

# Forms of manipulation in the discourse of social advertising

*Tatiana Valentinovna Anisimova*<sup>1\*</sup>, *Svetlana Anatolievna Chubai*<sup>2</sup>, and *Elena Grigorievna Gimpelson*<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Kaliningrad Branch of the Saint Petersburg University of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation, Department of Socio-Economic and Humanitarian Disciplines, Kaliningrad, Russia

<sup>2</sup>Volgograd State University, Department of Russian Philology and Journalism, Volgograd, Russia

<sup>3</sup>Haifa, Israel

**Abstract.** The article examines the specifics of using manipulation techniques in the discourse of social advertising. It is proposed to refer to manipulation the methods of distorting the linguistic picture of the addressee's world with the help of the possibilities provided by linguistic mechanisms. The research material was 12,000 posters collected by the continuous sampling method from various media banks on the Internet. The authors refer to the most frequent manipulation techniques, objectively inherent in the discourse of social advertising, the distortions in the intensity of promoting ideas in the public consciousness, and the use of pseudo-rational arguments. The presence of these manipulation techniques is due to the fact that social advertising posters are produced most often by public funds that seek to promote only the ideas that are close to them. A situation arises when not those values that are more important for society are more actively promoted, but those that have material support from funds. The ideas promoted by different funds may conflict with each other and with the traditional values of the nation. In this "war of ideas", two situations should be distinguished: 1) advertising encroaches on the values, which are traditionally recognized as important and promoted by state advertising (for example, for same-sex marriage, against vaccinations, etc.). 2) advertising raises questions regarding the settlement of relationships between people. Usually, such relationships have many options, so it is impossible to establish clear boundaries of a positive or negative attitude towards an object. Different funds interpret such situations in various ways in accordance with their ideology. Another active form of manipulation is the use of various forms of statistics that cannot be verified and which do not have any authoritative source behind them.

**Keywords:** social advertising, thematic composition of social advertising, manipulation, suggestion, pseudo-rational arguments

---

\* Corresponding author: [atvritor@yandex.ru](mailto:atvritor@yandex.ru)

## 1 Introduction

Verbal manipulation has long been an object of close attention of scientists (see, for example, [1-5]). Despite this, until now, it has not been possible to develop a unified approach to assessing this phenomenon or at least agree on the unity of the conceptual apparatus. The abundance and contradiction of various points of view lead to the fact that “manipulation is spoken of as a universal property of any communication. Manipulation appears to be a highly ambivalent concept that erases the line between positive and negative, useful and harmful” [6]. To prevent this from happening, it is necessary to have a clear criterion that allows attributing one or another phenomenon to manipulation. The authors believe that such a criterion could be a motivated attribution/non-attribution of an argumentative technique to the means of distorting the addressee's picture of the world using the possibilities provided by linguistic mechanisms (see about this [7]).

It is also striking that some types of discourse regularly attract the attention of researchers of manipulation (product advertising, politics, etc.), while others are still poorly researched. In particular, the peculiarities of manipulation in the field of social advertising (hereinafter SA) rarely attract the attention of researchers [8-11]. In this regard, it is relevant to analyze the features of the manipulation forms used by the creators of posters, dedicated to social topics. The research material was 12,000 posters of the Russian-speaking SA collected by the continuous sampling method from various media banks on the Internet.

When analyzing the means of manipulation in the SA discourse, linguists usually pay attention to the use of polysemy of words, tropes, figures, and other linguistic means for manipulative purposes. The authors would like to draw attention to the fact that there are manipulation techniques based on the very organization of the material. Thus, the observations show that the most typical manipulation technique, which is objectively characteristic of SA discourse, is the presence of imbalances in the intensity of suggestion of certain ideas to the population.

As a rule, the number of posters on a certain topic depends on how acute and important the considered problem is for society. Thus, the issues of observance of traffic rules, the fight against corruption, the promotion of a healthy lifestyle, and the preservation of the Earth's ecology are among the most pressing problems of the society and are the most frequent topics developed by the SA. Thus, according to the volume of issued products, it is possible to determine the priorities of the state in the field of social policy.

At the same time, SA posters are created not only by state structures but also by public organizations, which, as a rule, elaborate one or two problems. This can be the strengthening of the family (Fund for Support of Children), protection of wild and domestic animals (Vita), abandoning bad habits (Healthy Russia), etc. The products of such funds significantly affect the overall intensity of the promotion of various ideas.

The study of the quantitative composition of thematic SA clusters (regarding the principles of dividing SA into clusters, see [12]) shows that the problems of cruelty to animals concern the public incomparably more than the problems concerning human life. Thus, the cluster of posters dedicated to the humane treatment of pets significantly exceeds the volume of the clusters appealing to help orphans in orphanages, fight homelessness and act against child abuse in families taken together. From the very expressive and emotional posters dedicated to the fight against the use of animal fur in clothing, agitation for vegetarianism and the closure of circuses, the problem of preserving the life of animals (and not only wild animals shot for fur but also animals, specially raised for this purpose) appears more important than the problem of maintaining and strengthening the family. It is noted that the authors also believe that cruelty to animals and torturing them in a circus is not good, but the fact that, judging by the number of SA, in the scale of state values, the prevalence of vegetarianism is slightly higher than the problem of domestic violence, and much higher than

education problems, is surprising and regrettable. On the other hand, the issues of preserving cultural heritage and promoting cultural values do not at all concern the creators of SA. The number of posters in this group is insignificant, the quality of the impact is extremely low, and no ideas for improving the situation are proposed. At the same time, it is known that the cultural level of the majority of young people is extremely low, and their interests are limited to low-standard mass culture.

## **2 Results and discussion**

It is important to note that the views and ideological attitudes of public funds that issue SA can vary significantly. This leads to the fact that the ideas promoted by them come into conflict and contradict each other. Thus, the funds, supported by the Orthodox Church, promote patriarchal values: the creation of a large family, the prohibition of not only abortions but also contraceptives, etc. At the same time, the funds focused on Western values advertise same-sex marriages, pro-choice, etc. In some cases, such SA is simply extremist in nature. For example, a series of posters of the Russian Public Movement “Renaissance. Golden Age”: “Zionism is the mortal enemy of Russia”; “Holocaust is a myth”, etc. (<http://www.rod-vzv.info/zarubki.html>) are directly aimed at inciting hatred of the Jewish people.

In this “war of ideas”, two degrees should be distinguished:

1) SA of some funds encroaches on the values traditionally recognized as important and promoted by state SA. This includes posters legalizing same-sex marriage (depicting two young women and two small children: Yes, we are a couple, and the children are common! Therefore, we want common parental rights, a common surname, Mendelssohn's march and world peace), distorting the policy of the state in the field of health (Among all living things on the Earth, only a person poisons himself or herself and pays money for it... Alcohol, tobacco, drugs, GMOs, vaccinations, etc., where vaccinations are placed on a par with smoking and drugs, which also immediately transfers them into the category of factors causing irreparable harm to human health). It is considered necessary to stipulate here: obviously, people have the right to create same-sex families and refuse vaccinations for one reason or another, however, such phenomena should be considered marginal and such views should not be imposed on society (including through SA) as absolutely correct and recommended to everyone.

2) SA of the funds raises questions regarding the settlement of relations between people. Typically, such relationships have a large number of options, so it is impossible to establish clear boundaries of a positive or negative attitude towards an object. In this regard, there are many situations that different funds interpret in the opposite way in accordance with their ideology. Thus, the Fund for Support of Children in Difficult Life Situations fights against child abuse in the family and social homelessness (Child abuse is a vicious circle of violence!). Other funds and public associations (see, for example, the website [zasvobodu.rf](http://zasvobodu.rf)) aim to combat the spread of juvenile justice in Russia, which threatens the well-being of the traditional family (Russian families are against the introduction of a juvenile system!). There is no objection: both problems need the attention of society and are important for the harmonious existence of the family. At the same time, the difference in the views of the funds on these problems leads to opposite assessments of the same situations. In this sense, the discussion that has arisen on the Internet about the poster Beware! Angry Parents!, is especially indicative, which was released by the fighters against the cruel punishment of children in the family. It was rated as a “Social poster, discrediting birth family” [13]. It is interesting to note that the posters regarding violence against women in the family (Free yourself from domestic violence; There is no forgiveness for violence) do not cause any

protests, since they do not contradict the ideology of other funds and social groups that produce SA.

The first situation is of a strategic nature, since it concerns values that are important for the state. In this regard, it is necessary to demand that the funds, producing posters against vaccination of children or in favor of same-sex marriage, make rational arguments to support their thesis, and not simply deny the value traditionally accepted by society. Then the addressee will be able to assess more meaningfully the degree of acceptability for him or her of the proposed idea. The second situation is tactical in nature, since in this case, the values that are equally important for society come into conflict: on the one hand, it is unacceptable for officials to interfere in family affairs without a good reason, on the other hand, cases of violence and abuse of children in dysfunctional families cannot be ignored.

The second frequent method of manipulation in SA is the use of pseudo-rational arguments. Of all the types of such arguments in SA, elements of statistics are most often used, and in situations similar to those in product advertising: statistical data are reported that cannot be verified; therefore, their reliability raises serious doubts: Smoking takes 14 years of life; Cigarette smoking is the cause of heart disease in 25 % of cases, the cause of bronchitis in 75 % of cases, and in 90 % – the cause of death from lung cancer. There is no doubt that smoking is harmful to human health. However, it is not clear why the authors believe that the life of a smoker is shortened by 14 years and that in 75 % of cases, smoking is the cause of bronchitis. Human life and health depend not only on the presence of bad habits but also on other factors, therefore it is impossible to establish exactly why this or that person fell ill. This conclusion is confirmed by the fact that different posters often indicate completely different numbers, and the discrepancies can be very significant: During the entire war in Afghanistan, 14,000 Russian soldiers died. Alcohol kills up to 70,000 people a year; Alcohol kills 700,000 Russians every year. Here on one poster, the figure is 70 thousand, and on the other – 700 thousand. It is clear that such discrepancies cannot be explained by a statistical error. In all such cases, one should talk about pseudo-quantitative indicators, the use of which cannot be considered to be a rational argument, since they, as a rule, are needed to endow the object with certain qualitative characteristics (most often to intimidate the addressee). These arguments are a very powerful means of manipulation, since “the greatest achievement in manipulating numbers is the destruction of a person's ability to “weigh” phenomena, he or she loses a sense of proportion” [14].

### **3 Conclusion**

These techniques, surely, do not exhaust the list of forms of manipulation that are characteristic of the discourse of SA. In particular, a large percentage of manipulation is contained in the SA texts that are addressed to an undefined addressee and do not contain instructions on the way to solve the problem in question. There are such messages in all clusters (No corruption!; Let's not let culture disappear! etc.), but there are especially many of them in the “Ecology” section: Do not let the Earth suffocate!; The fate of nature is in our hands; Stop Global Warming). The effectiveness of such products is practically zero. If instead of encouraging people to take a specific action (to fasten a seat belt in a car, donate blood, help children in orphanages, etc.), people are urged to stop global warming or even save life on the Earth, a suspicion arises that in this way the creators of the posters are trying to distract the population from more pressing and specific problems.

### **References**

1. S.A. Vinogradova, *Cognitive Studies of Language*, **6**, 460-462 (2010)

2. A.G. Gurochkina, *Izvestia: Herzen University Journal of Humanities & Sciences*, **192**, 46-51 (2019)
3. A.V. Kokova, Yu.V. Zadorozhnaya, *World of Science, Culture, and Education*, **4(83)**, 322-323 (2020)
4. B.I. Osipov, *Legal Linguistics*, **8**, 216-221 (2007)
5. S.V. Usoltsev, *Manipulyatsiya v politike: Manipulyatsiya kak vid vozdeistviya na cheloveka [Manipulation in politics: Manipulation as a type of influence on a person]*, in *Fundamentalnye nauchnye issledovaniya: teoreticheskie i prakticheskie aspekty: sb. materialov III Mezhdunarodnoi nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii [Fundamental scientific research: theoretical and practical aspects: collection of materials of the III International Scientific and Practical Conference]*, 130-132 (ZapSibNTs, Kemerovo, 2017)
6. L.A. Brusenskaya, E.G. Kulikova, *The Legal Culture*, **1(32)**, 70-77 (2018)
7. T.V. Anisimova, *Bulletin of the Moscow Region State University. Series: Russian Philology*, **2**, 5-8 (2012)
8. N.I. Ilinskaya, *Osobennosti ispolzovaniya priemov manipulyatsii v sotsialnoi reklame [Features of the use of manipulation techniques in social advertising]*, in *Nauka, tekhnika i innovatsii: gipotezy, problemy, rezultaty. Sb. nauchnykh trudov po materialam XI Mezhdunarodnogo mezhdistsiplinarnogo foruma molodykh uchenykh [Science, technology and innovation: hypotheses, problems, and results. Collection of scientific papers on the materials of the XI International Interdisciplinary Conference of Young Scientists]*, 320-330 (NOO "Professionalnaya nauka", Moscow, 2017)
9. E.V. Martynov, *Vestnik of Moscow State Linguistic University. Social Sciences*, **2(800)**, 80-91 (2018)
10. I.V. Palashevskaya, M.S. Zubkova, *Modern Science: Actual Problems of Theory and Practice. Series: Humanities*, **12**, 239-242 (2017)
11. Ye.V. Yureva, *Litera*, **3**, 1 (2016)
12. T.V. Anisimova, S.A. Chubai, *Sotsialnaya reklama: ritoricheskii analiz plakatov sotsialnoi tematiki [Social advertising: a rhetorical analysis of posters on social topics]* (RUSAINS, Moscow, 2020)
13. *Sotsialnaya reklama protiv krovnnoi semi [Social advertising against birth family]* (2013). Accessed on: December 20, 2020. [Online]. Available: <http://rvs.su/statia/socialnaya-reklama-protiv-krovnnoy-semi> See also: <https://yandex.com.tr/collections/card/59ee81319f759a00b52c4727/>
14. S.G. Kara-Murza, *Manipulyatsiya soznaniem [Manipulation of consciousness]* (Eksmo, Moscow, 2009)