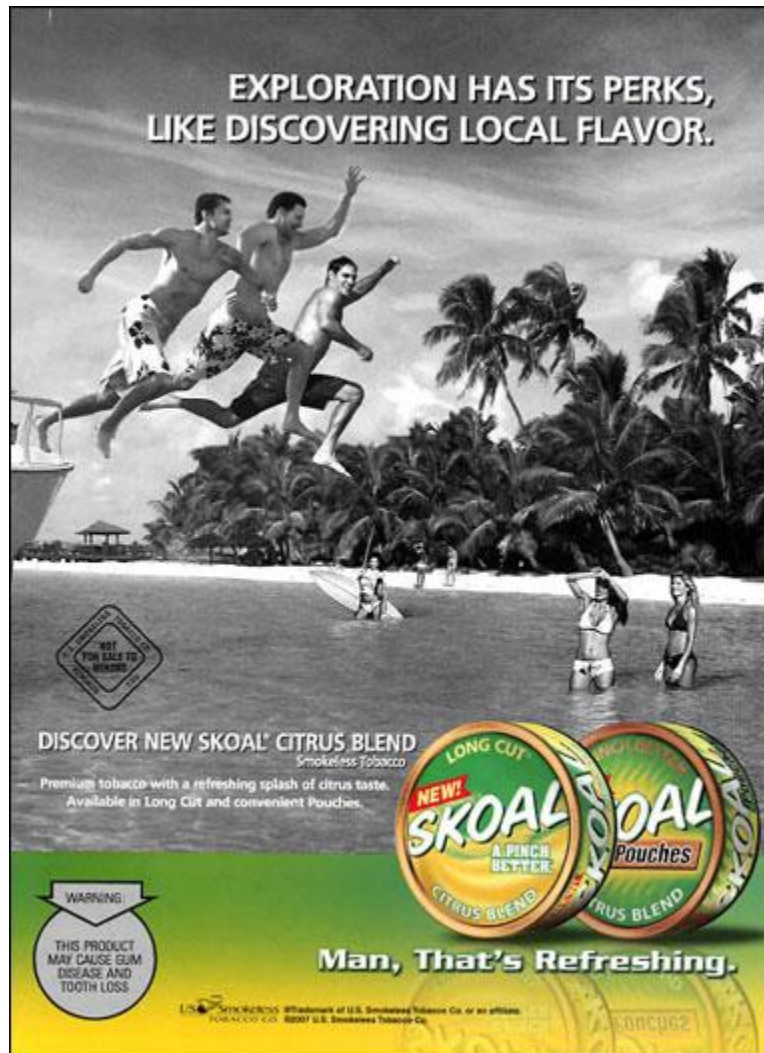


# Deconstruct this!

(Example from Media Literacy Project)



## 1. Whose message is this? Who created or paid for it? Why?

The U.S. Smokeless Tobacco Company, which is mentioned at the bottom of this ad in very fine print, paid for this message. It paid for this ad in order to promote and sell one of its tobacco products, Skoal Citrus Blend tobacco.

## 2. Who is the “target audience”? What is their age, ethnicity, class, profession, interests, etc.? What words, images or sounds suggest this?

The target audience appears to be younger, white, males, between the ages of 16 and 35. From the images and language we see, this ad suggests that the men are interested in leisure activities like boating, adventure, exploration, the outdoors, getting attention from women, staying fit, and having fun.

### 3. What is the “text” of the message?

(What we actually see and/or hear: written or spoken words, photos, drawings, logos, design, music, sounds, etc.) The main image in this ad is a black and white photo of three men wearing board shorts jumping from the deck of a large boat (which barely makes it into the photo) into shallow ocean waters near a beach. In the background of the photo we see three young women wading in the water, what appears to be a clear sky, and a mostly-deserted beach with palm trees and two women looking at the men from ashore. The words “exploration has its perks, like discovering local flavor” appear in all caps at the top of the photo. The bottom of the ad is made up of mainly green and yellow colors, and we see two cans of Skoal Citrus Blend spit tobacco, and the wording “Man, that’s refreshing.” There’s also the wording “Discover new Skoal Citrus Blend” and a warning in small black print on a gray background which reads “Warning: This product may cause gum disease and tooth loss.”

### 4. What is the “subtext” of the message?

(What do you think is the hidden or unstated meaning?)

There are many subtexts including:

- Skoal Citrus Blend allows you and your buddies to have lots of fun and adventure in your life*
- Women are one of the perks when you explore new places*
- Skoal will make you feel youthful, adventurous, and attractive to women*
- Skoal makes men want to jump high in the air into 3 feet of water*
- Discovering Skoal will allow you to experience the culture of the tropics*
- You will be part of the popular crowd among your friends and women when you use Skoal*
- Products that cause gum disease and tooth loss are refreshing*

### 5. What kind of lifestyle is presented? Is it glamorized? How?

The lifestyle that’s presented is one of leisure and fun. It’s glamorized because it seems to be exempt of responsibilities such as going to work, paying bills, taking care of children, communicating with a spouse/partner, doing chores, etc. It’s

also glamorized because, like so many ads, it shows youthful, attractive, and fit people.

## **6. What values are expressed?**

This ad promotes values of friendship, youthfulness, living a carefree life, risk-taking, and the importance of spending time away from work.

## **7. What positive messages are presented? What negative messages are presented?**

Positive: This ad seems to promote the importance of friends and enjoying yourself. We also see images of people who look physically healthy, when we know that smoking is unhealthy. It also seems like the U.S. Smokeless Tobacco Company cares about us because they put warnings in their ads about the dangers of spit tobacco.

Negative: The ad tells us that spit tobacco is “refreshing” when many of us know it has a bad taste. The lack of information about spit tobacco is, in itself, a negative message because we don’t have any visual clues from this ad that tobacco leads to dental problems like tooth loss or diseases like cancer.

## **8. What groups of people does this message empower? What groups does it disempower? How does this serve the media maker's interests?**

This ad empowers the advertisers who designed this ad (by demonstrating they are talented and creative in their marketing efforts) and also the people at US Smokeless Tobacco Company because this ad helps sell their product. It also appears to empower people who use spit tobacco by showing a fun and glamorous lifestyle; however, we know that in the long term, spit tobacco users may be disempowered because of the tobacco-related health issues they might face.

This message disempowers people who are trying to quit using tobacco, because it doesn’t show any of the negative aspects of tobacco use (except the small warning in the lower left corner) including addiction. It also disempowers those who speak out against tobacco use: health care professionals including doctors, nurses, health prevention specialists, health organizations (like American Cancer Society), and educators who try to teach others about the dangers of starting tobacco use or continuing tobacco use. Finally, it disempowers women who are placed in the ad to be sex symbols.

This ad serves the media maker's interest because this message continues to help promote tobacco use, sell spit tobacco, and make money for the U.S. Smokeless Tobacco Company.

### 9. What part of the story is not being told?

The main story that's not being told is that using spit tobacco continues to be an unhealthy choice. We know that spit tobacco use is connected to cancers of the mouth, tongue and throat, and poor dental hygiene. Tobacco companies don't tell us that the only growing portion of the tobacco market is spit tobacco--while cigarette sales continue to decrease, tobacco companies are trying to find more ways to market tobacco to folks. Tobacco companies also tell us they don't want underage people to use tobacco; yet, secret documents have shown us that tobacco companies target youth.



<http://medialiteracyproject.org/>