

## PERSUASIVE TECHNIQUES IN ADVERTISING

IOSIM IASMINA<sup>1</sup>, PASCARIU ANKA<sup>1</sup>, DRAGOESCU URLICA ANDREEA<sup>1\*</sup>,

LUNGU MARIUS ROBERT<sup>1</sup>, DUMITRESCU CARMEN<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Banat University of Agricultural Science and Veterinary Medicine "King Michael I of Romania" from Timisoara, Faculty of Management and Rural Tourism, Timisoara, Romania*

\*Corresponding author's e-mail: alina.urlica@usab-tm.ro

**Abstract:** *Purpose.* While the three basic models of communication include information, persuasion, and dialogue, advertising focuses on persuasion rather than on information or dialogue, which fits the pattern of global communication aiming at persuading, manipulating, and seducing, advertising seems to benefit from the main ways of persuading, but the share of each of them is still unknown. *Approach.* This research paper defines, explains, and illustrates twenty persuasive advertising techniques (PAT) to finally classify them depending on the main way of persuading (logos, ethos, and pathos). *Findings.* The study shows that logos and pathos – both involved in persuasion through rationality and emotions – are best represented than ethos by persuasive techniques. This means that the persuasive advertisement is more important than the speaker (manufacturer, advertiser) himself. *Research limitations.* The limitations of the research concern the size of the sample of advertisements analysed. *Future studies* should explore advertisements from the perspective of the type of product / service, of the cultural area of the advertisements, of the demographics of people involved in surveys on advertisements, etc. *Practical implications.* This study brings strategic insights into how to use persuasive techniques in advertising in a business context.

**Key words:** *persuasive technique, models of communication, dialogue, advertising*

### INTRODUCTION

Smith [7,14] identified three *basic models of communication* – the *model of information*, the *model of persuasion*, and the *model of the dialogue*:

- The *model of information*, highly prevalent in journalism and the scope of public relations, aims at achieving objectivity: the target of the message sender is maximizing knowledge levels or enhancing understanding; on the side of the target public, this model of communication is intended to help the public discover new knowledge or information;
- The *model of persuasion*, which is prevalent in publicity and the sphere of public relations, highlights support: the main target of the message sender is to activate, change, or bolster attitudes or behaviours; the public is in a position of evaluate the message and, as a result, to either accept or reject it;
- The *model of the dialogue*, prevalent in the area of intercultural and inter-religious relations and generally in public relations, stresses aspects pertaining to relationships: the main aim of the message sender revolves around generating an environment of mutual trust, sharing information related to peers in communicative encounters; from the point of view of the public, the recipient of the message not only shares the given information, but also seeks to understand more profoundly the partner joining in a communicative relationship.

According to Codoban [2], *global communication* is that type of on-going process where the media are constantly engaging in *persuading* the target audience (by inducing them certain reactions through argumented messages – [10]), *manipulating* (by controlling information tools or methods; influencing ideas, behaviours, or attitudes – [10]) and *seducing* (convincing others or beguiling them into believing something – [10]) – these are conspicuously the goals of advertising, in general.

Persuasion and manipulation may both be considered *propaganda techniques* [1,4] (where *propaganda* stands for biased or misleading information promoting certain interests

– [10]); in the case of advertising, it is intended to determine potential buyers to purchase the products which are advertised.

People generally believe that they are not as vulnerable to persuasion as other people, as a result of the belief in two other related illusions [8,13,16]: (a) The “illusion of invulnerability”, which manifests as a general tendency to think that we are less likely to become victims and (b) the “better-than-average effect”, which is expressed as a typically Western frame of mind whereby people have the tendency to consider themselves as being above average, especially regarding positive personal features such as skilfulness, competence, *etc.* [9].

Herjeu [4] discusses three main modalities of engaging in persuasive communication – *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*:

- *Logos* is known as “the Word of God”, divine reason or the creative principle, it is mentioned in the Gospel of John as the second person of the Trinity, which was embodied as Jesus Christ [10]; in persuasive communication, there are two rationality principles in this respect [11,12]:

- *Logical sentences*: factual, political, speculative, and valuable sentences;
- *Verbal evidence*: analogy, example, comparison, statistics, testimony, visual support;

- *Ethos* is seen as “the characteristic spirit” of an age, a culture, a community, or a group which includes shared attitudes or behaviours [10]; the public recognizes three features in a speaker:

- *Charisma* – represents a high degree of appeal, which inspires others (*Lexico*), including features such as attractiveness and kindness;
- *Domination* – represents power, control, or influence over others [10], including features like authority and power;
- *Credibility* – implies being trusted or seen as reliable [10], including features like honesty and status;

- *Pathos* – stands for a quality implying pity or sympathy [10], including adoration, despair, faith, fear, frustration, gratitude, pride, suffering, and other features evoking powerful emotions; persuasion also implies two types of emotions:

- *Positive emotions*: humour, love, sex appeal, virtue;
- *Negative emotions*: fear, guilt, hate.

To persuade someone to believe or do something, one should [4]:

- Agree with the opponent’s argument if it is rational;
- Allow opponents to repeat the main ideas and highlight the main aspect of their arguments;
- Declare one’s hope that the new information is useful (in the sense that it may change the opinion of the opponents without compromising their self-esteem);
- Emphasise the opponent’s weakness in argumentation, as compared to one’s own arguments;
- Notice weaknesses in the opponent’s speech (such as arguments having no support, contentious or improper evidence, apparent errors, unfounded assumptions, *etc.*) in a tactful manner;
- Listen to the opponent’s response without talking (to avoid surprises);
- Present one’s arguments by using logical arguments, which includes evidence (by analogy, comparison, definition, exemplification, explanation, illustration, figure, paraphrase, quote, statistics);
- Reformulate the main aspects of one’s arguments and highlight strengths, as opposed to weaknesses apparent in the arguments presented by opponents;
- Evidence that one’s reasoning is rational;

- Consider the interlocutor as a rational person who will normally accept rational argumentation. [7,14] There are two effective techniques most likely employed in persuasive argumentation:
  - *Stressing the benefits of one's product and minimising the opponent's problems associated with the product* by association, composition, and repetition;
  - *Maximizing the benefits of one's product and minimising the producer's problems associated with the product* by confusion, diversion, and omission.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The material analysed in this study consists in advertisements collected from the Internet starting from the main persuasive advertising techniques (PAT) used in advertising products and services (Figures 1 and 2).

The method used in the study is **corpus analysis**: each advertisement identified depending on its main persuasive advertising technique was used to define, explain, and illustrate the respective technique, which further on allowed the classification of the techniques from the perspective of the main way of persuading – logos, ethos, or pathos – in an attempt to establish a relationship between persuasive advertising technique and way of persuading.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

The most common persuasive advertising techniques (PAT) are defined, explained, and illustrated below.

*Bandwagon* – a popular activity which is regarded as fashionable by many people or which is attracting supporters [10] (the phrase *jump on the bandwagon* based on this PAT refers to joining others in support of a common cause – [10]); it is a PAT consisting in socially pressuring others to purchase something, since everyone does the same [6]. Maybe the best example of bandwagon advertising is on every McDonald's sign that says "Billions & billions served": in free translation, this is an informal invitation to join along (Figure 1a).

*Bargain* – an object sold or bought much more cheaply than the ordinary price [10] is a PAT suggesting "that the public can get something for almost nothing" (6). Thus, 50% of the initial cost means one can have a piece of clothing for half the price, which is a good bargain (Figure 1b).

*Common sense* – normal sound judgement [10] is a PAT enforcing one's common or natural sense of right or wrong [6]. Common sense tells the consumer that 40% less fat, 30% less calories, and a big taste can satisfy (or *satisfry!*) anyone (Figure 1c).

*Complimenting the customer* is a PAT congratulating or praising someone for something in a polite way. For instance, L'Oréal compliments its buyers by telling them "Because you're worth it!" (Figure 1d).

*Emotional appeal* is a PAT which makes you feel strongly [fear, happiness, instant gratification, sadness, trust] about something [3,6]. Such a PAT draws people's attention that climate change might also change them, turning them into fish-looking mutants (Figure 1e).

*Endorsement / testimonial* – represents a formal statement which is used so as to confirm someone's character or skills [10]; it is a PAT which employs experts or famous people to persuade the public [6]. In essence, it is a social proof. There is *influencer*, *success story*, *text*, and *video testimonials*. The famous American actress Marilyn Monroe endorsing "Lustre Crème Shampoo" was an influencer (Figure 1f).

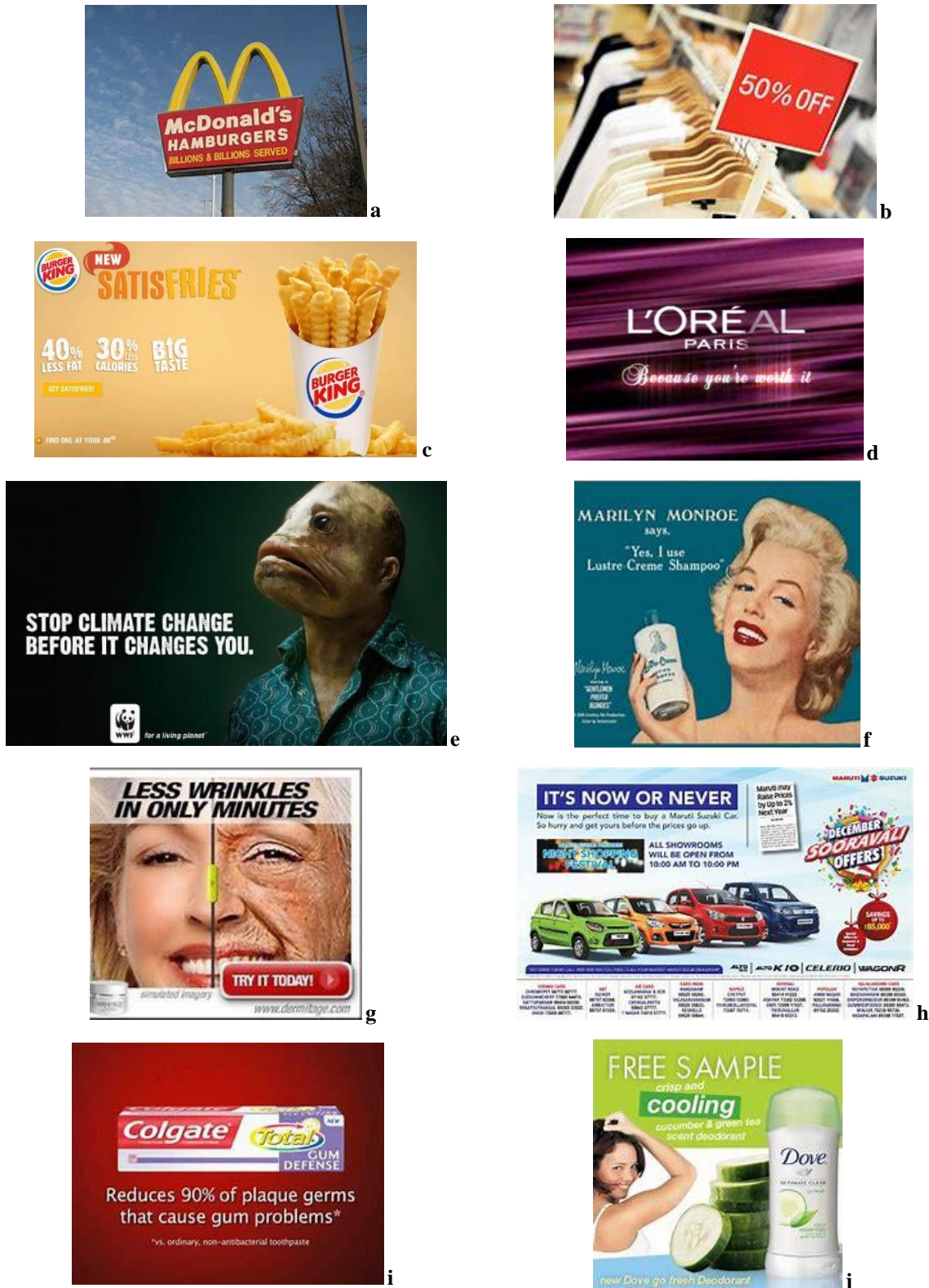


Figure 1. Illustrations of the first ten persuasive advertising techniques

**Exaggeration** is a PAT which presents something as better or greater than it actually is [6,15]. Everybody knows it is impossible to lose wrinkles in only minutes and that one needs weeks or even months of treatment to lose some of the wrinkles (Figure 1g).

**Exigency** is a PAT which promotes the impression that one is to act immediately or waste an incredible opportunity [6]. The best way to express this PAT is “It’s now or

never” (also an allusion to Elvis Presley’s famous song) to persuade the customer buy a Japanese car (Figure 1h).

**Facts and figures** giving the impression of accurate particulars [10] is a PAT which employs research or statistics to make something appear more desirable or reliable [5, 6]. The mention “Reduces 90% of plaque germs” must have persuaded billions of people to buy this tooth paste (Figure 1i).

**Free** – when something is offered free from charge [10] is a PAT suggesting that we could in fact get something without making any expenses [3,6]. People all over the world (from both highly industrialised and poor countries) will always hurry to get something for free, ignoring that it might persuade them to come back the next day and buy the product (Figure 1j).

**Glittering generalities** is a PAT which uses positive words which are in fact too vague to actually have genuine significance [6]. This is also the case of McDonald’s mochas which are promoted as “Creamy. Dreamy. Icy. Chocolatey” (Figure 2a).

**Heartstrings** resorts to feelings of love / compassion (*Lexico*); these are PATs that make us “feel good” about ourselves [6,15]. An example would be The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals which campaigns for pets (Figure 2b).

**Humour** is a PAT which is attractive because it amuses us [6]. An ad for Sedal Shampoo shows a lioness before and after using it, and the difference is astonishing (Figure 2c).

**Name calling** represents foul language or verbal abuse [10] and it is a PAT which displays weaker or inferior quality products so as to draw comparisons [6]. A Romanian with a sense of humour called McDonald’s grilled chicken, classic beef, and crispy chicken wraps “McCrap”, an allusion to the fact that this type of food is considered junk with low nutritional value – [10]) (Figure 2d).

**Reasoning** is a PAT attracting consumers by listing several reasons or by making a point [6] “If I’m eating at McDonald’s, then ...” is rather a conditional statement than a reasoning one (Figure 2e).

**Repetition** – reiterating something that has already been mentioned [10] is a PAT which consists in a redundant idea [3,6] to keep a brand / product in the forefront of consumer’s minds. “Coca” repeated six times should have such an effect: you encounter it endlessly until you go buy it. (Figure 2f).

**Rhetorical question** – asked in order to generate dramatic effects [10] is a PAT asking a question to produce an effect without expecting an answer. “Why love one [a dog] but eat the other [a pig depicted in the image]” – in this case, followed by the recommendation to choose vegetarian! – the answer is quite simple: the dog has been too long a pet to be eaten (at least in Western cultures) (Figure 2g).

**Snob appeal**, the opposite of *bandwagon*, persuades consumers that they will be part of a special group if they acquire a certain product or service; it plays into people’s fondness of receiving special treatment or being considered different (*The VCG*); it also implies that one who employs a certain product would necessarily be better than others [6, 8]. Godiva states that “Every woman is one part Diva”, which is presented as a good reason to “dive in” (Figure 2h).



Figure 2. Illustrations of next ten persuasive advertising techniques

**Transfer** is a PAT which associates famous people's names or pictures without making use of any direct quotes [6]. A good example is that of American actress Téa Leoni's photo advertising the Netflix TV series "Madam Secretary" (Figure 2i).

**Weasel words** are intentionally ambiguous statements which may sometimes even become misleading [10]; these are a type of PAT which promotes impressions of

meaningfulness, while making only vague claims. “So clean, it’s virtually spotless!” perfectly illustrates this type of PAT: if a product is virtually – i.e. “nearly” [10] spotless, this would not make it worthy of being bought (Figure 2j).

## CONCLUSIONS

The persuasive techniques in advertising analysed above belong to the following *ways of persuading*:

- *Logos*, with its two basic principles of rationality in persuasion:
  - *Logical sentences*: factual (*common sense, facts and figures, free*) and speculative (*reasoning, rhetorical question, snob appeal, weasel words*);
  - *Verbal evidence*: example (*exaggeration*), mention (*bandwagon, bargain*), and testimony (*endorsement / testimonial, transfer*);
- *Ethos*, with only two of its three features in a speaker:
  - *Domination*: control (*repetition*);
  - *Credibility*: competence (*exigency*) and honesty (*glittering generalities*);
- *Pathos*, with its two types of emotions involved in persuasion:
  - *Positive emotions*: humour (*humour*) and virtue (*complimenting the customer*);
  - *Negative emotions*: fear (*emotional appeal, heartstrings*) and hate (*name calling*).

*Logos* and *pathos* – both involved in persuasion through *rationality* and *emotions* – are best represented by 12 and 5, respectively, persuasive techniques, while *ethos* is represented by only 3 persuasive techniques. This means that the *persuasive advertisement* is more important than the *speaker* (*manufacturer, advertiser*).

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