

Multimodal Argumentation in (Pro-Social) Advertising

Exposé of Workshop – COST/APPLY | Örebro 6. April 2022

1 Introduction

The workshop is the follow-up to the lecture and will be concerned with analysing the argument structures in commercial and pro-social advertisements. We will come to appreciate the ingenuity of persuasive ideas and the richness of multimodal design solutions. As a result, it will become clear that arguments in advertising are of a special kind: loose in structure, implicit in form, minimalist in signing and dependent on knowledge of the respective public discourses. An important focus will be on the role of visuals in constructing arguments: Which part of an argument can images constitute? What is the logical relation between the image and the text message? Another central issue is to what extent and exactly how multimodal arguments in advertising are carried or facilitated by rhetorical operations, such as metonymy, metaphor, punning, allusion etc. Overall, the workshop seeks to sensitize participants to the richness and diversity of arguments in advertising, while at the same time highlighting the underlying systematicity regarding multimodal argument structure. A recurrent theme will be potential differences (and similarities) between commercial and pro-social ads regarding the arguments we find in them.

2 Instructions for Reading

Altogether four texts have been suggested as preparatory reading; these will also feature in the lecture. What follows is a short commentary on the four texts, giving participants a sense of what the texts contain and how they should be read. The list recommends the order in which the texts ought to be read:

1. **RIPLEY 2008:** This text could ideally form the starting point of your reading programme. It makes the strong claim that all advertising comes in the form of argumentation and substantiates this claim by introducing major theories or approaches to argumentation. The most interesting and relevant views on argumentation are: logical form, argument structure, pragma-dialectics and appeals other than to logos (e.g., the role of emotion). While not specifically addressing images, the paper is a strong plea for the visual or multimodal nature of argumentation in advertising.
2. **GRANCEA 2017:** This text focuses on the conditions for visual images to become valid parts of an argument. It specifically addresses the multimodal nature of print-ads as combinations of text and image. The paper highlights non-redundancy and a sufficiently clear and specific verbal context as prerequisites for images to become essential building blocks in arguments. The paper also discusses how images can be proof of a claim. While the author is sceptical of rhetorical figures as being necessary elements in argumentation, she supports a view of images as capable of taking over functions in arguments.
3. **ROCCI ET AL. 2018:** This article is a sketch of a model proposed for the analysis of multimodal arguments. This model distinguishes so-called 'layers', which can be thought of as steps in analysis. Essentially, an analysis of multimodal argumentation involves taking

stock of all signs, recognizing the ways in which these signs connect spatially (layout) and logically, and reconstructing the logical form of the argument, while also taking note of rhetorical operations in text and/or image. It may be worthwhile to get hold of your own simple advertisement and try out the model yourself.

4. **STÖCKL 2021:** This text is an empirical study of 232 ads, all of which involve digitally manipulated images (print-CGI). It suggests that design operations are at work in the image-making, i.e., manipulations of the visual structure of the images. These have a rhetorical potential, that is, a specific function they play in facilitating the multimodal argumentation. Overall, the paper is a plea for the visual richness of contemporary print advertising, drawing attention to the role of rhetoric generally. For arguments to take effect, text and image must relate logically and employ rhetorical operations.

3 Plan and Aims

The workshop envisages three parts, but seeks to maintain flexibility in adjusting the programme to the needs of the participants.

1. **REFLECTION/QUESTIONS:** The first part of the workshop will check your general understanding of major issues raised in the lecture and in the readings. We will revise central approaches to argumentation and some of the properties typical of multimodal argumentation in advertising. This section will be completed by a rough analysis of one or two ads in the group for purposes of illustrating main theoretical assumptions.
2. **A RATIONALE FOR ANALYSIS:** The second part of the workshop is to try and test analytical models designed to tease out a reconstruction of arguments in advertisements. In this section, the focus is on a practical step-by-step routine that can bring out the major properties of a given argument in concrete ads. Again, we will complete this section with a more rigorous and critical analysis of one or two ads.
3. **COMMERCIAL VS. PRO-SOCIAL ADS:** In the third and final part of the workshop we will address the potential differences between commercial and pro-social ads. For this purpose, we will be working in small groups on selected ad samples. These will be provided and come from two thematic domains each: e.g., cars and soft drinks vs. health and environmental protection. The results will be reflected in the forum.

4 References

- GRANCEA, I. (2017) Types of visual arguments. *Argumentum. Journal of the Seminar of Discursive Logic, Argumentation Theory and Rhetoric* 15 (2), 16–34. (>> *Visual Images as Arguments*)
- RIPLEY, M. L. (2008) Argumentation theorists argue that an ad is an argument. *Argumentation* 22, 507–519. (>> *Main Strands of Argumentation Theory Applied to Ads*)
- ROCCI, A.; MAZZALI-LURATI, S. and POLLAROLI, C. (2018) The argumentative and rhetorical function of multimodal metonymy. *Semiotica* 220, 123–153. (>> *Model for Analysing Multimodal Arguments*)
- STÖCKL, H. (2021): Pixel surgery and the doctored image. The rhetorical potential of visual compositing in print advertising. In: PFLAEGING, J. and WILDFEUER, J. and BATEMAN, J. (eds.) *Empirical Multimodality Research. Methods, Evaluations, Implications*. Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 187–209. (>> *Role of Visual Rhetoric for Multimodal Arguments*)