

A promoção de jovialidade: a construção de um discurso e argumentação persuasivos

Promoting youthfulness: the construction of persuasive discourse and argumentation

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ABSTRACT: Advertising discourse is persuasive by its very nature. Essentially goal-oriented, it is constructed so as to propose a pre-determined view of the world that suits its purposes, by means of a well-defined argumentative pathway that leads up to the proposed most (desired) suitable option. As a discourse that enjoys unparalleled freedom – both in terms of content and form – it has long moved beyond a clear-cut argumentative process based on hard sell versus soft sell, or tickle versus reason approaches (Cook, 2001:15). In their attempts to overcome boredom and scepticism on the part of an ad-literate audience, advertisers resort to different forms of argumentative reasoning: deduction, opposition, analogy or calculation, as proposed by Charaudeau (2008). In addition, as multi-modal texts, they make the most of the different modes available – pictures, text, sound, moving pictures – to build their argument. As claimed by Ripley (2008), an ad is an argument, thus, whichever claims or statements it makes, we are aware of – and suspicious about – its persuasive intent, though we often tend to go along with the worldviews it suggests. In spite of common accusations of stereotyping, segregating, imposing models of beauty, lifestyle among others, overlooking (and blurring) national idiosyncrasies, advertising has somehow managed to build rather convincing arguments that seemingly consider such criticism.

In this study, we will look into cosmetics adverts that explicitly and implicitly build their arguments in ways that almost always encourage identical proposals of youthfulness, despite their apparent different claims and argumentative routes and despite their apparent concern for incorporating socially (or politically) correct positions.

INTRODUCTION

It is only to be expected that persuasive discourse should imply carefully designed argumentation to convince their audience of the proposed action. As argued by Leech (1966: 23), advertising is an example of loaded language, as it ‘aims to change the will, opinion, or attitudes of its audience. [but] It differs from other types of loaded language in having a very precise material goal’. However, its audiences are well aware of that fact, as today advertisements speak to ad-literate audiences, and rather sceptical ones, as well (Cook, 2001; Myers, 1998), which means advertisements must overcome some prevailing disfavour, suspicion and frequently, discredit, on the part of the public. To accomplish this, advertising resorts to all devices, strategies, modes, media available, making sure the argumentative pathways presented to the audience are enough to make messages and appeals attractive and convincing. As argued by Ripley (2008:517).

An ad is someone saying that the product is good because someone else obviously either does not think it is good or has not yet realized that the product is good and needs to be convinced of the goodness (or appropriateness, affordability, etc.) of the product.

As a discourse that enjoys a lot of discursive freedom, it takes hold of multiple linguistic devices, including some incursions and interventions into linguistic norms, namely spelling liberties, phonetic manipulation, and even creative disruptive syntax and grammar. In addition, it will draw on other discourses – or their features – to renew itself and its discursive practices, to entertain and to apparently challenge and involve the audience into interpretation.

As multimodal texts, ads further make the most of all the modes provided by different media, from visuals to verbal signs, graphics and sound. This multimodal character gives advertising campaigns an array of argumentative channels, which often result in texts that contain both implicit and explicit claims, coming in different forms and modes leading up to the main argument, and to the main appeal, more often than not, rather convincingly. As argued by Ripley (2008), ‘An ad is an argument’, but an argument spelled out in different modes so as to repeat it in different ways, making sure the audience will get the message and, hopefully, remember it.

As part of social interaction, adverts feed on (dominant) ideologies. They require the audience's participation in the interpretation of the claims they make: the audience, the external participants, are essential to complete their argumentation. There is no ad if it does not enter the space of the audience, an audience with a given presupposed knowledge, which will prove an essential deciphering tool. Thus, ads need the audience's MRs, in the sense proposed by Fairclough (1992, 2001), (members' resources) in the processes of production and interpretation of texts. The 'MR which people have in their heads and draw upon when they produce or interpret texts', include their knowledge of language, representations of the natural and social worlds they inhabit, values, beliefs assumptions, and so on (Fairclough, 1992: 24).

Thus, we will attempt to demonstrate and discuss how cosmetics' advertising makes use of all these features to build messages that lead their audiences towards very well defined world views on the way we should look like, or at least try to look like. By means of adverts for well-known brands, with apparently different standpoints regarding skincare products advertising, we will try to demonstrate argumentative structures of adverts comply with common strategies encountered in other argumentative acts, and they follow lines of reasoning peculiar to strategies of influence, as argued by Charaudeau (2008), aiming to persuade their audience of their proposals and, eventually, their products' benefits and advantages, implying a dialogue with the audience based on assumptions of shared values and viewpoints.

Additionally, we will attempt to apply the categories proposed by Ruiz (2014), concerning implicit discourse, not only to demonstrate that much of the argumentative strategy in advertising – even though it is an overtly persuasive discourse – requires deduction to infer the most relevant ideological layers and that there are different forms of implicitness, associated with different marketing approaches. It seems that, despite different departure points, skincare advertising relies on identical premises and world views.

1. ARGUMENTATION WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF PERSUASIVE PROMOTIONAL DISCOURSE

Although not all advertising claims are put forward explicitly, advertising is unequivocally persuasive. As mentioned above, we are no longer dealing with naïve audiences (Cook, 2001), which means that creating adverts has never been so challenging, and argumentation is therefore thoroughly devised to influence the audience to act or only to believe in the viewpoints put forward by advertising messages. As in any argumentative act, adverts comply with the conditions of the ‘mise en scene’ of the argumentative act, as proposed by Charaudeau (2008), who claims that the argumentative subject must engage in a threefold discursive activity concerning argumentation:

(1) de quoi il s’agit (problématiser); (2) qu’elle [sic] position il adopte (se positionner); (3) quelle est la force de son argumentation (prouver). (Charaudeau, P., 2008: 5)

Ads present us with a situation, a proposition, one which is clearly imposed on us, often a problem for which they will offer the solution, and clearly adopt a standpoint – the best possible standpoint – which they attempt to prove, by providing the reasoning we ought to follow to get to the point they are trying to make. They rely on the communicational situation – that it is an advertising message – which will guarantee that the audience will go along. In fact, the audience’s recognition of the role advertising texts play, provides a series of assumptions on which advertisers rely on to build their messages, and the audience uses for interpreting them.

Most of these propositions will assume a preliminary viewpoint, almost as anticipating objection, in the sense used by Walton (2009) – proleptic argumentation – as it puts forward different strategies: arguments based on dominant preconceived worldviews, presented as starting point assuming they refute objection, using dominant referent systems, such as the discourse of (pseudo) science, among other validating proleptic arguments: ‘proleptic argumentation as referring to an argument that contains within itself a reply to some potential objection, attack or rebuttal that could be made against it’ (2009:107).

In the advertising line below it is argued that, assumedly, we do not look equally nice throughout the day but we would like to (this is an essential advertising tenet crucial to establish the communicational situation and the problem). The advertiser shows you it is important to choose a product that resolves this problem, and is going to show/prove that by means of the visuals, as the depicted model wearing this product looks glamorous and flawless, a common picture used in this kind of advertisement:

You're flawless every hour of the day. Look as beautiful tonight as you did this morning.
(Estée Lauder Double Wear)

As members of the audience, we rapidly recognise the argumentation which is implicit or explicit in the adverts, and what is more relevant, such argumentation heavily depends on world views and ideology that advertising (together with other systems and discourses) has been mirroring and validating for many years, to the point that we seldom question such underlying values. These, however, constitute essential pillars of advertising argumentation.

1.1 ARGUMENTATIVE STRATEGIES IN ADVERTISING

Whereas problem presentation is set by the communication context in that we assume ads will impose a given issue and viewpoint, and that the advertiser will assume they are in dialogue with their audience, in a position to recommend, advise and explain to us, the audience, the best course of action, it is clear that they will resort to a wide variety of arguments to validate their proposition and standpoint. Therefore, they will use the reasoning modes as proposed by Charaudeau (2008:10, 11): deduction, in that adverts establish some kind of connection cause-effect; analogy, which involves at least two facts, judgements or behaviours (very common among detergent adverts); opposition which implicates presenting opposite facts or ideas, highlighting contradiction, incompatibility, often used in counter-arguing; and reasoning based on calculation (adverts that present us with opposing alternative options, in that one of them works and the other does not, are quite common), evidencing the almost mathematical rela-

tionship between argument and consequence (using pseudoscientific formulas or evidence in adverts is quite a common strategy).

It is important to note that all of the types of reasoning proposed by Charaudeau (2008) can be used in advertising, and also require on the part of target audience a shared knowledge on which argumentation will be built. This is particularly relevant in the case of argumentation, as adverts rely heavily on assumption and presumptions believed to be common and taken for granted. Also, adverts can use more than one type of reasoning, and these can be expressed by different modes, which means we may as well expect analogy to manifest both in verbal and visual elements, or in sound/music, or in all of them.

2. IMPLICITNESS IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF ADVERTISING ARGUMENTS

On the other hand, the argumentative itinerary proposed by many adverts is not always clear-cut and transparent. As reiterated above, advertising is an eminently ideological discourse that assumes a dialogue with the audience, requiring the audience's participation in the construction of meaning. This means they expect the audience to decipher puns, metaphors, intertext and a variety of allusive devices that demand for the audience's ability to infer and recognise the inputs of implicit discourse:

Failure to recognise the exact intertext may jeopardise the advert's intelligibility, specifically in terms of the objective of fostering positive associations between product and intertext.' (Conradie, 2012: 307)

Actually, implicitness and inference are common features of the different argumentative strategies, essential to recommend a unique pathway to the desired worldview proposed by advertising. Ruiz (2014) proposes a model of analysis based on four types or dimensions of implicit discourse: insinuated discourse, hidden discourse, 'failed' discourse and underlying discourse. Such dimensions stem from a sociological perspective that claims that (a) all social discourse has both explicit and implicit elements, (b) implicit discourse is derived from explicit

discourse, not only conveyed by verbal utterances, but also by context and non-verbal elements, (c) to infer implicit discourse it is essential to consider the context, and (d) there might be contradiction between implicit and explicit discourse, but this is not necessarily what happens, (e) implicit discourse is not to be regarded as the truthful one behind the explicit, and (f) it may assume a variety of forms (Ruiz, 2014: 173-174). The scheme below summarizes the model to be applied to the analysis:

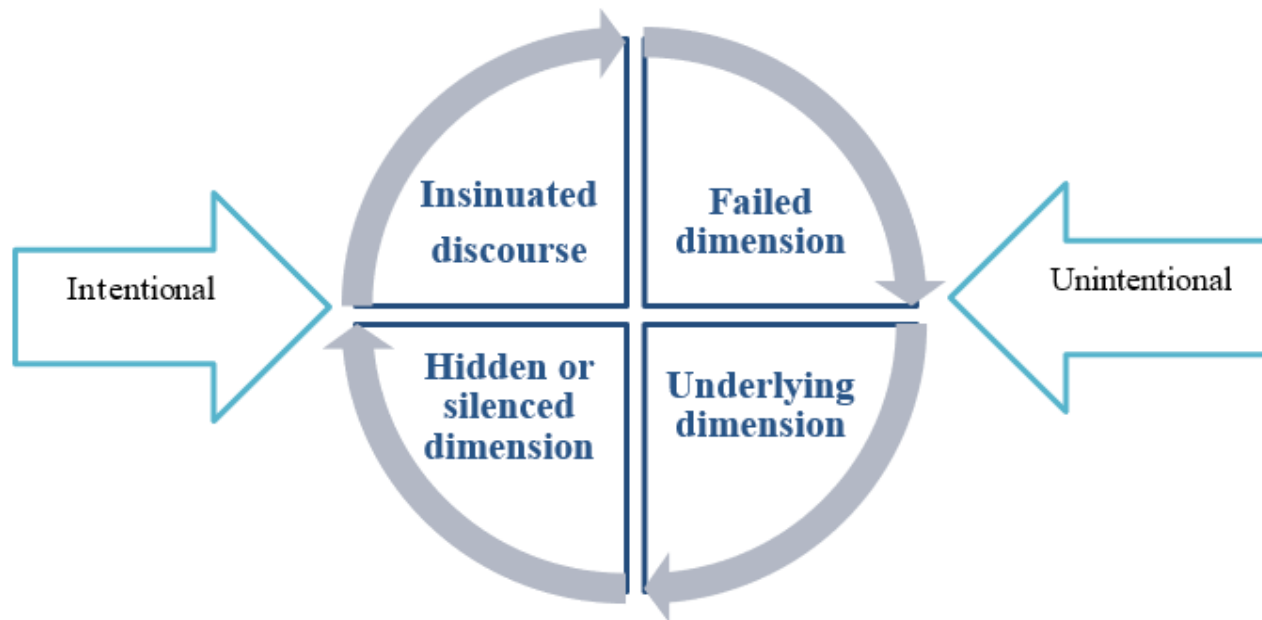


Figure 1: Scheme adapted from Ruiz, 2014

The dimensions proposed will be most useful in our analysis, as they include both intentional and unintentional forms of implicit discourse. Intentional forms seem to apply more frequently as advertising messages are judiciously constructed, and their constituting elements are seldom a result of spontaneous utterance. Thus, we will be focusing on dimensions such as

the insinuated dimension of discourse: ‘In this type of implicit discourse, the explicit elements lead or invite to infer the implicit elements’ (Ruiz, 2014: 175), and the hidden or silenced dimension of discourse, often associated with argumentative and manipulative strategies: ‘it is a non-discourse, an intended omission on the part of the producer of the discourse’ (Ruiz, 2014: 180).

Although the intentionality of these two dimensions seems to make them more significant for advertising, the failed dimension of discourse, whereby concealment fails, may become of interest, as adverts may attempt at leaving some aspects out, which are nonetheless revealed by other elements of the message: ‘we can define it, then, as that dimension of implicit discourse that consists in implicitly saying something that is meant to be concealed’ (Ruiz, 2014: 182). Likewise, though not revealing an intention on the producer’s part, the underlying dimension of discourse may be interesting in that such examples may point to ideological constructs that go unnoticed as the interlocutors take them granted or ‘natural’. As noted by Ruiz (2014: 184), ‘they are the ones that remain most on the edge of the awareness of the subjects involved’.

3. COSMETIC ADVERTISING: THE HIGHWAY TO YOUTHFULNESS

Cosmetics advertising goes back to as early as the eighteenth century and cosmetic products were also among the first products to be advertised nation-wide in the UK (Dyer, 1982: 18, 30). Most cosmetics, particularly those that belong to famous international brands, are still luxury items and part of many women’s (and men’s) lives, associated with their craving for beauty and youth. If we look at cosmetics advertisements from the 1920s, we will see that the appeals have not changed radically. Beautiful and/or youthful appearance, or even perfection are persistent appeals, definitely connected with prevailing ideologies, and with the nature of the product itself. Indeed, cosmetic products – whether makeup or skincare – are closely connected with a concern with good-looking skin and appearance, despite eventually genuine more rational motivations, such as seeking for healthier skin.

A woman is only as old as her complexion. (Headline for Boncilla Cosmetics from Boncilla Laboratories, 1923)

The propositions included in advertising in general, and in particular, cosmetic advertising, have frequently raised debate given the overriding imposition of stereotypes and models of beauty, many times connected with abusive forms of pushing dominant viewpoints on what it is to be beautiful, ignoring cultural differences and the desirable subjectivity on this matter. The somehow unrealistic craving for an everlasting youthful appearance has been a topic in these debates, which often result in adverts being accused of deceitful and manipulative, which does not seem to have deterred cosmetic advertising, nor this overtly or covertly proposed goal in such products.

3.1 BRAND POSITIONING AND ARGUMENTATION

If it is clear that cosmetic brands are clearly presenting ageing and unhealthy skin as a problem that requires a solution seems undisputable. The first stage for argumentation is thus set. The positioning also seems quite obvious: ageing skin and unhealthy skin are undesirable and therefore action should be taken by means of the product offered. Then, there is need for proving, and the third phase is catered for, as long as argumentative strategies are put forward.

Even though brands may choose different strategies concerning the way they will attempt to influence their audience, what the analysis below seems to indicate is that whether brands blatantly accept the ideological standpoint that cosmetic products provide a solution for skin problems or poor looking appearance, promising ideal beauty standards, or whether they claim to be sensible and honest, using rational, socially-ware claims (Simões & Tuna, 2015), and therefore assume not everyone can look as beautiful as top models and artists, they implicitly or explicitly present ageing a problem, and youthful appearance as a goal to be pursued.

3.1.1 IDENTICAL APPEALS THROUGH DIFFERENT ARGUMENTATIVE STRATEGIES

In the analysis below, we will, then, look into different ways different brands position themselves regarding the pursuit of beauty. As brands whose products clearly rely on the assumption that it is relevant and important to have healthy good-looking skin, regardless of their prevailing marketing standpoint with regard to the ideological construction of beauty – and beauty standards, they need to present their claims in a way that consumers incorporate the need and desire for skincare products.

The advertisements for Estée Lauder Advanced Eye Repair, for example, overtly insinuate that radiance and beauty lead to youthful appearance. In these adverts, the argumentation relies heavily not only on deduction, but also on calculation, by presenting scientific evidence, thus the reasoning, using ‘Hyaluronic Acid, nature’s “moisture magnet’ (regardless of the audience’s knowledge of its nature or effect) hydrates skin. This proposition is also dependent upon the assumption that science has become a powerful referent system in our society (see Williamson, 1978), and in advertising, hence a significant validating argument. This is an expected inference lying in hidden in discourse, but which the audience needs to recover to go along with the message. The underlying assumption that nature causes aggression but that ‘looking natural’ is a desired effect is another implicit dimension.

Powerful nighttime renewal for radiant, youthful-looking skin. Instantly adds radiance. Intensely hydrates. Advanced Night Repair significantly reduces the look of key signs of aging.

It maximizes the power of skin’s natural nighttime renewal with our exclusive ChronoluxCB™ Technology. Also includes Hyaluronic Acid, nature’s “moisture magnet,” to help lock in moisture¹.

1. Underlined added.

The next advert for Estée Lauder ‘supreme’ uses identical argumentation if we consider the verbal elements. The picture, however, leads us to an argument by analogy, by presenting us not only with what is meant by youthful look, but also presenting a comparison where the product

is the key to youthfulness. It is not by chance that the Portuguese version of this advert displays the title ‘A chave para a juventude’.

Argumentation in adverts is clearly conveyed in different modes. Like in plenty of other makeup and skincare ads, opposition in the following advert, for example, uses visuals to establish contrast of before and after the use of the product, thus arguing in favour of the product, as the picture so demonstrates. Actually, pictures are powerful argumentative devices in adverts for this type of product, as, in addition to create presence, in the sense proposed by Kjeldsen (2012: 241) – *evidentia* – realism and immediacy, they possess the quality of condensation or the ability to concentrate several ideas, thought and contents from emotional to more rational arguments:

Pictures, I suggest, have the potential to argue primarily by means of condensation. They offer a rhetorical enthymematic process in which something is condensed or omitted, and, as a consequence, it is up to the spectator to provide the unspoken premises. Rational condensation in pictures, then, is the visual counterpart of verbal argumentation.

Other brands adopt identical argumentation: we are naturally predetermined to age but that is not a desirable appearance, which means we must fight it, as looking good, means looking young. The product provides a solution for that condition, which means that if you use it, you will look better and younger as a result, as they use scientific methods. Science, through ground-breaking scientific formulae, equals effectiveness:

Shiseido Benefiance: A Wrinkle-fighting Regimen. Benefiance is our best selling and indulgently luxurious collection of treatments. Signs of aging are diminished, including dryness and the appearance of wrinkles and fine lines.

Our best-selling anti-aging skincare collection, Future Solution LX now formulated with SkingenecellEnmei Complex, a proprietary anti-aging ingredient that slows down the appearance of visible signs of aging, and helps restore and prolong a youthful look. The result: Smoother, softer, more radiant, age-defying skin.

Even brands that claim to use more realistic approaches displaying more mature models,



Figure 2: Picture of Coverderm advertisement

will reveal in their arguments that the ‘visible’ signs of ageing are worth fighting, as the advert for Nivea can demonstrate. The insinuated discourse leads us to this very conclusion: You may look beautiful (as the visuals show us) at a more mature age, but to look beautiful you need to take care of your skin and fight the not so nice signs of ageing.

The results indicate a clearly idealized image of a more mature woman. Explicitly, the advert reveals grey hair, some eye wrinkles, but clearly a good-looking well-preserved mature woman. The product name incorporates, from the outset, the implicit insinuated discourse – Vital – indicating that using this product and thus fighting the unwanted signs of ageing is essential.

The verbal elements in the advert provide a more explicit argumentative pathway, clearly delineating the basic tenets of beauty care reasoning found in most adverts: ageing is inevitable yet undesired, and we are prepared to accept it (to a certain well limited extent). It is possible, however to reverse the implacable natural signs of this condition through the use of the product, with an emphasis on the fact that it is not mere shallow vanity, but something women need and ‘deserve’, as stated in the title of the ad:

On the packaging: Vital Multi Active Anti-Age Cream. Mature Skin. Reduces all major signs of mature skin ageing.

Title: Gives Mature Skin the Extra Care It Deserves.

Copy: Vital Anti-Age Cream. Visibly reduces wrinkles, improves firmness and helps prevent age spots.

Even brands that self-proclaim as defenders of real beauty, such as Dove, will leave clues through allusion and insinuated implicit discourse which is not so different from mainstream approaches. Although their argumentation explicitly lays on the claim of ‘real beauty’, as their initial text in the official website² mentions, we are later confronted with the same concerns about youthful looking skin and appearance, as well as to inputs as to what that means:



Figure 3: Nivea advertisement.

2. <https://www.dove.com/us/en/home.html>

Welcome to Dove...

... the home of real beauty. For over a decade, we've been working to make beauty a source of confidence, not anxiety, and here's where the journey continues.

Beauty is not defined by shape, size or colour – it's feeling like the best version of yourself. Authentic. Unique. Real. Which is why we've made sure our site reflects that. Every image you see here features women cast from real life. A real life version of beauty.

Whatever you're looking for – products to provide you with the care you need, tips and advice ranging from hair care, to skin care, to underarm care – everything you see here is designed to make you feel beautiful.

The claim of 'real' is reiterated throughout the textual elements and tentatively reiterated in the pictorial elements by using models that actually look like the neighbour next door. Nonetheless, a more attentive observation will disclose an implicit insinuated suggestion concerning the realness we are actually aiming at – a wrinkle-less glowing smooth skin. Later this is further insinuated in references to the products, including product names such as 'Youthful Vitality Body Lotion/Cream' and in the descriptions that follow:

Youthful Vitality Body Lotion

A smooth body lotion containing a revitalising serum that helps give you resilient and younger looking skin.

Figure 4: The selling line of the product Youthful Vitality Body Lotion

After all, real beauty is young looking. After all, the brand proposes a treatment for real ageing, as well, resorting to the same strategies – a combination of nature and science – resulting in pseudo-scientific argumentation. As claimed by Coupland (2007: 58), 'In a marketplace which continues to put a premium on the desirability of youthful appearance, technologized solutions to the 'problem' of ageing can therefore be liberating, as they offer a certain amount

of control, a strategy which is visible in the copy of the product Youthful Vitality Body Lotion and of Youthful Vitality body cream:

Give your skin its spring back with Dove DermaSpa Uplifted+

Skin has never been so uplifting with Dove Dermaspa Uplifted+ our new range for improved firmness and elasticity.

Youthful Vitality Body Cream

A luxurious body cream that adds the feel of the spa to your skin care routine and helps to give you resilient and younger looking skin.

Youthful-looking skin as a standard for beauty is present in a variety of prompts: the metaphor of spring, associated with renewal, and youthfulness, the product name – uplifted – as it suggests the more invasive techniques of lifting surgery, and the spelled out attributes of good-looking (and young) skin, ‘firmness’ and ‘elasticity’. Even though the brand positions itself as representative of more realistic approaches to this kind of products, in an attempt to resist more stereotyped views of beauty and to incorporate difference – and different life cycles and stages – into its claims and appeals, it nonetheless succumbs to mainstream ideologies, thus recognising more covert arguments that there are indeed some patterns of how youthfulness and healthy skin translate socially.

FINAL REMARKS

This brief analysis has revealed that not only do adverts pursue an argumentative structure process meant to influence their audience in a supposed dialogue to adhere to their proposals, but they also carefully restrict possible readings and interpretations, through implicit discourse strategies, thus ensuring that there is no significant diversion from their planned itinerary. They cannot afford to do so; and cosmetic adverts are no different regardless of their proclaimed standpoint.

For this reason, they carefully devise their argumentation, benefitting from the modes available. We have seen that argumentative strategies do not necessarily come in words and this gives these promotional texts not only a significant argumentative potential, but also great room for implying and inviting their audience to infer and thus participate in the construction of meaning. Hopefully, the audience will get involved and thus go along.

In cosmetic, skincare advertising these argumentative structures lead up to the promise of better appearance, relying heavily on rather stereotyped views of beauty, inextricably bound to youthfulness. These views, as we have seen, may come via more or less explicit argumentation, and often through implicitness, namely, in Ruiz's (2014) category of 'insinuated discourse', where surface elements lead to the underlying ideology. Moreover, it is also common, especially in brands that present a more responsible alternative approach, that some of the claims will unintentionally (failed implicit discourse) reveal the underlying dominant ideology.

Regardless of the standpoint or marketing strategy adopted, what seems to be relevant to draw from this discussion is the need for taking implicitness into account when looking at advertising argumentation. While it is clear that adverts are overtly created to persuade – and this is a rather transparent intent – it is also evident that a thorough interpretation requires close attention to manifestations of implicit content.

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