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# The Múnchausen Effect and the post-truth era advertising messages. Critical analysis on fallacious and enthymematic advertising slogan argumentation

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**Abstract:** Humans have always been prone to adorning the truth and to producing twisted fallacious arguments in order to sketch *a truth* (i.e., *their own truth*) that best suited their interest at a certain time, within certain circumstances. Even more, the communication climate of nowadays has moved from face-to-face communication – that offered a limited kit of means to *mold the truth* – towards the emerging technology mediated virtual communication that enhances the dressing up and the re-shaping of truth to make the message more appealing to its target public to such an extent that truth loses its substance and may turn into its opposite. Advertising messaging exhibits some contradictory characteristics that are involved in producing what we call and aim at coining here as the *Múnchausen Effect*. Our research findings have shown that all of the 100 taglines on *bestslogans.com* relied on enthymematic argumentation and were erroneous in terms of content, all as *non sequitur fallacies*. However, due to the ambiguity brought about by their elliptical structure (as all of them lacked the conclusion and at least one of the premises), these implicit arguments have proved hard to analyze with regard to the specific kind of fallacies that could *hide* beyond the missing premise(s), as one could imagine *any* kind of missing premise(s), where there is an elliptical structure of argumentation. This difficulty that is encountered leaves room to another kind of approach to research in communication, *the quantum approach* that in critical thinking may have to do with informal logic, and that takes into account creativity and the Umberto Eco idea of *opera aperta*. We may dwell on such an approach in a further study.

**Keywords:** Múnchausen effect, advertising slogans, enthymemes, fallacies, post-truth era

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*L'effet Münchhausen et les messages publicitaires de l'ère post-vérité. Analyse critique sur l'argumentation des slogans publicitaires fallacieux et enthymématiques*

**Résumé :** Les humains ont toujours été enclins à orner la vérité et à produire des arguments fallacieux tordus pour esquisser une vérité (i.e., *leur propre vérité*) qui convenait le mieux à leurs intérêts à un certain moment, dans certaines circonstances. Plus encore, le climat de communication d'aujourd'hui est passé de la communication face-à-face –qui offrait un ensemble limité de moyens pour façonner la vérité – vers la communication virtuelle médiatisée émergente qui améliore l'habillage et le remodelage de la vérité afin de rendre le message plus attrayant pour son public cible à tel point que la vérité perd sa substance et puisse devenir son contraire. Les messages publicitaires présentent certaines caractéristiques contradictoires que sont impliquées dans la production de ce que nous appelons ici *l'effet Münchhausen*. Nos résultats de recherche ont montré que tous les 100 slogans sur bestslogans.com reposaient sur l'argumentation enthymématique et qu'ils étaient erronés en termes de contenu, tous en tant que sophismes non sequitur (non séquentiels). Cependant, en raison de l'ambiguïté provoquée par leur structure elliptique (comme tous n'avaient pas la conclusion et au moins l'une des prémises), ces arguments implicites se sont révélés difficiles à analyser en ce qui concerne les erreurs spécifiques qui pourraient se cacher au-delà prémisses (s) manquantes (s), comme on pourrait imaginer n'importe quelle prémisses (s) manquantes (s), où il y a une structure elliptique d'argumentation. Cette difficulté laisse place à un autre type d'approche de la recherche en communication, l'approche quantique que la pensée critique peut avoir à faire par la logique informelle, et qui prend en compte la créativité et l'idée d'Umberto Eco de l'opéra aperta. Nous pouvons nous attarder sur une telle approche dans une étude ultérieure.

**Mots-clés :** effet Münchhausen, slogans publicitaires, enthymèmes, sophismes, ère post-vérité

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### 1. To express or to impress? Advertising in the post truth era

Motto: "Deception has become the modern way of life. Where once the boundary line between truth and lies was clear and distinct, it is no longer so. In the post-truth era, deceiving others has become a challenge, a game, a habit." Ralph Keyes (2004)

Humans have always been prone to adorning the truth and to producing twisted fallacious arguments in order to sketch *a truth* (i.e., *their own truth*) that best suited their interest at a certain time, within certain circumstances. The more people use this "truth" within their communication, the more twisted it gets, due to successive subjective "contributions" to the appearance of the "truth" mentioned above, in interpreting and/or in conveying this "truth" onwards. Even more, the

communication climate of nowadays has moved from face-to-face communication – that offered a limited kit of means to *mold the truth* – towards the emerging technology mediated virtual communication that enhances the dressing up and the re-shaping of truth to make the message more appealing to its target public to such an extent that truth loses its substance and may turn into its opposite.

The term *post-truth era* – that stands for this emerging reality of communication nowadays – was launched by Ralph Keyes in 2004 to refer to this trend of distorting the truth. Keyes was inspired by Steve Tesich (1992) who had argued that in the American society, profit making and the pursuit of political power made many decide to take up post-truth strategies (instead of *the real truth*) "at the expense of democracy".

Mass and public communication are most important in this respect. Such communication that reaches multitudes is used in order to impress and to persuade whilst it also inherently and implicitly influences people to a large extent nowadays into adjusting to the building of post truths, being inspired by such post truths instead of handling just the truth as it is. Various types of strategies and techniques are widely used in marketing, branding, advertising, public relations, journalism, etc. in order to enhance and promote the image of people, organizations, products, services, etc.

Especially in the communication messages designed as advertising, there is a particular type of contradictory context that requires both brevity and lots of connotative meanings added to denotations. On the one hand, brevity is a must in advertising firstly, because promotion through ads is quite expensive, and secondly, as the time that the publics can spend on ad reception and perception is pretty limited. On the other hand, redundant connotative meanings piled up to the denotations are necessary in advertising messaging in order to impress the publics, to grab and to maintain their attention. This very context brings about exaggerations, twisted truths, fallacious argumentation to convince the target public to buy the brand (i.e., to buy the brand).

There is no wonder that content or material errors in argumentation to support a brand are committed within advertising messaging, inasmuch as creativity is a basic assumption in ad design. And creativity is a form of deviant behavior, namely of positive deviance, as one needs to bring up something new in order to be creative, that is, something that has not been created before, and is thus deviant to what has been known and experienced before.

Thus, to impress (by re-creating the truths) is what advertising looks for, rather than only to express the bare truth as it is. As Leo Burnett stated, "I am one who believes that one of the greatest dangers of advertising is not that of misleading people, but that of boring them to death." His emphasis on the importance of creativity in molding advertising messages is obvious.

## **2. Image or mask? *The Múnchhausen Effect*. Exaggeration and enthymematic fallacies in advertising slogans**

Motto: *We want consumers to say, "That's a hell of a product", instead of, "That's a hell of an ad".* Leo Burnett

Nowadays, marketing, branding, advertising, public relations, journalism, etc. are fields of activity that aim at enhancing and promoting the image of people, organizations, products, services, etc. by means of adequate communication strategies. As Leo Burnett emphasized in the motto above, the image of a product (or service, or organization, or person, etc) should not be built so as to hide or mask the reality or the truth about what the image is being designed for, both as the truth may come out obvious, and as people deserve being treated honestly.

We aim at showing here that the taglines attached to the image of a product (or organization, or person, or service) are elements of a media product that are quite often built to function in a distorted manner, often times like an exaggeration which may be regarded more or less like the mask/replacement of the product through ads that Leo Burnett evoked. We thus posit that in advertising slogan design, exaggeration plays an important part in the sketching of such a mask/replacement.

We will also strive to demonstrate here that the truth is avoided when and as long as the conclusion of slogan argumentation and the structure of the inherent argument itself is shunned within enthymematic statements in taglines, instead of providing a reflecting of reality, that is, the truth, even in a form that complements this truth.

Through our study, we deem that in ad slogans the avoidance of the explicit conclusion to buy the brand may lead anyone into suspecting that ad messaging seems to work at alluring the target publics into choosing the brand, no matter what kind of compromise to logical argumentation principles or even to ethical ones it would have to resort to.

As already mentioned above, advertising messaging exhibits some contradictory characteristics that are involved in producing what we call and aim at coining here as the *Múnchhausen Effect*. As it is known, to the fictional character Baron Múnchhausen (from Rudolf Erich Raspe's 1785 book) the distortion of truth was commonplace. Baron Múnchhausen used to exaggerate everything and get the truth distorted into fantastic tales that could catch the attention of the audience. In a similar way, in this era of information and communication, advertising messages jut out from the large array of any kind of messages by means of exaggeration (either by increasing or by decreasing the size/amplitude of the phenomenon they stand for). It seems that only by being exaggerated, ad messages may get the chance of becoming more impressive and of getting and maintaining the attention of the target publics. Inspired by both this character and by the name *Múnchhausen syndrome* given in psychiatry to factitious disorder, we define here *the Múnchhausen Effect in communication as the intentional distortion of truth* (by means of elliptical and erroneous argumentation, exaggeration, a.s.o) *for the sake of persuasion*. This

Münchhausen Effect may also appear nonverbally, in the *doctored images*, for example, in the commercials that show products which appear in colors that are brighter than the ones of the real objects. However, here we tackle only the verbal structure of slogans in an attempt to identify fallacies and enthymemes in the implicit argumentation of such advertising taglines.

The Münchhausen syndrome mentioned is a medical condition that refers to people who exaggerate or create symptoms of physical illness or of psychological trauma to get the attention or the sympathy of others (Amos & Robinson, 2010, pp.83-83). This trend to exaggerate or re-create the truth seems to apply more and more to communication contexts nowadays. As Ralph Keyes (2004) observes, deception has become a routine in many circumstances of communication. This deception by improving on the truth may get us to a widespread sense that much of what we are told cannot be trusted. And trust is a basic and critical issue with communication inasmuch as distrust may bring about the withdrawal of those involved in communication, or even to protests against advertising and consumerism (like the *truth in advertising* movement, Chapman, 1992, p. 25). Keyes wonders "what motivates the casual dishonesty that has become pandemic" and why so many "feel a need to embellish" the truth. We may answer that the pressure of the context, of others, makes it necessary to create images of the truth that are embellished to be more attractive for the publics than those of the competitors from the same category. This escalating competition makes them move farther and farther from the initial truth. These days there is a race of embellishment of the truth, and thence, of increasing shallowness, and of wrong and regretted decisions or less involvement.

Consequently, in advertising, in an over-effort to reach both originality (creativity) and brevity, and to impress, messages fall prey to the slippery slope of what we coin here as *Münchhausen effect*. Thus, in the communication through advertising messages truth gets twisted so seriously through exaggeration that quite often the resulting ad cannot be anything but a remote shadow of the truth at the onset, and an entire story is built around this truth to make up for it.

#### 1.1. *Advertising, between Aim and Claim. Research Objectives*

Most often if not always, ads *claim* to tell the *story of the brand*. However, they *aim*, in fact to convince the publics to buy the brand, and they give supporting arguments for that very purpose.

Even at a first glance, advertising slogans (or taglines) obviously seem elliptical and exaggerated. And, no matter what kind of story they may *claim* to tell, they actually implicitly *aim* to provide arguments for the target publics to buy the brand they promote. And this argumentation needs to be brief, both so as not to bore the audience, and because exposure of ads (irrespective of the medium chosen) is expensive. On the other hand, the need to tell a memorable story may bring about what logic calls material errors (that is, content errors) in the search for the shortest

and the most impressive argumentation (Vasile, 2011, pp. 48-49). These facts we have noticed lead us to analyzing these same issues we have perceived as intriguing for the structuring of communication in ad slogans: enthymematic arguments (i.e., elliptical ones), exaggeration and fallacies in these arguments.

Throughout this study of ours we thus aim at coining the term Múnchhausen Effect as a post-truth era manifestation of distorted truth by exaggeration in communication for the sake of persuasion, focusing here on advertising messaging.

Throughout our analysis we would like to show that: the more popular the advertising slogans/taglines, the more fallaciously exaggerated, and the more elliptical. In other words, if the advertising slogans/taglines are fallaciously exaggerated, and enthymematic, then they may be memorably brief and impressive enough to be retained as the best and most popular ones. We assumed that all of the one hundred taglines we analyzed were exaggerated and enthymematic.

#### 1.2. *Research Methodology and Corpus or Advertising between Means and Whims?*

Advertising is one of the strongest examples to account for this Múnchhausen effect, and therefore, we have tackled the critical thinking content analysis of argumentation through advertising slogans.

In the post-truth era, advertising uses certain *means* of expression to get to the emotions, and even to the *whims* of its publics into making these publics buy the brand. And our analysis takes into account these means that tackle the public's whims and/or emotions.

Within such a context of post-truth being cultivated to hide underlying interests, *critical thinking* is key to the unveiling of intentional content errors by exaggeration (i.e., fallacies by exaggeration) in argumentation that is meant to influence publics into adopting a certain kind of behavior that is desired by the authors of post-truth messaging. We have found supportive conceptual grounding of our study here mostly in two from among the myriad of definitions given to critical thinking. The first one belongs to Ennis (1996, p. XVII) who referred to critical thinking as a process whose main purpose is to inspire reasonable decisions on what we should believe or on how we should act. The second one is that of Lipman (2003, apud. Nieto & Saiz, 2010, p. 19) who stated the thinking that we may label as critical is the kind of thinking that "facilitates the undertaking of good judgments within and by criteria; it is self-correcting and sensitive to context". The framework of critical thinking is inherent within a research like our endeavor, mostly as we tackle the kind of judgment and argumentation in advertising, in the shortest and most compelling kind of ad messaging, that is, in taglines.

Content analysis best suits our research objectives in the way Ole Holsti regarded it as a "multipurpose research method developed specifically for investigating any problem in which the content of communication serves as the basis of inference" (Holsti, 1969, p.2, apud. Pointdexter & McCombs, 2000, p.188). The

way this research uses content analysis refers to the verbal content of taglines (slogans) in advertising. Informal argument analysis is actually our main target within this research undertaking. According to Hitchcock (2006), informal logic is best understood as "the normative study of argument" and the area of logic that aims at developing "standards, criteria and procedures for the interpretation, evaluation and construction of arguments (...) used in natural language". And the natural language we analyze with emphasis of enthymematic (that is, elliptical) implicit argumentation is that of advertising most popular slogans, in order to pinpoint the important part played by exaggeration coined thereby as the Munchausen effect.

Subsequently, we have critically analyzed the kind of argumentation performed within each of one hundred most popular advertising slogans (according to *bestslogans.com*, and to *thebalance.com*). The choice of such a research corpus is based on the fact that these slogans (taglines) have been considered as being the most memorable ones, and, therefore, the most effective ones, in that they generated awareness of their target public. We considered such a sample as an *ad libitum* one, as we deemed that it better suited our endeavor aims, proving more convenient and matching better our research resources, as well. The size of the sample is sufficient and relevant enough so as to support the conclusions we could consequently come up with.

### 1.3. *Research Results. Interpretation*

An important difficulty that we have encountered throughout the research process is that all of the one hundred taglines are elliptical, which means that they are enthymemes (or, in the case of polysyllogisms, which are called *epicheremes* in logic). Douglas Walton (2008b) briefly defines an enthymeme as an incomplete argument. In ads, enthymemes also serve as the best means to avoid usually the structure of valid argumentation that would make the public ponder and take longer to make the desired decision or even make the opposite decision.

For the majority of them (if not for all) it has been almost impossible to reconstruct the whole implicit argument, and, to tell what kind of fallacies could be identified in each of these one hundred ad slogans. Nevertheless, there are valuable conclusions that we have still been able to draw from our analysis.

From among the one hundred most popular taglines in advertising (according to *bestslogans.com*, and to *thebalance.com*) we have discovered that enthymemes are ubiquitous. In other words, all of these slogans are elliptical in terms of the implicit inherent argumentative part that they perform as ads.

As enthymematic arguments, all of the slogans we have analyzed lack the conclusion, and at least one of the premises. From among the 100% enthymemes, 59 % are too elliptical to rend themselves to an analysis to identify which part of the argument is missing, besides the implicit conclusion, 37 % lack the minor premise (that should contain the subject of the conclusion), and 4% are elliptical



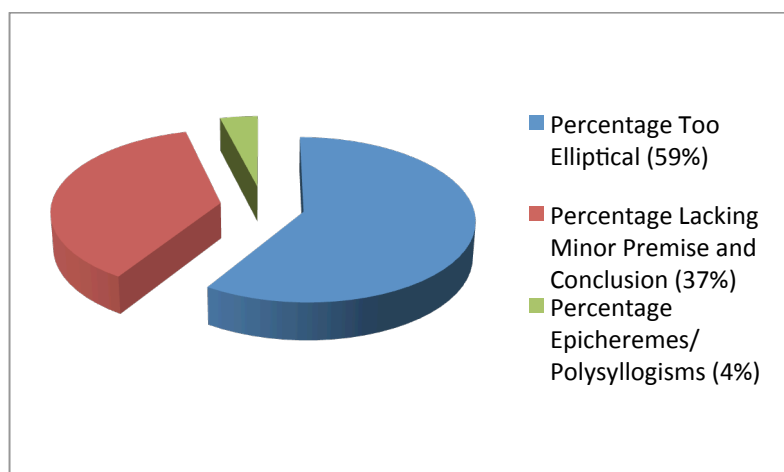
polysyllogisms (epicheremes). Our initial hypothesis regarding the enthymematic design of the argumentation in these slogans has been confirmed.

In terms of the part of the argument that is missing (or that is not formally expressed), there are three types of enthymemes (elliptical arguments). Those of the first type do not contain an explicit conclusion. All of the slogans analysed fall into this category as they all lack an explicit conclusion, though anyone knows that the explicit one is "(The customer) buys the brand". A second type of enthymeme we could encounter in 37 of these taglines was the one that lacks the minor premise (which contains the subject of the conclusion).

The table 1 and the figure 1 below graphically show these findings in a more tangible visual representation of the research results.

**Table 1.** Enthymematic Argumentation in the 100 most popular/best slogans (according to bestslogans.com, and to thebalance.com)

Number of Enthymematic Taglines	No. Too Elliptical	Percentage Too Elliptical	No. Lacking Minor Premise and Conclusion	Percentage Lacking Minor Premise and Conclusion	No. Epicheremes	Percentage Epicheremes
100	59	59%	37	37%	4	4%



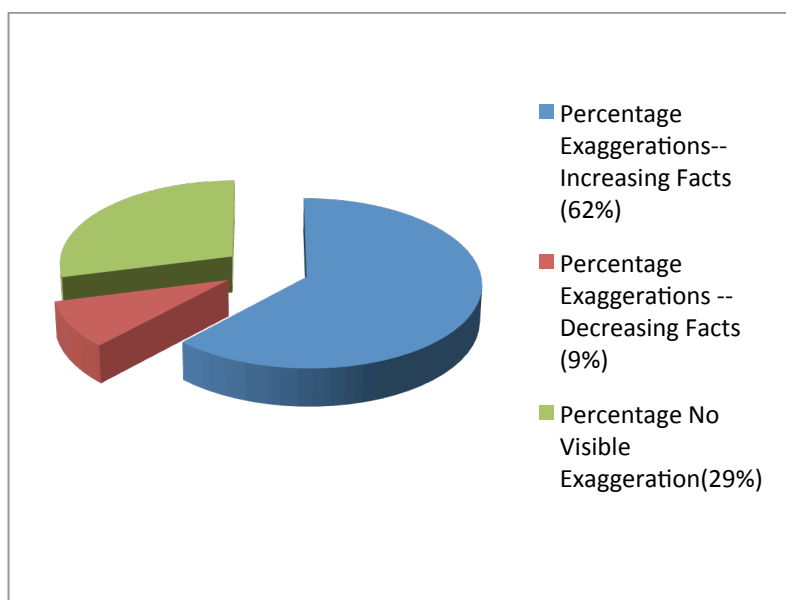
**Figure 1.** Enthymematic Argumentation in the 100 most popular/best slogans (according to bestslogans.com, and to thebalance.com)

In terms of the exaggerations in these slogans, that reminds us of the Baron Münchhausen and leads us towards coining the Münchhausen Effect as a phenomenon that broadly affects advertising, our assumption that all of the slogans are (or contain) explicit exaggerations has not been confirmed entirely. To be more specific, a tagline like "A diamond is forever" (for the DeBeers brand) does not seem exaggerated at a first glance. Still, the implicit continuation or the context that could fill the blanks may be an exaggeration (at least as one may lose the diamond or it may be taken from them, or one may go bankrupt, etc). Therefore, this pitfall of elliptical argumentation makes many interpretations possible to these taglines.

The explicit results of the analysis of the exaggerations in these taglines has shown an overwhelming percentage of exaggerations in the sense of an increase in the (re)presentation of the phenomenon of reference (62%). An expected much lower percent of decreasing representation of facts (9%) has not been surprising at all. Throughout some seminar activities with the undergraduate students that asked them to think of campaign ideas that would exaggerate by understatement (like the Volkswagen slogan "Think Small") or by overestimation, it proved very difficult to the students to understate, as compared to the opposite. Therefore, there has been no wonder that we have identified less slogans of understatement/downsizing. To our surprise, however, there is a significant percentage of hidden exaggerations (29%) under the disguise of a representation of the truth as it is, though there are sides of this truth that are obviously omitted if they are not favorable to the brand that is promoted. Table 2 and Figure 2 graphically show these findings.

**Table 2.** *Exaggerations in Argumentation in the 100 most popular/best slogans (according to bestslogans.com, and to thebalance.com)*

Number of Taglines	No. Exaggerations – Increasing	Percent age Exaggerations – Increasing	No. Exaggerations – Decreasing	Percent age Exaggerations – Decreasing	No. No Visible Exaggerations	Percentage No Visible Exaggerations
100	62	62%	9	9%	29	29%



**Figure 2.** *Exaggerations in Argumentation in the 100 most popular/best slogans (according to bestslogans.com, and to thebalance.com)*

As to what kind of fallacies we could identify, the fact that all of the one hundred slogans lack an explicit conclusion makes them all fall into the category of *non sequitur* fallacies, that is, of errors due to the fact that the conclusion is not entailed by the premises of the argument.

It is well known that an argument is logically valid when its conclusion is entailed by its premises, and this conclusion functions as a consequence of those premises. Entailment (or logical consequence) then refers to the fact that one statement (the conclusion of an argument) should logically follow from one or more statements (the premises).

Thus, *in all of the hundred best (or most popular, at least) taglines analysed here, there was no rigorously identifiable entailment of the conclusion from the premises*, as too much of each and any argument was missing. Therefore, all these taglines are fallacious, first, in that they all fall into the category of the *non sequitur* fallacies. A non sequitur fallacy is the argumentation error that happens when the conclusion does not follow from the premises. In other words, when what is shown as evidence or reason to support a conclusion is actually irrelevant or adds very little support if any to that conclusion, then the argumentation is erroneous in the form of a non sequitur fallacy.

An example of such a fallacy in the research corpus we analysed can be found in the tagline: I'd walk a mile for a Camel (ad for Camel cigarettes, 1921). This elliptical fallacious argument could contain this tagline above and the inherent, implicit conclusion: Buy Camel cigarettes. The logical form of such a non sequitur (Douglas Walton, 2008a) fallacious argument would be the following:

Premise 1: Claim X is made.

Premise 2: Evidence is presented for claim X.

Conclusion: Therefore, claim Y is true.

It is obvious that the premises then do neither support nor entail the conclusion.

As it may appear obvious, in an elliptical argument, like the creatively twisted arguments used in ads, one cannot identify any entailment of the conclusion by the premises within the argument, as there are too many omitted parts (premises or the conclusion) from the structure of the argument. Thus, there is no wonder that all of these taglines are non sequitur fallacies.

As all these taglines address anyone who may be interested in the object of the ad (that is, the product, service, person, organization, etc., that is being advertised for). Consequently, by targeting everyone, they are also hasty generalizations in that they start by claiming particular facts which are afterwards extended as functional for anyone else. A telling example in the analysed slogans may be the Pringles: "Once you pop, you can't stop".

There are only fourteen (corresponding to the same percentage of 14) of the slogans that are appeals to emotions explicitly, whilst only three are obvious fallacies of the argumentum ad numerum or ad populum types. The slogan "When you care enough to send the very best" (that advertises for Hallmark) is an explicit appeal to emotions, whereas "We all adore a Kia-Ora" is an obvious argumentum ad numerum/populum.

Implicitly, due to the elliptical form of the argumentation, many more of the slogans could contain such content errors (i.e., fallacies). Some of these taglines may be considered as fallacious due to division or to composition. Still, it is hard to tell how many or which, as the enthymematic design of these slogans makes it almost impossible to acknowledge the implicit part of the argument.

## Conclusion

Motto : The least initial deviation from the truth is multiplied later a thousandfold.” Aristotle (2015, 10). “*On The Heavens*”

As mentioned here above, as they are all enthymematic arguments, all of the one hundred slogans we have analyzed lack the conclusion, and at least one of the premises. Due to the elliptical form of this implicit argumentation through slogans, and to the characteristics of natural language that does not exhibit rigor (mostly in advertising taglines), no research endeavor may lucky guess and there is no chance to re-construct such elliptical arguments, as they leave room to an unlimited number of possible interpretations. Natural language is not a matter of rigor. People do not speak or write in natural language according to the rigor of mathematics or logic, even if and when they perform argumentation and aim at leading others into desired conclusions by providing arguments.

However, the rigor of analysis of the existing elements of the arguments in advertising messaging may still emphasize key ideas regarding some important characteristics of argumentation through slogans in advertising, in order to enhance the better understanding of such mechanisms of communication.

From among the 100% enthymemes, 59 % are too elliptical to rend themselves to an analysis to identify which part of the argument is missing, besides the implicit conclusion, 37 % lack the minor premise (that should contain the subject of the conclusion), and 4% are elliptical polysyllogisms (epicheremes). Our initial hypothesis regarding the enthymematic design of the argumentation in these slogans has been confirmed.

The explicit results of the analysis of the exaggerations in these taglines has shown an overwhelming percentage of exaggerations in the sense of an increase in the (re)presentation of the phenomenon of reference (62%). An expected much lower percent of decreasing representation of facts (9%) has not been surprising at all. To our surprise, however, there is a significant percentage of hidden exaggerations (29%) under the disguise of a representation of the truth as it is, though there are sides of this truth that are obviously omitted if they are not favorable to the brand that is promoted.

These results prove to the fact that advertising is one of the strongest examples to account for the Münchhausen effect that we aim at coining through this study. Inspired by both the fictional character Baron Münchhausen (from Rudolf Erich Raspe’s 1785 book) and by the name *Münchhausen syndrome* given in psychiatry to factitious disorder, we reefer here *the Münchhausen Effect in communication* as the intentional distortion of truth (by means of elliptical and erroneous argumentation, a.s.o) for the sake of persuasion, or propaganda or any other form of social influence.

Though the structure of these post-truth messages (of slogans) does not explicitly look like that of logically sound arguments, they still, implicitly and inherently, evoke some kind of argumentation (mostly materially erroneous and enthymematic) in order to convince people, by any means, to buy the brand that the ad promotes. Brevity is another important trait of advertising messaging and of ad slogans in particular. In order to achieve this brevity and to still preserve persuasive strength, enthymemes, that may be briefly referred to as elliptical arguments, are quite common.

Within our research endeavour we encountered at least one significant difficulty in the analysis of arguments in advertising taglines. This difficulty refers to the context of analysing elliptical arguments (enthymemes), as it would be presumptuous to try to guess the missing premises. However, though all of the 100 slogans lacked the conclusion, it is quite easy to tell what the conclusion could be about, as in advertising the missing conclusion is inherent and implicit, inasmuch as all ads are meant to convince their publics to buy the product or service.

Another problem with reconstructing the missing parts of elliptical arguments in ad slogans is that they were all non sequitur fallacies (i.e., their conclusions do not follow from the explicit/expressed premises), and they lacked an explicit conclusion. Therefore, the reconstruction of the missing premises cannot be made only by lucky guessing, as for very many of the taglines, there are many possible versions of possibly lacking premises to be added.

Because of their elliptical form, it is also hard to tell how many of these taglines may be epicheremes (i.e., elliptical polysyllogisms). Epicheremes are also known to be elliptical sorites. Sorites are arguments that may have several premises and one conclusion. Sorites may be resolved into a chain of syllogisms, the conclusion of each of which is a premise of the next syllogism (Hurley, 2011). In spite of the already mentioned difficulty encountered in finding such elliptical polysyllogisms in such ad messages (i.e., taglines), a percentage of four and a corresponding number of four epicheremes (i.e., elliptical polysyllogisms) have been identified.

#### *Feed-forward: Advertising Responsibility.*

Thus, our research findings have shown, as mentioned above, *that all of the 100 taglines on bestslogans.com* rely on *enthymematic* argumentation and *are erroneous in terms of content (fallacious)*, all as *non sequitur fallacies*. However, due to the ambiguity brought about by their elliptical structure (as all of them lacked the conclusion and at least one of the premises), these implicit arguments have proved hard to analyze with regard to the specific kind of fallacies that could *hide* beyond the missing premise(s), as one could imagine *any* kind of missing premise(s), where there is an elliptical structure of argumentation. This difficulty that is encountered leaves room to another kind of approach to research in communication, *the quantum*

*approach* that in critical thinking may have to do with informal logic, and that takes into account creativity and the Umberto Eco idea of *opera aperta*. In our study, we have noticed that this elliptical form of the argumentation in slogans leaves them open to many possible interpretations of the scope of their claims. They themselves are thus built open-endedly, like an *opera aperta* (*open creation*). We may dwell on such an approach in a further study.

Our findings have shown that 71% of the one hundred slogans were explicit exaggerations. We would have expected a bigger percentage, though. Therefore, the surprising number of 29 (corresponding to 29 %) explicitly non-exaggerated taglines supports the idea that advertising professionals care about common sense, beyond the temptation to exaggerate. As Leo Burnett's says, "Anyone who thinks that people can be fooled or pushed around has an inaccurate and pretty low estimate of people – and he won't do very well in advertising."

The exaggerations, either explicit or implicit, the ubiquity of fallacies in the verbal representation of these advertising messages are manifestations of a Múnchhausen effect of advertising that is one of the phenomena that seemingly justified a *post-truth* label placed on most of public and media communication nowadays.

Thus, we may subsequently conclude, from a critical thinking viewpoint, that the "creative" handling of the truth – in a Baron Múnchhausen-like manner – that we have identified in the research corpus has been developed to reach the limits of common sense and of law abiding corporate strategies. Bigger and more frequent exaggerations, and other ways of distortion of the truth would run the risk of law action against advertising agencies that would then entail unwanted financial loss.

Another reason why not everyone and everything in the advertising industry is explicitly focused on exaggeration may be that they would not enjoy being sued for illegal claims. Yet another reason, why not, that some (hopefully many) may feel like they should act responsibly in terms of the social impact that advertising may have. The very same Leo Burnett, the personality well-known as an advertising industry legend, urged the professionals in the field, "Let's gear our advertising to sell our goods, but let's recognize also that advertising has a broad social responsibility."

No matter how highly appreciated is creativity in advertising, professionals should not fall into the temptation of Múnchhausen-like exaggerations and of slipping into post-truthfulness, or else ad messaging may gradually lose credibility, and tamper instead with the human public's ability to tell the good from the evil and the right from the wrong.

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