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Argumentation and emotional cognition in advertisements

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ABSTRACT: From Spinoza to today, it has been noted that human beings respond to what is unusual in our lives. The advertising community knows this and struggles to find ways to be unusual in the face of an estimated 3,500 ads per day. One way is through emotion. This paper examines arguments made in advertisements where emotional cognition is appealed to and how they differ from ads that appeal to rational cognition.

KEYWORDS: advertising, argumentation, multi-modal argumentation, emotional cognition, Gilbert, rational cognition

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most difficult parts of analyzing arguments, particularly those made in advertisements, is knowing how to evaluate an emotional argument. If we know one thing from Michael Gilbert's work with multi-modal argumentation theory, it is that no argument is ever purely logical or purely emotional. In Western society, the term *argument* is closely bound with *logic*. We hear:

- "I'm not going to argue with you if you can't be logical."
- "We can't have this argument if you're going to get emotional on me."
- "What you feel' is not a good argument; give me a good reason why I should do it."
- "If all you can say is that you've got a hunch, there's no point in arguing."

But logic is not the only form of argument. Gilbert (1994) maintains that while argumentation traditionally is associated with logic and reasoning (Balthorp 1979; O'Keefe 1982; Willard 1983, 1989; van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1989), we also must consider three other modes of argumentation:

- (1) Emotional "is related to the realm of feelings."
- (2) Visceral "stems from the area of the physical"
- (3) Kisceral "covers the intuitive and non-sensory arenas." (Gilbert 1994: 159)

In an ad in *Esquire Magazine* for the DIY (Do It Yourself) television network, we see a woman standing in what appears to be an elegant home with fashionable wood flooring and modern art on the walls. She is wearing a slinky sequined low-cut dress and knee high boots, and is carrying a hammer. The small amount of copy in the lower right corner says, "Esquire Ultimate Bachelor Pad Television Special" with the date and time and the DIY network logo. The woman is identified in small print on the right as the host and

licensed contractor on the show. In this ad, we can find a logical argument to fit a proper syllogism:

All things built by the DIY network are well built.
The *Esquire* Ultimate Bachelor Pad was built by the DIY network.
Therefore the *Esquire* Ultimate Bachelor Pad is well built.

We also can find an emotional argument, which we can put in the form of a syllogism:

All things making use of a beautiful tough woman in an ad are worth experiencing.
The DIY Network uses a beautiful tough woman in its ad.
Therefore the DIY Network is worth experiencing.

As with almost any advertisement, we also can find a visceral argument (the physical image of the woman holding a hammer) and a kisceral argument (the intuitive link between hammer, construction, and eventual beauty), but this paper restricts itself to comparing logical and emotional advertisements. It is important to note that, instead of the word *rational*, Gilbert uses the term *logical* “to indicate not merely a respect for orderliness of presentation, but also a subscription to a certain set of beliefs about evidence and sources of information” (Gilbert 1994: 159). He also stresses the need to realize that emotional arguments are rational, that “emotional ‘reasoning’, or, if you will, the utilization of emotion in arguments in part or in whole, is perfectly rational” (Gilbert 2004).

From Spinoza’s *Ethics* (1677, 191) to a twentieth century paper by Ben-Ze’ev (1995), theorists have noted that as human beings we tend to respond to what is unusual in our lives. This is true of well-structured logical arguments whose format comes down to us from Aristotle, it is true of emotional outbursts expressing a disagreement with a different opinion, and it also is true of emotional arguments made in the advertising community. Bombarded with some 3,500 advertisements in every twenty-four hours (Solomon 2008: 52), as consumers we find it necessary to practice selective perception – not even noticing many of these ads, vigilant perception—seeing only ads for products that matter to us in some way, and defensive perception—not seeing what fails to agree with our position or to interest us. In order to cut through the clutter and influence the target market, those who function in the advertising community must know the difference between ads that appeal through logic and rationality and those that reach out to us through emotional arguments.

One of the problems addressed by Gilbert’s model of multi-modal argumentation is the too-frequent perception that *logical* means *right* and *emotional* means *wrong*. Any of the four modes of argumentation may be *right* for any particular use. What may be *wrong* is the use of any of the four modes of argumentation to improperly make an argument for the purchase of a product. Thus an ad may meet all the requirements for a valid logical argument but still be questionable when we examine its emotional, physical, or intuitive argument in addition to its logical one. Most ads will have elements of all four types of arguments, but most also will have one mode that is predominant. This paper examines arguments made in advertisements where emotional cognition is appealed to and how they differ from ads that appeal to rational cognition. It takes as a starting point a position that emotions can be arguments (Ben-Ze’ev 1995), Slade’s (2003) position that ads can be arguments, and the position of Birdsell and Groarke (2004), Groarke (2005), and Carozza (2010) that the visual can be an argument.

2. MARKETING THEORISTS AND EMOTIONAL ARGUMENTS

On January 10, 2008, Jack Trout (of Marketing fame; Ries and Trout 2000) posted an essay on an Internet blog about branding (Trout 2008) whose conclusion I cannot agree with, but which initiated some interesting discussions about the differences and links between emotional and rational cognition, since others disagreed with him as well. Trout described what he feels is a slow move by the advertising community to “get very emotional”. He is referring to what he sees as an increasing trend in advertising to using emotional rather than rational cognition, based on the belief that “emotional advertising gets more attention”.

One example he gives is Lowe’s, challenging Home Depot with what he believes was a great slogan, “Improving home improvement”. But then they changed it for something more emotional, “Let’s build something together”. Trout appears to be engaging in what Carozza (2010) describes as the frequent failure of rational argumentation to take into account such things as culture, class, and gender in the context of an argument. Lowe’s may well have decided that a good way to gain market share against Home Depot and a good way to catch the viewers’ attention would be to appeal to the home handy-woman, she of no small numbers in today’s culture of increasing cross-gender activities, with the idea of building something together with her husband. Trout, however, labels the move to the new slogan, “silliness”. He cites Wal-Mart as a good example of companies that are combining rationality and emotion, with an ad that reminds us of Wal-Mart’s lower prices as well as showing us how we can have fun with the money we save. But his examples do not ring true. In criticizing Continental Airlines, he describes their original slogan, “More airline for the money” as far preferable to the new emotional one, “Work Hard. Fly right”. One wonders, with the example from Wal-Mart and that from Continental, if Trout is not perhaps confusing “rational” with “financial”. But even financial matters can be presented with emotional arguments.

A typical logical advertisement for financial services might be one for the CFA Institute (Certified Financial Analyst) from the *Globe and Mail’s Report on Business*. It is a full page black and white ad with the headline, “WHEN MANAGING YOUR WEALTH, PERSPECTIVE CAN MEAN EVERYTHING”. It goes on to talk in a small tight paragraph about how in the complex global market of today, investing and managing wealth is best done by professionals – Certified Financial Analysts. At the bottom of the page is the black and white CFA logo, and a vertical list: ETHICS, TENACITY, RIGOUR, ANALYTICS. The logical argument for this ad could be structured as follows:

All organizations with perspective analyzing your wealth are successful wealth managers.
CFA Institute and its members are organizations with perspective analyzing your wealth.
 Therefore CFA Institute is a successful wealth manager.

There is little emotion in this ad, but all ads will have some portion of their argument in emotional form. This one’s emotional argument hints at the feelings of fear, risk, complexity, and shame if one were to lose or mismanage one’s investments, but the predominant mode is logical.

Desjardins and Company plays on this same emotion of fear of not having the best manager for your investments, but in this case we have a full page colour ad also from the *Globe and Mail’s Report on Business* with half of the page taken up with a view from below up into a window where four people stand, two men and two women, in a

modern office building. We only see the back of one woman, the side view of another, a full view of one man, and just the left side of the other man. The words, “THE BEST KEPT SECRET?” are in the upper left corner of the picture. The copy below presents a logical argument to tell us why business people should trust Desjardin and Company, that could be structured thus:

All companies that have financial strength, national presence, expertise and knowledge are good companies to entrust with an organization’s group insurance and retirement savings.
Desjardin and Company has financial strength, national presence, expertise and knowledge.
Therefore Desjardin and Company is a good company to entrust with your organization’s group insurance and retirement savings.

The emotional argument, presented in the picture of the four people, implies that only a select few know the secret of where to entrust their group insurance and retirement savings, and that if one is not among those few knowledgeable people, one’s investments will not be safe. The fact that we are looking in a window at two manly men and two attractive women, that we are unable to see all of them clearly, and that the women are dressed alike with long flowing blonde hair adds to the sense of exclusion and perhaps jealousy and envy. In a magazine that consists often of large blocks of dense print, this ad with its picture of attractive people is more likely to get noticed than the previous ad which consisted of just logical prose.

An ad for Questrade (“Mutual Fund Maximizer”), also from the *Globe and Mail’s Report on Business*, uses most of the page for its emotional argument. We see four men under the headline, “THE USUAL SUSPECTS”. Each holds a briefcase and identification number (1-4) and they stand in front of a set of lines that provides information on their height, just as in a police lineup. The scant amount of copy tells us to transfer our money to Questrade where we will retrieve the 1% fee “SKIMMED OFF” by our current broker, called a “TRAILER FEE”.

One can always find a logical argument even in emotionally presented ads. Here, it might be:

Only companies that do not charge extra fees are worth investing with.
Questrade is one of few companies that does not charge extra fees.
Therefore Questrade is a company worth investing with.

The major thrust of the argument in this ad is emotional, using the familiar police line-up (for all of us who watch all those Law and Order programmes) to imply that what a broker does when taking the Trailer Fee is tantamount to a crime, and making it clear that Questrade is the only company we can trust.

One last example of emotion in financial services ads comes from GEICO, America’s third largest car insurer. This ad ran in the magazine *Real Simple*. More than half of the full page full colour ad is taken up by a portrait in gilt frame of a gecko standing in front of a highly polished desk with a traditional banker’s green lamp, and a luxurious leather chair. He is holding a pair of eyeglasses in a classic pose for a top manager’s portrait. We have to fish the logical argument out of the small amount of text, most of which is devoted to the emotional argument. The logical argument could be:

Only companies that are large and growing, that are part of Warren Buffett’s empire, and that have worked hard to save customers money are worth investing with.

GEICO is a company that is large and growing, that is part of Warren Buffett's empire, and that has worked hard to save customers money.
Therefore GEICO is a company worth investing with.

In this ad, however, almost the entirety of the argument is emotional. Starting with the picture of the gecko, which invites humour and good feeling, we move on to the copy in the ad that is peppered with continual references to the cute little green lizard-like fellow, hardly a normal representative of financial expertise:

“Nearly 15 years ago, GEICO became a proud part of Warren Buffett's famed holding company. Back then, the Gecko was one of the hardworking people – sorry, reptiles, in our GEICO offices. Now he's helped GEICO become not only the third-largest car insurance company in the country [United States], but also the fastest growing. Which is no surprise. For over 70 years GEICO has worked hard to save people hundreds on car insurance. So why not give the Gecko a call to see how much you could save? You'll find he's easier to reach than Mr. Buffett.”

As we contemplate these four ads, it is important to note that the first three came from the *Globe and Mail's Report on Business*, while the last one, the most emotional of all, ran in *Real Simple*. This fits with Carozza's (2010) contention that the use of emotional arguments is affected by such things as culture, tradition and class. The readership for *Real Simple* is likely quite different from that of *Report on Business*, with the latter appealing to people seriously interested in business, and *Real Simple* appealing to a market interested in simplifying and thereby beautifying life.

Jack Trout cites a study that measured how often people fast-forwarded through ads, presuming that one would fast forward if not engaged by the ad. He cites ads which are the least fast-forwarded, including Bowflex exercise machine, vacations in the Dominican Republic, and Hooters Restaurant. Trout claims that these ads are fast forwarded less frequently because they appeal to logic and intellect and not emotion. Critics of Trout's reasoning vehemently insist that ads for exercise machines to make us sexier, vacations in warm voluptuous climates, and restaurants that feature sexually alluring waitresses are far from “non-emotional”. “Jeff”, responding to Trout, answers the question, “What's the difference between the rational and emotional?” with the statement, “Nothing. The rational does not exist. Every ‘rational’ example that might be presented is actually an emotional decision...you can always reduce the rational to the emotional—or the effort to fulfill a motivating need”. This poses an interesting parallel to the criticism made by both Ripley (2005) and Duran (2010) of the research (including their own) in the field of emotional arguments—that too often when constructing a representation of the emotional argument we reduce the emotional argument to a logical one, attempting to force it into the format of a syllogism. “Jeff” sees it as reducing the logical argument to an emotional one. Douglas Massey, speaking at his presidential address to the American Sociological Society, brings the element of time into the picture:

Evolution has bequeathed us a cognitive structure with two mentalities – one emotional and one rational. While these two processors are interconnected, emotional cognition precedes rational cognition in evolutionary time and in real time, and feedback between the two is such that emotional traffic into the rational brain dominates that going in the reverse direction. (Massey 2002)

Massey contends that an advertisement first hits us with its emotional argument, and then with its logical argument. We can see an example of this in ads for cars. A full page, full colour ad for Chevrolet Cruze, from *Instyle* lures us first, with a picture of a streetlight in the upper left, to the copy about a third of the way down that says, “LIKE A COROLLA, BUT WITH EVERYTHING YOU WANT”. This emotion grabbing statement leads us to read on to see that it is said by Chevrolet Cruze, and then draws us to the picture of a bright red Cruze at the bottom of the ad. Only once we have processed the sense of a trick statement (the other brand of car is more appealing?) and the impact of the red car do we proceed into logical mode and analyze exactly what has been said and what the message is behind it. Meanwhile the emotional driven part of our brain has already registered the appeal of a new bright red Chevrolet that has “everything you want”.

We see this situating in time with a two-page ad for the Ford Edge. The first page is a large full colour picture of a pair of beautiful red lips, with hundreds of tiny words barely visible in the lipstick that covers them. The only copy reads, “THE NEW EDGE UNDERSTANDS 10,000 VOICE COMMANDS”. In the lower right corner is a small Ford logo and the phrase, “Drive one.” Initially we may easily take it for a lipstick ad. As our eye moves from left to right, top to bottom, in the directions in which westerners read, we register an emotional response to the pair of lips. Presumably the Ford logo confuses us enough to turn the page to see what is going on. On the second page of the two-page ad we see a blue car in the centre of the page, the same hundreds and hundreds of tiny words surrounding it like a partial halo, the same Ford logo at the bottom of the page, with the same phrase, “Drive one.” There is some additional copy that explains what we are seeing. And in reading this we move into the logical argumentation of the ad, “ENOUGH SAID. It doesn’t just give directions, it takes orders. A whole lot of them. The new EDGE with MYFORDTOUCH™. An automotive first. It’s quite possibly the world’s smartest crossover. 2011 EDGE”. The Ford website address is also included.

3. EMOTIONAL AND LOGICAL (RATIONAL) ARGUMENTS

Most ads, whether emotion or logic based, are easily understood, at least by the target market and often by anyone. Advertisers spend millions of dollars to ensure this. Logic based ads are sometimes easier to understand as the argument is often practically written out in full in the copy. Emotion based ads can be more difficult. Gilbert says that “[U]nderstanding emotional arguments means respecting the influence that emotion has on communication. If we do this, if we allow that even the simple comprehension of what is being said must take into account the emotional configuration of the arguers, then we can move forward to try to understand what is, for example, a good and bad emotional argument”(Gilbert 1995: 9).

Perfume ads are nearly always emotion based. They are so omnipresent in almost any sort of magazine that we may hardly notice them anymore. Advertisers for perfumes must try increasingly harder to break through the clutter of their own sorts of ads. Two perfume ads, both from *Real Simple*, make different arguments about the kind of woman they appeal to. The first, an ad for Donna Karan Cashmere Mist is a full page sepia toned picture of a woman sitting down, her head resting on one raised knee, her hands holding her leg, and looking out at us with a “come hither” look in her bedroom eyes. She barely wears a luxurious dark bathrobe. The only copy on the ad is the name of

the perfume and the celebrity it is named for, written in gold letters across the middle of the picture. The emotional argument in this ad is simply that wearing this perfume will make you beautiful and sexy.

The second perfume ad portrays a different sort of woman. In a full page full colour ad, we see the skyline of New York at night, on either side of the page. In the centre stands a woman in front of a red door, wearing a classy white satin cocktail dress, and with long flowing hair, looking almost wholesome. On the lower left quarter of the page is a picture of a bottle of the perfume, and across the top twenty percent of the picture are the name of the maker of the perfume and the perfume itself: Elizabeth Arden RED DOOR. Below that in small print is the phrase, "The same classic fragrance, with a new signature look". The emotional argument in this ad is that the woman who wears this fragrance is a sophisticated, classic beauty. We could attempt, and succeed at, finding logical arguments for these two ads but they are unnecessary and would just be syllogism-styled reshaping of the emotional arguments presented.

Skin care ads are frequently emotion based, but can be logic based as well. A full page full colour ad for Aveeno skin care products shows the head and shoulders of a woman in front of a fire looking out at us with a happy smile. The lower 60% of the page is taken up with three columns, each of which contains the picture of one of Aveeno's products, with a lengthy description of the benefits of each product. The predominant mode of the argument is logical. We can read descriptions of how these products are to help us have smoother skin in the winter months. This ad is not going to cut through much clutter. Lubriderm, on the other hand, in a print ad taken from the Internet, uses a riveting picture of a woman sitting on a leathery old alligator, holding in her hand a bottle of the body lotion. The understanding of the ad is almost split-second and we are hit with the emotional argument before any logical argument has time to make its way through our mind. If you don't want skin like an alligator, use this product. This ad definitely cuts through the clutter of advertising in our lives.

Some product categories lend themselves totally to one or the other of emotional or logical approaches. Ads for financial investments, we have seen, tend to be more logical than emotional, especially depending on in which magazine they appear. In the category of products for pets, it is nearly impossible to find an ad that does not use emotion. An ad for Iams Premium pet food in *Real Simple* provides some logical argumentation, telling us that it has the most advanced Iams nutrition ever, and that Iams is "12 powerful vitamins, 8 essential minerals, and 2 proteins in every bite". But it is the full colour picture, taking up more than two thirds of the page, which grabs the reader's attention. A veterinarian sits with a cat in her lap and we see that it is the cat who is "saying" what Iams means to her, what is in every bite. Beside the veterinarian and the cat sits a winsome white dog with one black ear and one black eye, who appears to be saying, "To me... it's lunch". In another *Real Simple* dog food ad, Natural Balance, a picture taking up nearly three quarters of the page shows a chocolate brown hound looking up at us with soulful eyes. The copy at the top of the page says, "Natural diet side effects may include staring into your eyes with a look that says, 'Let's live together forever'". There is a brief mention of the large selection of natural and organic foods and a website to find more information, but the picture and the emotional copy make up the main argument in this advertisement. We do not need to reduce the emotional argument to a logical syllogism in order to analyze it. In the Iams ad we can point to the presence of a veterinarian ensuring

healthy care for our pets, and to the cat and the dog as nearly speaking animals showing their appreciation of the product, whether it is a list of ingredients which sound healthy, or the simple statement that, “To me... it’s lunch”. As Gilbert point out, an emotion based ad can be just as clear as a logic based ad (Gilbert 2004).

Not all ads are clear, whether based in emotion or logic. An ad for Tone-ups Skechers footwear, in *Instyle* magazine, without the picture of the product would leave the reader wondering what the product was. As it is, the ad presents a highly emotion based ad centered in the fact that most women are not happy with their bottoms. The full page full colour picture shows a young woman in a ballet-type pose, seen from the back, stretching to one side. Her bottom has been replaced with an upside-down heart. To the left of this heart is a right-side-up heart and the copy between the two hearts, says merely, “your”, giving us the message, “Love your bottom”. The copy below says, “Make your bottom half your better half!” and gives a webpage address and a store at which the running shoes can be purchased. In the lower left corner of the ad is a picture of the running shoes, without which this ad would make little sense.

Skechers also has an ad, in *Esquire*, for men’s Shape-ups footwear that is emotion based but much clearer about the subject of its argument. This full page, full colour ad shows a picture of Joe Montana, star American football quarterback, in throwing pose except instead of a football he holds, in the upper left corner, one running shoe. His name and signature are near the top right of the picture. Half-way down is the name “Skechers Fitness Group Shape-ups” and a list under “Designed to Help” of what they will do for you: “Burn more calories, tone muscles, improve posture, reduce stress on back and legs”. Below that is the line, “GET BACK IN THE GAME”, and the name of a store where you can buy them. The use of the known sports hero and the crucial placement of the product make the emotional argument.

With one last comment on shoe ads, we see Calvin Klein’s ad in *Real Simple* for a foot-baring, strappy, high-heeled sandal. All we see in the full page full colour ad is a leg from about six inches above the ankle to the sole of the shoe. On the bottom of the picture is the name “Calvin Klein” and the address of their website. Here we particularly can note that we do not need to put an emotional argument into the shape of a logical syllogism in order to analyze it. This emotional argument hinges largely on the name of the designer and on the sandal itself. The taupe colour implies smooth, soft, easy-going, as opposed to for example the bright blue of Joe Montana’s shirt in the Skechers’ ad, and it appeals to our desire for comfort and fashion. There is of course the obvious point that the two ads are aimed at different sexes.

Just because an ad is mainly logic based and contains a lot of print does not mean that it will necessarily be easily understood. An ad in *Real Simple* for Prevnar 13, a vaccine to protect against streptococcus pneumonia, contains a full page of fine black and white print, including such not-easily-understood statements as this disclaimer:

The immune response from the transition or catch-up schedules might be lower for the 6 additional strains (types 1, 3, 5, 6A, 7F, and 19A) than if your child had received the full 4 doses of Prevnar 13. It’s not known how medically important this difference is.

We also would have a difficult time constructing a simple syllogistic diagram of the main argument of the ad. It is far too complicated and full of language not interpretable by the

average lay person, and makes far more than one or two simple claims, yet it appears in a layperson's magazine.

An ad with a small amount of print may also be difficult to interpret, unless one is aware of the meaning of comments. An ad for Gentleman Jack Tennessee whiskey in *GQ* (*Gentlemen's Quarterly*) shows a picture of the bottle accompanied by a glass with ice and the product in it. Next to that picture is the phrase, "THE EXTRA STEP MAKES THE DIFFERENCE". This hinges, however, on the copy in the middle of the full page full colour ad, "Step 1: wearing a suit; Extra Step: not letting it wear you". We are left to make our own meaning for how the wearing of a suit relates to drinking bourbon. In liquor ads, however, we almost always can easily find a simple argument—go buy this and drink it because it is so special. We see this in an ad for Vodka. In a full colour ad from *Vogue*, a picture takes up 80% of the page to show a bottle of Absolut vodka being poured into a martini glass, creating the glass as it pours. The title, "ABSOLUT CREATION" says it all, a drink so special it creates its own glass. The fine print goes on to argue that, "A perfectly mixed cocktail starts with a perfectly mixed vodka. The finest Swedish Winter Wheat. No sugars added. Ideal viscosity for mixing", but the ad's main argument is emotional and visual.

An example of an ad, from *Globe and Mail's Report on Business*, which relies mostly on its prose, despite a full page full colour picture of a business woman, is one for Microsoft, which without the brand name Microsoft printed at the bottom of the ad would mean little to even experienced computer users. The copy reads:

I'M THE QUEEN OF CAPACITY.
 I CAN MAKE DATA OMNIPRESENT. ON OR OFF PREMISES.
 I CAN ACHIEVE TOTAL TECHNOLOGICAL HARMONY.
 I CAN PAY WAY LESS AND DO WAY MORE.
 I CAN PLAY LIKE AN OPTIMIST AND PAY LIKE A REALIST.
 I HAVE CLOUD POWER.

Cloud Power refers to a new system to revolutionize the way a company's information technology works. Without knowing what Cloud Power meant, the ad would have little logical meaning, or any emotional meaning for that matter.

We return to Michael Gilbert who makes the point emphatically. "The emotional message at odds with the logical message can be ignored, but we ignore the emotional message at our peril" (Gilbert 2005, 46). It is rare that we see ads where the emotional and logical arguments are at odds with each other. Even an ad in *Esquire* for The Cosmopolitan, "a unique luxury resort" in Las Vegas shows us a picture of a bell hop, from the back, carrying luggage in a hotel, hardly anything to raise our emotion, until we realize that the trimly dressed, almost proper bell hop is barefoot and wears no pants of any kind.

4. CONCLUSION

Ultimately, it remains to realize that in advertising, it will be difficult to evaluate emotional ads. We cannot separate emotion from logic or reason. In the Jack Trout Marketing blog cited, “Brad” (Brad VanAuken, Chief Brand Strategist) makes the point in responding to Trout, “You are trying to divide up something that can’t and shouldn’t be divided in advertising—emotions and rationality. They are both under the umbrella of logical benefit that the product brings: feeling good. That’s all anyone is ever buying” (VanAuken 2008).

Paul Thagard, writing about the Emotional Coherence of Religion, makes the point that, “all thinking has an emotional component, so that emotional cognition comprises all of cognition viewed from the perspective that emphasizes the integration of traditional cognitive processes such as reasoning, with emotional processes that attach values to mental representations” (Thagard 2005: 59). Thagard cites philosophers, economists, and neuroscientists who disagree with the commonly believed claim “that emotions are inherently irrational ... [and that] there is a sharp divide between emotional thought and rational cognition” (Thagard 2005: 60). He goes on to propose a theory of emotional coherence which reminds us of Gilbert’s (1997) *Coalescent Argumentation*, in which he makes the point that the purpose of argumentation is to bring the parties closer together, into coalescence.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: With thanks to Michael Gilbert for his continuing inspiration and to my colleague and fellow researcher Claudio Durán.

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Commentary on “ARGUMENTATION AND EMOTIONAL COGNITION IN ADVERTISEMENTS” by Louise Ripley

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I'm new to argumentation and so I accept without reflection that ads are persuasive, that visual is at least as persuasive as text (aural or written) and that persuasion is a form of argumentation. When composing the commentary I approached the article as if it was an ad and chose to express the review in emotive rather than cognitive language. I used a subjective vocabulary of feeling.

Taking a subjective perspective—was I persuaded that emotional cognition appeals to the unusual in a different way from rational cognition? The abstract certainly appealed to the unusual for me. I was completely unfamiliar with the term emotional cognition. Research revealed a helpful online paper by Markku Hannula. Not only did this paper arrest me through my experience of the unfamiliar but also stimulated me to engage with it and solve my problem. My intent was positive because I just wanted to know and feel good knowing. Not so different from the effect of a good ad. I also ask myself was I stimulated to experience an emotion or did this ‘hook’ stimulate me to become more aware of emotion?

Emotional cognition—what's that? It is cognition about emotion. Cognition—process of knowing, perceiving, reasoning, judging—verb.

That which is known through perception, reasoning, intuition, knowledge—noun.¹

I'm going to resist the epistemological allure for the moment and parse the two definitions for a moment. It seems that the paper is linking emotional response to both intuition and judging. I react first with my gut, my intuition, and then with my head or logic and judge. To me the judging needs pattern recognition, categorization and association—the basis for me to deconstruct the ad and derive its meaning for me. This is my good old frontal lobe at work. Simultaneously I experience some combination of happiness, sadness, fear, anger, disgust and surprise. This is the self-referential part of arousal and it confuses me.

Does the ad stimulate emotion or my awareness of emotion—has to do both hence emotional cognition. So not only does the ad stimulate my awareness that I want to feel good, it stimulates a self-monitoring judgment that yes, I feel good or no I don't feel good. If I do feel good after deconstructing the ad then no need to buy anything to feel good. If I don't feel good then I want to buy what was advertised. This is a pretty complex process of experience (I feel) awareness (I know what I feel), act (I do to feel some-

¹ [http://Helsinki.academia.edu/MarkkuHannula/Papers/123935/THE METALEVEL OF COGNITION-EMOTION INTERACTION](http://Helsinki.academia.edu/MarkkuHannula/Papers/123935/THE_METALEVEL_OF_COGNITION-EMOTION_INTERACTION)

thing else), and assess (I judge how I feel now). It's hard for me to disentangle this from the logic of causality other than to say intuitively fulfillment of the desire to feel good or cost/benefit seems different from fulfillment of a thought-out if-then causal chain.

But neurophysiologically there is a physiological difference in response—cerebral cortex versus amygdala. It seems then that the ad needs to get the immediate non-cognitive response of 'wow' from the amygdala before anything else happens. In fact the more surprised I am by the 'wow' the less likely I will engage my cortex in the response to the 'wow'.² Physiologically the amygdala is part of the nervous system – the telecommunications system from the brain to the muscles. It processes pleasure. Neurologically dopamine gives us pleasure.

Neurologically, stimulating the amygdala stimulates memories of emotional significance that influence my interpretation of what I'm now experiencing. It's almost instantaneous and the right amygdala responds to visual while the left to verbal.³ The other memory system gives me my cause-effect cognition and is called the hippocampus. Emotion affects the intensity of hippocampal memory for event details and probably memory for detail affects the intensity of emotion. So I need to be startled but not so startled I can't think through to choose the act of buying it to feel good. All this is to say, neurophysiologically the context in which the startle response occurs is memory of both types. What is rhetorically logic, is hippocampal stimulus of memory events and pathos is amygdala stimulus of memory feeling.

It seems that I must feel surprise from the unfamiliar and know I'm surprised or nothing will come of the experience of the ad. I must want the pleasure of deconstruction.

But the seller's intent is modest—to persuade me to believe if I buy it I will feel good. It is all about me—and my hedonic state—which is not a homonym for either selfish or illogical, or even intensive—emotion. Neurophysiologically it's all about the dopamine. And neurophysiologically it's probably ineffective to evoke too intense an amygdala wow response. Too much dopamine and why do I want to buy anything? But both visual and text stimulate either right or left amygdala. Do I believe advertisers know this physiology? Yes. Hence the all-to-familiar structure of visual plus text (or audio) to stimulate the act of purchasing.

At the end of the day, if the purpose of an ad is to motivate purchase then it's unclear to me what benefit it would have to 'measure' emotional processing. If indeed emotion is a consequence of a stimulated amygdala and if pleasure is a physiological event—the emission of dopamine into our brains—then it seems measuring emotion misses the point. As I read the literature the 'wow' is almost an instantaneous response in the amygdala and one we become aware of only when we engage with the stimulus. The amygdalae are stimulated by both text and picture. There's a hypothesis that male and female respond differently to the same text and picture but no body of neuroscientific evidence as to how that difference is physiologically expressed.

I keep coming back to physiology because that is where the light is—the evidence that emotion and non-emotional reasoning are inseparable. As a marketer I would like to know what the most effective way is of generating the right 'wow' level to engage my audience in the persuasion game.

² http://neurons.wordpress.com/2007/05/25/amygdala__small-on-size-big-on-function/

³ <http://www.idc.upenn.edu/myl/llog/Brizendine/Phelps2004.pdf>

It seems to me that if I want to persuade you that if you buy it you will feel good, I don't want you to feel bad about feeling good—this ambiguity is not effective. The seller wants me to judge feeling good as good—this is my hippocampal memory at work and a higher order emotional meta-cognition.

What if persuasion is undertaken in betrayal? That is to say the heart of advertising is to buy a lie?

How do I accomplish that goal? It seems that when you like how and what I communicate I succeed. What I communicate is constant—buy it and you will feel good.

Ads are designed to affect the viewer's intent. The visual induces a positive emotive intent and perspective as the viewer prepares to deconstruct the meaning. The seller intends the ad and the visual to convey a positive meaning to the viewer. So I am caught in the paradox of feeling pleasure when I engage in a deceitful experience – this seems a different proposition to me than feeling pleasure when I engage in invoking an authentic experience.

When I make the purchase, will I feel real pleasure in a fulfilling a false premise or false pleasure in fulfilling a false premise—and what difference would it make if there was a difference? If I feel real pleasure in buying Lubriderm am I stupid, bad, or just having fun in the way children have fun when they play? The play of children is not authentic but it is innocent pleasure. The effective ad could be structured to engage us in innocent pleasure of play. There is little or no gap between what the seller intends and what the viewer intends when deconstructing the visual and text—no one intends harm from the deceit of play. At the heart of rhetoric is a surprising validity in how the brain actually works. An effective ad stimulates:

- (A) desire for cognitive engagement—absent this and I will not engage with the visual
- (B) desire to feel good—absent this I will not engage with the visual

What is salient to advertising is that the interplay of emotive and cognitive affects beliefs/attitudes (DeBellis & Goldin 1997), value/moral/ethics. WOW, who knew? Now these two authors are not neuroscientists, but this explains why the seller wants me to feel good (moral) about feeling good. This is why the seller wants me to believe that buying it will make me feel good because I played.

Open ads take longer to deconstruct but viewers 'like' them as long as deconstructing the meaning does not take too long. Ambiguity as polysemy rather than obscurity is the goal of the image. The more closed or unambiguously the visual deploys familiar symbols, in the ad the more quickly the viewer can deconstruct the imagery although the less opportunity for multiple positive meanings. Maybe the seller wants me to deconstruct the imagery to innocent invitation to play? Not only does the seller need to delight or hook me with the unfamiliar but persuade me of the innocence of the pleasure I will feel?

BUT the shorter the cognitive engagement and perhaps the lower the affective response—viewers don't 'like' closed ads as much.

The visual balance is between stimulating and satisfying. The stimulation of need to cognitively deconstruct the visual and feeling good as/when I do the deconstruction. This is why it's important to stimulate the amygdala to positive intent – to feel good about feeling good.⁴

⁴ http://laurabright.com/papers/persuasivedesign/literature_review/visual_rhetoric/

The text is equal with the visual in capacity to stimulate the amygdala – potentially – but not as much is understood about the hippocampus.

What really interested me as I did some research was the number of intangibles evoked by waking me up with words or imagery. The notion of belief and values/morals being emotional states is fascinating (DeBellis & Goldin 1997) and if physiology is true then value/moral states are both emotional and non-emotional. That gets me to the ethics part—so far there seems something authentic about the physiology. I'm responding in truth but to what? Am I responding to a truthful stimulus or an untruthful one. Does it matter? Physiologically no it's unlikely it matters because the emotional response is so fast it's not mediated by judgment until I'm aware of the response - then I start assessing it.

Does it matter if I know I'm stimulated by a lie? Idiosyncratically yes—I don't feel positive about intentional deceit—quite the opposite from pleasure I feel something quite negative when I discover the deceit. That gets me to a strange position with the seller. The seller does not have the time to persuade me that the purchase provides authentic pleasure because, really, how much time am I willing to devote to deciding what skin cream to purchase? So it seems to me I'm engaged in something different with the seller. I know the hedonic proposition is a lie and of course so too does the seller. The ad's job is to engage me in the pleasure of the lie, not the pleasure of the truth.

At this point I really don't know how to proceed any further except to infer that if I'm right the pragmatic goal of the ad is to make me aware of the lie—hence the effectiveness of unfamiliar visuals and text. If I like the lie I'll play the game and buy. If I don't like the lie I won't play the game and I won't buy. To succeed, the advertiser must awaken my childlike playfulness to assure me I am invited to play a game of imagination that will be fun if I engage in the game. Maybe it reduces to how much dopamine the advertiser can stimulate the brain to emit. Not too much, not too little, just right.

That photo and that advertising text sets off a pretty complicated emotional or self-referential chain that has me linking a set of extremely complex ideas, values, morals, ethics and emotion

My seller's message is If feeling good is more rational than feeling bad and as a potential purchaser I am not feeling good then believe if I buy this then I will feel good and feel good about feeling good. If ads 'wow' me then they appeal to emotions and are readily understood and if I understand this add, then it has communicated an emotion-laden message that is logical and moral and hedonic, pleasurable. Miraculous.

I offer a suggestion in the presentation of examples—reduce the number of ads presented in the paper. All the ads included visual and text communication but there were no pictures. The emotion was conveyed in 'loaded' text in the article. To contrast with an allegedly logic-based ad the description contains no loaded words but rather the percentage of page with number of columns. I'm feeling tricked that somehow the picture of a nearly naked woman that comprises almost 100% of the ad with only 3 words on the page in one case is more emotive than the picture that comprises 40% of the ad with a lot of words in the other case. In a third comparison to a woman in business dress taking 100% of the add I feel more confused because the visual and text comprising 6 lines are all dismissed and the brand name of Microsoft is dominant—or is it two words, Cloud Power? This is a business to business ad, not a business to consumer ad. It's worthwhile to examine the visual/text components of each type of ad before lumping them together.

COMMENTARY

Neurophysiologically the comparisons of the balance of visual and text in the business to person ads isn't substantiated and I don't feel an intuitively compelling desire to believe in the comparisons and contrasts drawn among the three examples involving women. An ad needs both visual and text content to stimulate emotion. I feel uneasy when I read the words describing the picture and I feel the effort behind the persuasion in the article rather than feel persuaded. Replace the description with the pictures themselves.

I am quite ready to accept that my emotional response to the structure and content of this article is inappropriate but I also felt confused. Structurally I felt overwhelmed by the challenge of all the topics knitted together into the paper. I do understand that the gap between what I expect and what I see/read is essential to my engagement but I felt the need to experience the ads for myself in fact I longed to experience them so I went online to do so. I could not find any of the examples but I found many sites with many, many ads. Then was infected with a virus, and unsolicited porn visuals, as seems to be the favourite of these builders of viruses. What was beneficial to me was the experience of a different use of sexual imagery and the intentionality of photos with no text, but that is a different discussion from this one on the visual as argument.

Another issue is that I'm old. Younger people may be less confused by a collage approach than I am. I felt bombarded by topics, by examples, by arguments and eventually felt exhausted. But, it was fun to deconstruct the article as if it was an ad.

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