

A Student

“Essential Oils Have Healed Our Family for Centuries: No Vaccine is a Safe Vaccine” reads a sign attached to the side of a barn in middle-of-nowhere Kansas. Drivers pass the sign traveling eighty miles per hour down the highway, giving little notice to the opinions of the strange farmers. Beyond the barn bearing the sign is a family graveyard. This was common in the settling of the American West, though the size of that particular family graveyard is not. It is clear by the remaining cracked concrete foundations that homes had to be moved to make space for more family remains, and that fences had been moved and their perimeters expanded many times in recent years. The pseudoscience in which this family had put their faith did not appear to serve them well. *The Onion* uses techniques of satire and propaganda to defend a nonsensical product in order to satirize consumer gullibility to pseudoscience in advertising and medicine.

Initially, *The Onion* introduces (lines 1-26) the fictional but well-polished description of “MagnaSoles” both as a comment on advertising and on consumer habits. *The Onion* describes the product as originating from “five forms of pseudoscience”—openly stating the fallacious nature of the product—as its first selling point. This implies that American consumers are obsessed with scientific and technological improvements, but they are not concerned with the integrity of that science. The article transitions to a description of the first feature of the soles, their ability to “properly align the biomagnetic field around your foot.” This concept, of course, is nonexistent, but sounds quite professional and potentially revolutionary if it were real. The consumer either does not know or does not care that the pseudoscience they are being marketed is false. The use of satirical buzzwords and false advertising continues as the “total foot-rejuvenation system” that is MagnaSoles is introduced. *The Onion* describes the “semi-plausible

medical medical technique known as reflexology,” a feature of the shoes that magically heals every part of the body through some loose correspondence with the sole of one’s foot. Again the advertisement demonstrates its own *semi*-plausibility, commenting on the ineptitude or perhaps simple apathy of the American consumer while using buzzwords to gloss over the impossibility of the product. This lack of scientific integrity, though plainly admitted to the consumer, does not overpower the use of scientific buzzwords that accompany it.

Secondly, *The Onion* employs (lines 27-51) the product’s many impossible features in order to demonstrate the willingness of American consumers to believe what is too good to be true. As a comedic reference to those commonly known to believe and practice pseudoscience, the advertisement references the “healing power of crystals” included in MagnaSoles as a means of providing “vibrational biofeedback”—another nonexistent, comical, but nonetheless intriguing to some feature. Transitioning to the new and necessary form of nonexistent science of Terranometry, the article gives a detailed explanation of the “special resonator nodules” within MagnaSoles and their capability of matching the earth’s vibration rate of 32.805 kilofrankels. Though this data is nonsensical and meaningless, it is data nonetheless—often the only requirement of “skeptical” consumers who doubt the legitimacy of advertising claims. The advertisement has fulfilled nearly all of the descriptive requirements for the product to be considered legitimate by American consumers.

Finally, *The Onion* provides testimony (lines 52-69) for the product as a comment on the gullibility of consumers towards reviews—whether reliable or not. The final requirement of a skeptical consumer would be testimonials in favor of the functionality of a product, especially one promising so much as MagnaSoles. *The Onion* uses the “plain folk” technique to convince consumers of the value of the product, providing testimony in common language: Helen Kuhn

“twisted [her] ankle something awful,” but the healing powers of MagnaSoles have allowed her to “walk comfortably” after seven weeks—plenty of time for either her injuries to heal, or for the product to magically function. That testimony concludes with a call to “prove that MagnaSoles didn’t heal [her],” something the reader cannot personally do. If they cannot prove the ineffectiveness of the product, then it by default must be effective. The article transitions finally to a testimony of a man, Geoff DeAngilis, who gladly chose to pay \$20 for MagnaSoles instead of having an expensive and entirely medically necessary spinal realignment. He, of course, argues that “MagnaSoles really seem like they’re working.” If this many, with such dire medical problems, can attest to the functionality of the pseudoscientific product, then the science behind them must be in fact of the highest quality.

The family graveyard in Kansas is, thankfully, the only of its kind along the well-traversed interstate highway. Past the sign on the barn in both directions, however, are advertisements for other products painted on larger, professionally designed billboards. Many gawk at the family graveyard filled by a belief in pseudoscience while seriously considering the purchase of a product advertised on a billboard five miles behind them that seemed too good to be true. How can it be, though, if it’s advertised so prolifically and so professionally?