

WMSCI 2013
July 09 - 15, 2013 – Orlando, Florida, USA
THEME: Special Track on Interdisciplinary Research, Education, and Communication: Summer IDREC
2013

TITLE:

Argument Advertising Ethics and Dogs: MultiModal Argumentation Once More With Humour

ABSTRACT

Michael Gilbert's MultiModal Argumentation model has been useful for a variety of issues in ethics in advertising. In this final conference presentation of his work, I take the reader briefly through a review of MMA, and then do an analysis of its use in dog advertising.

INTRODUCTION

Advertisers in today's cautious and cluttered world face a problem in constructing an ad that catches the viewer's attention while avoiding appearing inappropriate. Consumers are exposed to some 3,500 advertisements per day (Solomon 2014, p. 49), and advertisers know they must do something special and different to catch the consumers' attention. Advertisers know that humour and visual associations help cut through the clutter, but what may seem like clever visual representation to the designer of an ad may appear as sexist, racist, ageist, or just offensive when viewed by the target market. Constructing an effective and appropriate advertising message requires collaboration in interdisciplinary research into how an ad will make its argument to the viewer, and whether that ad can be considered "ethical". The word *ethical* is in quotation marks because ethical decisions are usually based on beliefs formed early in consumers' lives, making the decision often a very personal one. Nevertheless, we can use a method from Philosophy, Michael Gilbert's MultiModal Argumentation, to examine the issue of ethics in argument. This paper continues a stream of work by the author dedicated to examining the interdisciplinary application of philosophical models to issues of importance to business, especially in the field of communications that build arguments. To the analysis, it adds the element of humour, as suggested by Professor Thomas Marlowe of Seton Hall University. In examining arguments in advertisements and, where humour may be found, evaluating its effects, this paper assumes emotions can be arguments (Ben-Ze'ev 1995), that ads can be arguments, (Slade 2003), and that the visual can be an argument (Groarke 2005).

Michael Gilbert's MultiModal Argumentation model has long been studied in the fields of Philosophy and of Business as a way of evaluating arguments. Most arguments will of course have at least some logical component, but Gilbert (1994, 1995, 2004, 2005) argues that there also are other ways of evaluating an argument. In Western society, the term *argument* is closely bound with *logic*, as in a phrase we hear often, "I'm not going to argue with you if you can't be logical." Gilbert maintains that while argumentation traditionally is associated with logic and reasoning (Balthorp 1979, O'Keefe 1982, Willard 1983 and 1989, van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1989), we also must consider three other modes of argumentation:

Emotional "is related to the realm of feelings;"

Visceral "stems from the area of the physical;"

Kisceral "covers the intuitive and non-sensory arenas" (Gilbert, 1994, 159).

Part of the research to be done by the designer of an ad is investigating the argument the ad makes from all four perspectives. This paper examines print ads with visual elements, looking at differences in logical versus emotional approaches, and examining the role of humour in the analysis. In "confronting them with the world" (Stappers, 2007, 1), the designer can examine each form of argument and, through research such as focus groups and surveys, determine which ad will appeal best to the target market.

To give an example of my use of Gilbert's model with advertisements: in a full colour ad in *Esquire Magazine* for the Do It Yourself television network, we see a woman standing in an elegant home with fashionable wood flooring and modern art on the walls. She wears a low-cut sequinned dress and knee-high boots, and carries a hammer. The copy in the lower right corner says, "Esquire Ultimate Bachelor Pad Television Special" with the date and time and the DIY network logo. 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.

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 beauty). We also find humour in connections made between a woman as beauty and a woman as capable construction worker. Unfortunately we also encounter a rather sexist view of woman and yet another attempt to use an attractive woman to sell a product.

ADVERTISING AND DOGS

Fortunately for advertisers, there are other routes to humour in ads. Everyone these days it seems is mad about dogs. They appear in ads for everything from applesauce to zoos. They are particularly being used more and more in ads because of the number of aging Baby Boomers adopting dogs. Best of all is the fact that we can use dogs in silly, humorous, ridiculous ways to make a product memorable, and unlike a human who might protest, they will not utter even a growl, and they have no access to ethics boards or product boycotting.

A major use of dogs in ads is to advertise products made especially for dogs, such as treats. This bloodhound shown at his place of employment as a search animal appears to be about to bolt, were it not for the treat awaiting him at the finish of his job – Because dogs don't always have it easy:



In a quick MultiModal Argumentation explanation we can see how the ad makes its argument in the four modes:

Logic: *All dirty jobs require a treat*

A dog using a criminal's underwear to track him is a dirty job.

Therefore, this dog deserves a treat.

Emotional: The expression on the dog's face tells us what he is feeling.

Visceral: The picture is graphic and hits home right in the gut.

Kisceral: We make the leap from the picture of the dog and the underwear to what the task will be.

In each mode, we come to the conclusion that the advertised Dog Treats are a good thing to buy for our dog. I could continue this analysis with more dog ads, but I have been doing this for a long time and this is my last conference presentation before I retire, in one year, so I am just going to take you through a series of ads showing in how many different ways advertisers are using dogs today. Almost all of them make their argument in the emotional or visceral mode.

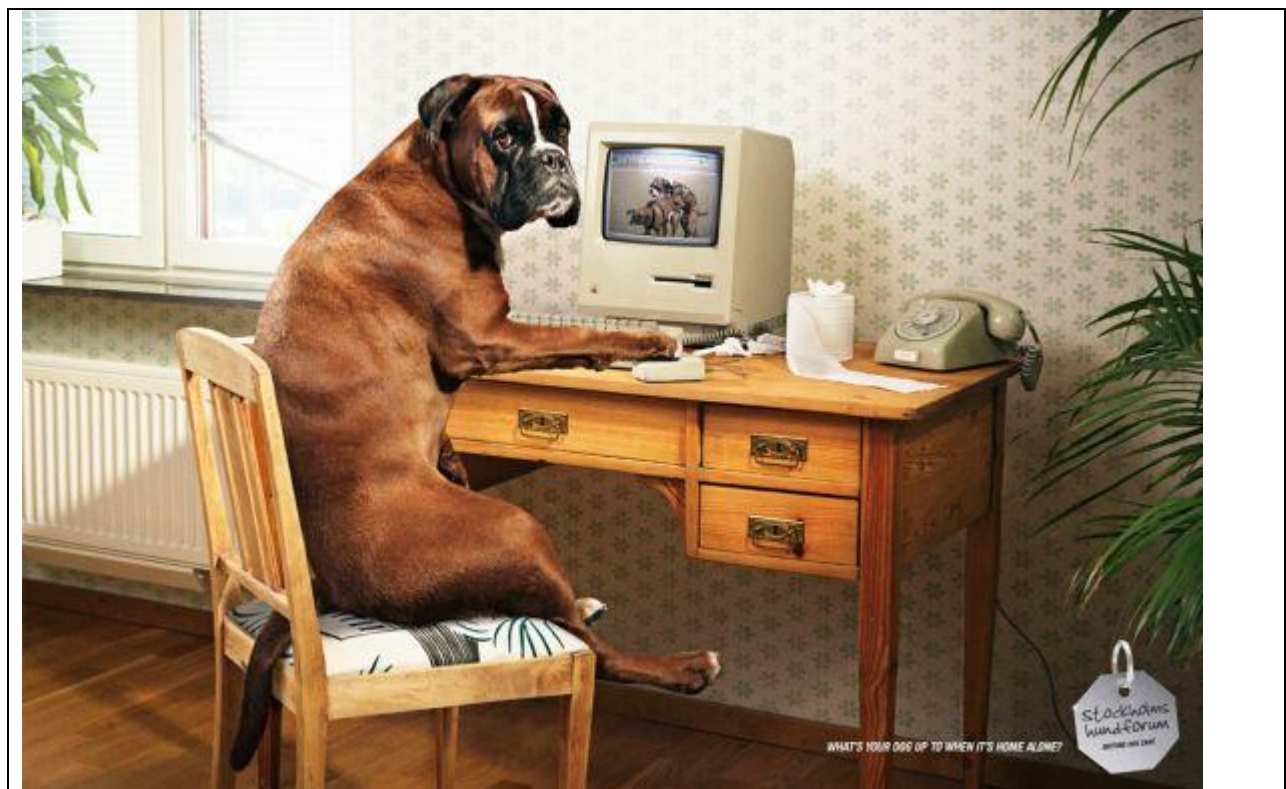
The ad may provide a solution to a problem with a dog that many owners experience – bad dog breath:



Good treats can make a dog healthier, especially in the area of tooth care – Give your dog stronger teeth:



An ad for doggy daycare emphasizes the fear that parents have for someone left home alone, and as more dogs become surrogate children, it is easy to use that fear in a humorous way to advertise a service that looks after your dog while you are away – What's your dog up to when it's home alone?:



A huge number of dog ads are designed to appeal to people who may be thinking of bringing a stray dog into their home – There's no better friend. Adopt a dog:



Or a company might be advertising to sell purebred dogs. This one combines people's love of dogs as well as chocolate:



Dogs are used to advertise products with no direct relationship to dogs – Energizer Batteries, Never let their toys die:



Eyeglasses – The Black Connection:



Bird food – Turns Birdie into man's best friend:



And finally automobiles, that wonderful combination of dogs and cars – Zero to 100 km/hr in 4 seconds:



CONCLUSION

Michael Gilbert's Multimodal argumentation model has been widely used and in particular has given me an enriched research programme over a number of years. My thanks to him, and to Thomas Marlowe for suggesting the use of humour in the analysis.

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