor' text as well as the other way round, text is still a vital element in making sense of an ad. The less verbal anchoring is present, we may deduce, the greater the range of interpretations that is possible. (Forceville, 1996: 102)*

In the French ad, the main text reads as follows: "Peau régénérée dès 15 jours"<sup>2</sup>, preceded by "L'innovation anti-âge Avène : Concentrer deux actifs clés, l'acide hyaluronique et le Niacinamide 6% pour agir sur la cause du vieillissement, prolonger la jeunesse des cellules et repousser les signes de l'âge"<sup>3</sup>. This carefully detailed phrasing is further reinforced by the highlighted text: "Innovation anti-âge Hyaluron Activ B3: Acide Hyaluronique, Niacinamide 6%. Agit sur la cause du vieillissement. Raffermit - Corrige les rides"<sup>4</sup>. The French version extends this textually rich approach by including three footnotes that provide additional explanatory details: "1/ Test *in vitro*. 2/ % satisfaction, 65 utilisatrices. 3/ Le Green Impact Index est un outil de mesure de l'éco-socio-conception des produits cosmétiques et de santé familiale. Sa méthode, conçue par Pierre Fabre et évaluée par AFNOR Certification, repose sur la cotation de 20 critères environnementaux et sociétaux."<sup>5</sup> (The socio-environmental impact is rated "B"). Footnotes can be considered as a form of textual deixis, also known as discourse deixis, that involves referring to elements within the text itself.

*Textual deixis— expressions that foreground the textuality of the text, including explicit 'signposting' such as chapter titles and paragraphing; co-reference to other stretches of text; reference to the text itself or the act of production; [...]. (Stockwell, 2002: 46)*

In light of this definition, footnotes fulfil the function of textual deixis in several ways: they establish an explicit link between part of the main text and additional information, thus acting as internal pointers within the text, they operate as deictic markers that direct readers' attention to another part of the document, and they enable specific textual elements to be referenced, which is a key characteristic of textual deixis. The details added through the footnotes reinforce the scientific and environmental credibility of the promoted product and the brand as a whole. The presence of quantitative data, which is absent in the English version, along with more technical terminology, reflects an intention to deliver precise and scientific information, thereby positioning the product as

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<sup>1</sup> English translation: "Certain cells cause the skin to age. This is a major discovery that is revolutionizing anti-ageing science: ageing cells contaminate young cells, spreading ageing around them".

<sup>2</sup> English translation: "Skin regenerated from 15 days onward".

<sup>3</sup> English translation: "Avène's anti-ageing innovation: Combining two key active ingredients, hyaluronic acid and 6% niacinamide, to target the cause of ageing, prolong cellular youthfulness, and delay the signs of ageing".

<sup>4</sup> English translation: "Hyaluron Activ B3 anti-ageing innovation: Hyaluronic acid, 6% Niacinamide. Acts on the cause of ageing. Firms – Corrects wrinkles".

<sup>5</sup> English translation: "1/ In vitro test. 2/ % satisfaction rate among 65 users. 3/ The Green Impact Index is a tool for measuring the eco-socio-design of cosmetics and family health products. Developed by Pierre Fabre and assessed by AFNOR Certification, it rates products based on 20 environmental and societal criteria.

a scientifically grounded solution. This way, French advertisers build a genuine “line of argumentation”, i.e. a “logically connected set of arguments linked together in a coherent system”<sup>1</sup> (Viktorovich, 2023: 97) [*my translation*].

In addition, the QR code is also present in the French version, revealing a resolutely modern communication strategy, albeit with notable nuances in its implementation. Accompanied by the phrase “En savoir plus sur l’innovation” (“Find out more about the innovation”), the QR code links to a WebAR<sup>2</sup> experience accessible only via mobile phones. This web page invites users to “discover a unique experience” (“Découvrez une expérience unique”) and to “start here” (“Commencer ici”)<sup>3</sup>. The interactive format enables users to explore a 3D animation of the cream jar opening, complemented by three dynamic and visually appealing videos that highlight the key elements of the print advertisement, namely an explanation of skin ageing, the product’s key ingredients, and the promised effects. Furthermore, another interaction-inviting element is present in the form of a small envelope icon labelled “Join us” (“Rejoignez-nous”), which, when clicked, directs users to the brand’s newsletter subscription interface. This multi-channel strategy strengthens reader engagement by offering a rich and contemporary user experience that reinforces the primary advertising message and fosters greater audience loyalty. Such an approach aligns with the extensive textual elements and the wealth of rhetorical devices already present in the French print ad.

This advertisement also displays instances of code-mixing. The bilingual labelling “Crème régénération cellulaire / Cell renewal cream” not only ensures regulatory compliance but also facilitates the reception of the product by the English-speaking public. In doing so, the brand successfully combines its identity with a broader international reach. Additionally, the phrase “Made in France” prominently featured on the jar emphasises the product’s French origin and leverages the international reputation of French cosmetic excellence.

All these differences between the two editions of the ad reflect distinct strategic approaches tailored to their respective target audiences. The French advertisement adopts an informative, explanatory, and highly detailed style, characterised by scientifically loaded visual connotation, which aligns well with an audience that values empirical and scientific arguments. Conversely, the English version makes use of a more succinct tone that goes straight to the point, focusing mainly on visible and rapid benefits of the product as well as the individual needs of (future) consumers. This contrast reflects a British cultural context that values efficiency and simplicity over a more elaborate scientific approach.

#### **4. Case study (3): image adjustment**

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<sup>1</sup> Original quote: une “ligne argumentative” est “un ensemble d’arguments articulés les uns aux autres en un système cohérent”.

<sup>2</sup> WebAR: Web Augmented Reality.

<sup>3</sup> It was not possible to take screenshots of the page due to its three-dimensional nature and the dynamic content. This technical limitation prevented the visual display of the WebAR experience, which requires active interaction with a mobile device to be fully grasped.



Figure 6: Lancôme cream “Rénergie” - Vogue UK April 2023



Figure 7: Lancôme cream “Rénergie” - ELLE FR 14 December 2023

First, it is noteworthy that the brand chose to feature an actress as its ambassador, a strategy that underscores the persuasive role of celebrity figures in advertising. Indeed, “celebrity endorsement bestows influence on the product in question” (O’Shaughnessy & O’Shaughnessy, 2004: 148). In this analysis, I shed light on a specific aspect of the visual treatment in these advertisements, namely the presence of two spotlights: one relates to the visual emphasis on the product itself, and the other is the focus on the celebrity’s face that fills an entire page of the advertising campaign. The distribution of attention in this advertisement is not fortuitous, as Stockwell (2002: 18) points out:

*Attention is selective rather than an indiscriminating blanket phenomenon. Certain elements in a visual field are selected for attention, and these will typically be the elements that are regarded as figures. [...] Cognitive psychologists have used the metaphor of the ‘spotlight’ as a means of understanding the focus of attention. Whatever*

*is in the spotlight at a certain moment will receive all the interest and processing focus of the viewer or reader.*

Thus, the visual design of the advertisement is based on a strategic selection of salient elements that guide the viewer's gaze alternately towards the product and the celebrity who embodies the promised results. In this discussion, particular attention is drawn to the second page, which at first sight features the same portrait of the brand's ambassador. However, there is a notable difference in the image: in the French version, the photograph appears to have been edited to remove the signs of ageing, particularly the wrinkles on the forehead, around the mouth, and on the neck, as well as to erase a mole on the cheek. Conversely, the British version presents a more naturalistic portrayal that seems closer to reality, to the extent that, when placed side by side, the image broadcast in France could be perceived as an "after" to the one published in the United Kingdom. The latter thus seems to ensure that the promised effect remains authentically faithful to reality, avoiding any exaggeration that could mislead consumers regarding the product's actual performance. This visual discrepancy can be explained by external restrictions related to differing legal factors in the two countries.

In France, the regulation of images in cosmetics advertising is carried out through the ARPP<sup>1</sup>, a regulatory system that aims to guarantee the truthfulness of the messages conveyed. On the one hand, since 2017, French law stipulates that any commercially used photograph of models whose physical appearance has been digitally altered to slim or thicken the figure must bear the label "photographie retouchée" ("edited photograph") (Décret n° 2017-738, art. R. 2133-6). This obligation, which mainly addresses alterations to body shape, applies to all advertising media and exposes offenders to financial penalties of 37,500 euros up to 30% of advertising costs. However, this disclaimer does not explicitly cover facial retouching and is not mandatory for minor modifications such as adjustments involving make-up or lighting. On the other hand, the ARPP states in its "Recommendation on cosmetic products, version 8" (in force since 2019)<sup>2</sup> that:

*a/ Digital techniques may be used to enhance the beauty of images in order to communicate the brand's personality and positioning and/or any specific product benefits.*

*b/ However, the illustration of a product's performance must not be misleading:*

*b1/ Digital techniques must not alter images of models in such a way that their shapes or characteristics become misleading about the results that can be achieved by the product<sup>3</sup>.*

Thus, as for the ad under analysis, French advertisers consider the touch-ups applied to the ad image as minor enhancements rather than excessive or misleading alterations. The adaptation of the advertising image in the English version mirrors a more stringent regulatory framework. Although there is no explicit legal obligation to label retouched images, advertisements in the UK are subject to rigorous controls set by the ASA<sup>4</sup> and

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<sup>1</sup> ARPP: Autorité de Régulation Professionnelle de la Publicité (Professional Advertising Regulatory Authority).

<sup>2</sup> "Recommandation produits cosmétiques version 8" (en vigueur depuis le 1<sup>er</sup> juillet 2019).

<sup>3</sup> Original quote: "a/ Des techniques numériques peuvent être utilisées pour améliorer la beauté des images afin de communiquer sur la personnalité et le positionnement de la marque et/ou tout avantage spécifique du produit.

b/ Cependant, l'illustration de la performance d'un produit ne doit pas être trompeuse :  
b1/ Les techniques numériques ne doivent pas modifier les images des modèles de telle manière que leurs formes ou leurs caractéristiques deviennent trompeuses sur le résultat pouvant être atteint par le produit".

<sup>4</sup> ASA: Advertising Standards Authority.

CAP<sup>1</sup>. The latter states that “*the use of post-production techniques through the re-touching of photographic images requires particular attention to avoid misleading consumers*” (CAP, 2011: 5). The ASA’s guidelines explicitly state that advertisers must not exaggerate the effect of their product on the skin:

*Marketers should not exaggerate the effect their product is likely to have on the skin. While favourable lighting, for example, is often used in anti-wrinkle cream advertisements, the ASA has upheld complaints where the post production re-touching of photographs has been considered to give a misleading impression about the results a product is likely to achieve on the model shown. (ASA, 23 March 2023).*

The ASA therefore intervenes on a case-by-case basis, especially when visual alterations could mislead the public about a product’s effects. In this regard, it considers alterations related to product performance to be unacceptable, as indicated in the following regulatory text:

*The following are examples likely to mislead and are unacceptable:*

- *Re-touching related to any characteristics directly relevant to the apparent performance of the product being advertised. For example, removing or reducing the appearance of lines and wrinkles around the eyes for an eye cream advertisement or increasing the length or thickness of eyelashes in an advertisement for mascara. [...] (CAP, 2011: 5).*

It is unequivocally established that any image airbrushing that diminishes or removes visible signs of ageing in UK advertising communications is strictly prohibited in order to prevent any form of deception linked to digitally altered images.

*The main message here is that advertising claims (including visual claims) should not mislead by exaggerating the effect the product is capable of achieving. Marketers should ensure they retain appropriate material to be able to demonstrate whether any re-touching has been carried out, in the event of an investigation (ASA, 20 Dec 2023).*

Hence, the implementation of formal legislative restrictions on photo retouching in the United Kingdom may encourage advertisers to adopt a more cautious approach to avoid potential infringements for misleading advertising. For instance, in 2012, the ASA banned an advertisement for L’Oréal’s “Revitalift Repair 10” anti-wrinkle cream on the grounds that the image had been altered to a degree that substantially changed the appearance of the skin, thereby producing misleading claims and visual elements (Cosmeticobs, 2012). Indeed, the UK is widely considered “*much more attentive to the veracity of commercial messages than any advertising regulatory authority in Europe, particularly in the cosmetics sector.*”<sup>2</sup>[my translation] (Cosmeticobs, 2012). To conclude, a comparative analysis of the two advertising versions shows that brands must comply with the specific regulatory standards of each target market. Taking local legislation into account is therefore a key factor in ensuring both legal compliance and effective advertising implementation. As Pillière (2021: 15) emphasises, “*Not only the language changes with translation; so does the context, the intent, the function, the entire communicative situation*”.

## Conclusion

A greater degree of similarity in the reproduction of equivalent advertisements across two European countries was beforehand expected; however, a completely faithful replication of both text and image proved to be limited. The corpus-based approach

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<sup>1</sup> CAP: Committee of Advertising Practice.

<sup>2</sup> Original quote: “[...] bien plus attentifs à l’honnêteté des messages commerciaux que n’importe quelle autorité de régulation de la publicité en Europe, particulièrement en matière de cosmétique”.

adopted in this study helped bring to light significant differences in terms of stylistic and argumentative strategies used in English and French advertisements. Adjustments enable messages to be conveyed not only in a linguistically understandable way but also in a format that is relevant and efficient for the target audience. Both discursive and extralinguistic choices may vary considerably depending on the target audience, which is why it is important for brands to have a thorough knowledge of their readership before launching an advertising campaign. Adaptation, therefore, often entails substantive modifications to both textual and visual strategies to align with local values as well as target consumer expectations. The analysis of the data exhibited in this paper demonstrates that advertising adaptation brings about a pragmatic transformation of the advertising message, where loyalty to the source material is partially overshadowed by the need for situational anchoring. To sum up, as beauty brands circulate globally, their advertising does not simply cross borders; it is reshaped by language, culture, and market demands.

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