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## Commentary on Ripley

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# Commentary on M. Louise Ripley's "Reframing Emotional Arguments in Ads in the Culture of Informal Logic"

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**ABSTRACT:** Although I agree with the author that emotion should be faced with new tools in argumentation theory, I do not agree with some of the distinctions made to analyze emotional arguments in ads. As long as we do not have an ideal model to evaluate emotional arguments, from which we can decide what and why certain emotional arguments are wrong, we can not say that some of them are unethical.

**KEYWORDS:** commercial speech, ethics, persuasion, Walton.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Let's start by using FDL:

All papers that face the problem of emotional arguments are very welcome.  
Ripley's paper faces the problem of emotional arguments.  
Therefore, Ripley's paper is very welcome.

The notion of appealing to emotions in speeches and controversies, which has been treated in rhetoric extensively, is faced in terms of argumentation theory in Ripley's paper. It is not very common to find reflections in this realm with such a degree of determination as in Ripley's effort. I think that the lack of research in this area is not only indicative of a certain lack of knowledge regarding how to explain the function of emotions in argumentative exchanges, but is also indicative of a certain lack of will to do it. That is why Ripley's paper is very welcome.

In what follows, I will try to mention what I find problematic in Ripley's perspective, instead of emphasizing the points we have in common. I will concentrate on the necessary distinction, not made in Ripley's paper, between commercial speech and persuasion in ads and how this distinction could help in analyzing emotions in arguments, especially regarding to dialectical obligations of the advertiser; second, I will face the problem of true or false beliefs in ads which is, to me, the main point in Ripley's work, because it is linked with the problem of ethical dimensions, this is to say, the problem of evaluating emotional arguments.

I do have to say, before we start, that in Ripley's paper it is not totally clear what emotional arguments are (although on p. 4 Gilbert's definition is quoted), and why she sees a "hint of emotion" in the Duo-Pro example, this last problem perhaps being more my incapacity to read the feelings expressed in the word "care", than an effective emotional strategy of Duo-Pro.

## 2. COMMERCIAL SPEECH AND DIALECTICAL OBLIGATIONS

What I think is necessary to add to analyze ads, and the emotions contained in them, is that their purpose is not only a persuasive one, but also, and mainly, a commercial speech one (Walton 2007). This means that ads are not only speech acts in which abstract persuasion is adduced, but mainly they are speech acts in which the interests of the proponent are explicitly proposed. The advertiser tries to get an action from the audience, namely: the buying of the product. In this respect, the ads have one of the main characteristics of deliberative dialogue. Taking into account that as consumers we have to choose between products, the advertiser, in democratic societies, will use any strategy both to provoke the action expected and to anticipate reactions (*prolepsis* in rhetoric). As the advertiser knows that time for ads is limited and the money to invest in ads must be balanced, but it is possible to play with images, colors and catch-phrases, emotions are his/her best bet.

In this process, the advertiser will cover dialectical obligations in her mental space (although today the ads of big companies are made by teams of experts, in which some of them take the role of audience or consumer), but she especially will focus on the best narration to provoke the wanted action. Precisely because the experts can take the role and place of all—or many—different types of consumers to decide on the best narration and arguments in the ad, we can assume that they will play with all the possibilities in terms of criticism: as experts and arguers they are well trained in dealing with objections. I think Ripley is timid in saying that ads have some level of dialectical exchange (p. 6): they are full of dialectical exchange, at least those that appear in expensive magazines.

Regarding the criteria of sufficiency, Ripley claims that, at least in the Artistic Tile's example, the ad does not provide enough evidence for its case. But the question here is why the ad should do so, knowing the limitation of space (in TV, Magazines, radios, etc.), time and money. It is completely the other way round: today the mass media consumers are used to, or they are part of, the visual minimalistic, but at the same exaggerated, emotional culture. They expect and approve of the succinctness, consuming grandiloquent phrases and very explicit images in many cases. Unfortunately, the criteria of exaggeration can not be a rule to evaluate emotional arguments -negatively-, because in that case not many ads—or propaganda—would have the chance to send out their message. Unlike the rules of Pragma-dialectic theory to resolve discussions critically, where the ideal model is the result of a very clear frame based on pragmatic and dialectical parameters, we do not have an ideal model of emotional argumentation by which to evaluate the ecology of emotions in controversies. In the beginning of the paper Ripley recognizes this, but later she assumes some of the very general rules identified by Gilbert.

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### 3. TRUE OF FALSE? THE ETHICAL PROBLEM AND A MANIFESTATION OF THE PROBLEM OF EVALUATION

Just as Ripley pointed out in the introduction of the paper, later in the last paragraph of point 2, and then in the whole sixth part, the problem of using emotional arguments finds its problematic dimension in how to evaluate the acceptability of some emotional premises in ads. Part of the right answer is given by Ripley when she says that many ads are made for a specific target market. Thus, the acceptability is put under the parameters of specific audiences.

Quoting one of Johnson's ethical questions within dialectical obligations: Is it rational on my part to expect the Other to be rationally moved by an assertion that I believe to be false? Ripley makes her case by asking: can the reader rationally assume that person to be a customer who would use that product? As audience, in fact, we do not ask that type of question, because if it were the case that that person would not use the product, she or he would lose her credibility as a public person, instead of the product losing credibility.

As an artefact, the ad can not be compared to reality (the woman in Artistic Tiles is unique for that ad and for the ideal imaginary pursuit in the campaign), just as the content of a novel can not be compared to the reality. In this sense, perhaps unfortunately, argumentation theory is limited to a more realistic context. The ads we are interested in are closer to dramatizations than real scenarios, thus we can not apply our real ethical parameters to them.

[Link to paper](#)

#### REFERENCE

Walton, D. (2007). *Media Argumentation. Dialectic, persuasion, and rhetoric*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.