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PSA AS A MANIPULATION TOOL

The aim of this paper is to study public service advertisements (PSAs) from the perspective of manipulative techniques applied as well as seeking to answer the question to what extent are PSAs manipulative. PSAs are broadly defined as non-commercial advertisements and as such they are considered to belong to advertising discourse. In its turn advertising discourse makes use of wide range of argumentative and manipulative techniques. Moreover, PSAs are aimed at educating, informing, raising public awareness on current issues within society, therefore serving public interests, whereas manipulative discourse is considered to serve the interests of the manipulator against the interests of the manipulated. Hence, the question to what extent PSAs can be considered manipulative needs clarification. Drawing on the theories of several linguists, an attempt is made to view PSAs from the perspective of manipulative discourse theories and reveal some of the manipulative techniques applied in print PSAs.

Key words: advertisement, non-commercial advertisement, PSA, linguistic manipulation, manipulative discourse, argumentative discourse, implicit information, perlocutionary effect

The question of defining manipulation has been in the centre of attention of scientists during the last decades. The main questions that are often tackled are: What is manipulation? What kind of characteristic features manipulation has? How to distinguish manipulative language from non-manipulative language? How to distinguish manipulation from persuasion? All these questions are constantly examined in the works of a number of linguists. However, there seems to be no consensus as such. The present paper will attempt to touch upon some of these questions aiming to understand the application of manipulation in public service advertisements (PSAs).

What is manipulation? This question has radical answers. "Some people believe that all communication is in itself manipulative because it aims at changing, and thus somehow at manipulating, the behaviour of others. The only way for the communication not to be manipulative would be for it not to be effective" /Rigotti, 2005: 63/. In this broader sense manipulation turns out to have a positive meaning because it is linked with effectiveness of communication. However, there is also the opposite view; van Dijk mentions that "in everyday usage, the concept of manipulation has negative associations – manipulation is bad – because such a practice violates social norms" /van Dijk, 2006: 360/. Moreover, according to the linguists O'Keefe, Dillard and Pfau, "without the negative associations, manipulation could be a form of (legitimate) persuasion" /as cited in van Dijk,

2006: 361/. And here rises another issue – the distinction of manipulation from persuasion.

Van Dijk accepts the fact that the boundary line between manipulation and persuasion is fuzzy, however, he suggests that the difference between the two lies in power, domination and mind control. "The crucial difference in this case is that in persuasion the interlocutors are free to believe or act as they please, depending on whether or not they accept the arguments of the persuader, whereas in manipulation recipients are typically assigned a more passive role: they are victims of manipulation" /van Dijk, 2006: 361/. Moreover, van Dijk singles out also the interests of the manipulator against the interests of the manipulated /van Dijk, 2006/. Rigotti's definition also tends to emphasize the role of manipulator's interests/goals. Accordingly, "a message is manipulative if it twists the vision of the world (physical as well as social – or human – actual as well as virtual) in the mind of the addressee, so that he/she is prevented from having a healthy attitude towards decision (i.e. an attitude responding to his/her very interest), and pursues the manipulator's goal in the illusion of pursuing her/his own goal" /Rigotti, 2005: 68/.

However, Maillat and Oswald question the criterion of speaker's interests and think that in some cases it is possible to manipulate people to their own advantage. "People do have conflicting interests, but this does not mean that manipulation is only about violating a hearer's interest: some violations… may happen in the pursuit of a goal which, in the end, satisfies one of the hearer's main interests" /Maillat, Oswald, 2009: 354/. Hence, the criterion of speaker's and hearer's interests turns out to be contradictory, but it is particularly essential for the object of our study – PSAs.

PSAs are traditionally defined as non-commercial advertisements "carried free of charge by mass media to publicize a message in public interests" and as such they are considered to belong to advertising discourse /http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/public-service-announcement.html/. Advertising discourse is generally considered to be manipulative because it aims to make people act in a certain way, e.g., buying a product/service in case of commercial advertising, changing public opinion/action in case of public service advertising. Van Dijk also mentions advertising as an example of multimodal contemporary communicative manipulation /van Dijk, 2006/. On the other hand, there is the opposite viewpoint supporting that advertising is persuasive; it applies persuasion techniques which are often rendered as manipulative when in fact they are not /Мишланов, 2007/. Therefore, the question whether advertising discourse is manipulative or not comes to the problem of distinguishing manipulation from persuasion.

Dwelling on the link between manipulation and advertising, Parasutskaya also supports the second viewpoint negating manipulation in advertising discourse. According to her, advertising does not have absolute power. It can trigger certain actions and changes and it does influence people and society in general, however, it

is not responsible for everything that is happening. And the addressee always has a choice to agree/disagree. Further, Parasutskaya questions the perlocutionary effect of manipulative discourse arguing that most of the analysis is done on linguistic level the aim of which is revealing some manipulative techniques, whereas the outcome/perlocutionary effect and the covertness of these techniques are not questioned. Hence, it is concluded that since there are some techniques applied, then they do have perlocutionary effect and therefore the discourse is manipulative. This is a common drawback when analyzing advertising discourse, for example. The analysts reveal certain techniques, for example, focusing on a certain positive feature and hiding other features and, hence, presume that it is manipulative, whereas the presence of covertness does not necessarily mean that it exercises manipulation or moreover that it is effective /Парасуцкая, 2011/.

Definitely, the issues raised by the Russian scholar do have some value since they focus on the problem of one-sided analysis; i.e. focusing on linguistic means only, whereas the analysis of manipulative techniques and their effectiveness is far more complicated and embraces not only linguistic but also semiotic analysis (when it comes to text of the advertisement) as well as careful consideration of "social, cognitive and discursive" aspects according to van Dijk /van Dijk, 2006/. However, in our opinion the non-effectiveness of the techniques applied as mentioned by Parasutskaya is not enough to negate the existence or attempt of manipulation in advertising discourse. Moreover, the analysis of manipulation cannot be done from speaker-oriented (intention/interests of the speaker) or hearer-oriented (perlocutionary effect on the hearer, hearer's interests) approach only but rather with a careful consideration of all communicative elements and participants.

Considering all the viewpoints, it is worthy to note that the reality is far more complicated and with all the techniques applied in advertisements, we cannot radically negate the application of neither manipulation, nor persuasion in advertisements. In fact, both can successfully be applied in advertisements. What refers to PSAs as type of advertising discourse, they also make use of both manipulative and persuasive techniques. Bernadskaya mentions that PSAs apply three main types of argumentation: logical, emotional and moral (based on values) /Бернадская, 2008/. Correspondingly, the first one is based on logical persuasive mechanisms, whereas the second and the third are based on emotions, moral values and therefore can be considered rather manipulative.

Bernadskaya also singles out three main techniques of linguistic manipulation applied in advertisements: emotions, social setting and world picture /Бернадская, 2008/. It is important to note, however, that in most of the ads these mechanisms are applied integrated which greatly increases the perlocutionary effect of ads.

As an example we shall observe how these persuasive and manipulative techniques work on PSAs.

Figure 1

The ad depicted in figure 1 was created by Ad Council to promote child passenger safety in the US. The ad consists of two interrelated texts – the semiotic/non-verbal text and the linguistic/verbal text that go hand in hand to achieve the desired perlocutionary effect on the audience. The semiotic text (i.e. the picture) depicts an accident scene as if the audience is eye witnessing it sitting behind the wheel. So the semiotic text creates a possible world picture where the audience faces the dangerous situation and cannot take any action. The dangerous world picture can lead to negative emotions – fear, frustration. Hence, the ad makes an appeal to the emotions of the audience. Moreover, the verbal text *It's too late to know if your child's in the right car seat when you're driving* directly addresses the audience with the application of the pronoun *you* and clarifies that the target audience for the ad are parents (*your child)*. This utterance also implicitly touches upon moral argumentation because it anchors on the sense of parent's responsibility for providing the safety of their children. After having shown the possible dangerous world, which makes appeal to parents' emotions and sense of responsibility, the next verbal utterance shifts from the possible world to the real world: *Fortunately, you're only reading*. Then the audience is provided with the statistics which provides logical argumentation for the call to action. *Car crashes are a leading killer of children 1 to 13*. The deductive logical argument gives the general statistics which however does not appeal only to the logic of parents but can arouse some emotional response on the side of the audience too. The phrase *leading killer* can contribute to this. From the scary logical statistics comes the necessity to take action and change something and this is what the ad calls to – learn more information about the right car seats for children. So the whole ad has

the problem – solution scheme. First, we see the description of the problem or to be more exact the argumentation that the problem is serious and requires action. This argumentation is provided with appeal to emotions, values and logic of the audience. Next, when the audience accepts the seriousness of the problem some action or solution is suggested.

However, it is worthy to note that the ad does not make use of logical argumentation only but relies heavily on manipulation; in particular, with the application of world picture and emotional appeal which are means of linguistic manipulation as mentioned by Bernadskaya /Бернадская, 2008/. The creation of a possible dangerous world picture plays a central role in this case because it can arouse strong negative emotions and playing on these emotions as well as parent's sense of responsibility the main aim of the ad is realized. What concerns the logical argumentation, it plays a secondary role and is rather weak and fallacious. The premise '*Car crashes are a leading killer of children 1 to 13*' provides general statistics on car crashes being a leading killer of children and from this premise the conclusion to choose the right car seat is drawn which however lacks some strong logical argumentation, since the ad does not provide any statistics of right car seats reducing the number of deaths. Hence, the main perlocutionary effect of the ad is achieved by making an appeal to parents' emotions and sense of responsibility, which in its turn is achieved by creating a possible dangerous world picture, i.e. by means of manipulation.

Another ad depicted in Figure 2 applies similar techniques, however, it raises a different safety issue vital in American society.

Figure 2

Targeted primarily at parents the ad calls parents to take precautions and safely store firearms from children. In a society where according to June 2016 survey 36 percent of "adults either own a firearm personally, or live with someone who does", the protection of children from firearm accidents becomes vital /Ingraham, 2016/. Similar to the previous example, this ad consists of two texts: linguistic (verbal) and semiotic (non-verbal). The first one relies on chain argumentation showing the negative consequences that will be avoided if firearm safety rules are kept and ending with a call to action directed towards parents: *so please, always remember to keep your firearm stored safely.* As opposed to the logical chain argumentation applied in linguistic text, the semiotic text shows the possible scary effect of not keeping firearms from children. The picture depicts a child with a scar on his face which cannot but evoke negative emotions within audience raising fear and strong concern over the firearm safety. Hence, similar to the previous example two possible world pictures are created within one ad. The first one is expressed by verbal means and has positive outcome – *no screams of pain, no scars*, whereas the second one is expressed by non-verbal means and shows the scary negative outcome – child's picture with a terrifying scar, making a strong emotional appeal. This technique is manipulative since it heavily relies on emotion of fear and effect achieved from the contrast between two possible worlds.

Coming back to the criterion of speaker's/hearer's interests in manipulation, one can argue that PSAs are not manipulative, since the interests/goals of public and ad coincide, because by definition PSAs publicize messages in public interests. However, the question of PSAs working only for the public interests needs further investigation because sometimes the true aim of the PSA can be covert which in its turn according to Maillat and Oswald is another characteristic feature of manipulation /Maillat and Oswald, 2009/. For instance, in the discussed example, the explicit aim of the PSA is providing the safety of child passengers by sitting them in the correct car seats, according to their ages. However, it is not difficult to guess that the implicit aim is to make parents buy four different types of car seats for children of different ages. So ultimately, this PSA turns out to bring profit for car seat manufacturers.

Careful consideration of PSA topics also needs further investigation because the choice of the topics can also become a powerful means of public manipulation diverting the society from the real problems and focusing their attention on the issues mentioned in PSAs.

Moreover, in his paper "Misplaced Marketing. The social harm of public service advertising" Rotfeld brings in an interesting issue mentioning that "the power of advertising is presumed and people behind most public service advertising campaigns see advertising itself as the solution" /Rotfeld, 2002: 465/. He backs up his argument saying that many Ad Council campaigns end up with few target consumers ever seeing it because PSAs depend on time and space provided to them by media for free which cannot ensure that the campaigns reach the target audience.

As a result, "since this advertising effort misdirects resources as well as attention, this trust in advertising that is not a real solution becomes part of the problem" /Rotfeld, 2002: 467/.

On the other hand, we cannot deny the positive effect that PSAs have on changing target audience's behaviour and attitudes. A systematic analysis of PSA campaigns revealed that campaign effectiveness varied considerably between the campaigns, however, "on aggregate, the campaigns imparted a positive effect on the target behaviors and attitudes" /Keisler, 2016: 103/.

Summing up, PSAs are an effective media tool that if used wisely can exercise great positive changes within society. However, just like any other media tool PSAs also make use of manipulative techniques on linguistic as well as semiotic level making appeal to emotions and moral values of people. The knowledge of these mechanisms can help the audience to adequately evaluate the received information, use it to their advantage and be aware and protected from covert manipulative techniques applied in media.

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Հ. ԻՆԱՐԱԶՅԱՆ – *Սոցիալական գովազդը որպես մրաշահարկման գործիք.* – Սույն հոդվածը նպատակ ունի ուսումնասիրել սոցիալական գովազդը մտաշահարկային հնարների տեսանկյունից, ինչպես նաև քննել այն հարցը, թե որքանով կարելի է սոցիալական գովազդը մտաշահարկային համարել: Սոցիալական գովազդը սահմանվում է որպես ոչ առևտրային գովազդ և դիտարկվում գովազդային խոսույթի շրջանակներում: Իր հերթին գովազդային խոսույթում լայնորեն կիրառվում են փաստարկային և մտաշահարկային հնարներ: Այդուհանդերձ, սոցիալական գովազդը միտված է ուսուցանել, տեղեկացնել, մեծացնել հանրային իրազեկումը առկա հասարակական խնդիրների վերաբերյալ, հետևաբար ծառայել հանրային շահին, մինչդեռ մտաշահարկային խոսույթը ծառայում է մտաշահարկողի շահին՝ ի հակառակ մտաշահարկվողի շահի: Հետևաբար հարց է ծագում՝ ինչքանով կարելի է սոցիալական գովազդը մտաշահարկային համարել: Հենվելով մի շարք լեզվաբանների տեսությունների վրա՝ սույն հոդվածում սոցիալական գովազդը դիտարկվում է մտաշահարկային խոսույթի տեսանկյունից, ինչի արդյունքում վեր են հանվում տպագիր սոցիալական գովազդում կիրառվող մի շարք մտաշահարկային հնարներ:

Բանալի բառեր. գովազդ, ոչ առևտրային գովազդ, սոցիալական գովազդ, լեզվաբանական մտաշահարկում, մտաշահարկային խոսույթ, փաստարկային խոսույթ, ներակա տեղեկություն, պերլոկուտիվ ազդեցություն

Е. ХАРАЗЯН – *Социальная реклама как инструмент манипуляции.* – В настоящей статье рассматриваются манипулятивные механизмы, используемые в социальной рекламе, а также обсуждается вопрос, можно ли считать социальную рекламу манипулятивной. Социальную рекламу принято считать разновидностью рекламного дискурса, в которой используются разные аргументативные и манипулятивные механизмы. Более того, социальная реклама, будучи направлена на повышение информированности общественности о текущих проблемах в обществе, служит общественным интересам, тогда как манипулятивный дискурс служит интересам манипулятора против интересов манипулируемых. Следовательно, вопрос о том, в какой степени социальную рекламу можно считать манипулятивной, нуждается в разъяснении. Опираясь на теории нескольких лингвистов, в статье предпринята попытка исследования социальной рекламы с точки зрения манипулятивных теорий дискурса с целью выявления некоторых манипулятивных методов, применяемых в печатных социальных рекламах.

Ключевые слова: реклама, некоммерческая реклама, социальная реклама, лингвистическая манипуляция, манипулятивный дискурс, аргументативный дискурс, имплицитная информация, перлокутивный эффект