CM 220 Unit 2 Reading

I. Advertising as an invention

Like writing itself, advertising—which can be defined as the use of words, graphic design, and images to sell a product, service, or idea—was an invention. Advertising is an ancient invention, and its early media included rock drawings, hand-drawn posters, handbills, and billboards. We do not know who invented advertising itself, but one contender for the title of “inventor of modern print advertising” would be Andrea Alciato, who published the first book of emblems in 1531. Emblems are allegorical pictures that are accompanied by text that guides the reader’s understanding of what the pictures mean. Still, it would take some time before print advertisements began to resemble what we are familiar with today. During the 18th and 19th centuries, newspapers and rising literacy rates greatly expanded the reach and importance of advertisements. Since the 19th century, every technological medium invented—including photography, phonograph records, radio, film, television, the Internet, and cell phones—has been used to transmit advertising messages.

II. Advertisements as arguments

Advertising is essentially a form of persuasive writing. In an advertisement, someone is trying to sell us something. What they are selling can range from a product that can be purchased at the store to something much more abstract. Many advertisements seek to sway our political views, persuade us to take some kind of action, or color our perceptions of corporations and other organizations. In the process, they may appeal to our emotions or make illogical or unethical arguments. These misleading tactics are why it is good idea to use critical thinking to break down and analyze at least some of the advertising messages that surround us every day.

Spoof ads and anti-consumerism ads, such as those shown on the Adbusters website, can help us to see how advertisements make arguments. Contemporary advertisers have learned from spoof ads and anti-consumerism ads how to make edgy and humorous advertisements for a younger audience. For instance, this New York Times article by Andrew Adam Newman (2009), discusses how Procter & Gamble’s “Residue is Evil” campaign for the deodorant Old Spice uses humor to appeal to men in the 12-34 age demographic. Notice how the “Residue Is Evil” ad plays on the viewer’s desire to appear attractive and not foolish.

III. Analyzing an advertising argument
The R.J. Reynolds Company began the “More doctors smoke Camels” ad campaign in 1946 in anticipation that scientific research into the health effects of smoking might eventually pose a threat to their business. This early 1950s print advertisement is just one example from this campaign, which spanned eight years.

Like any argument, this advertisement seeks to persuade the reader by making claims, which are statements of belief that may or may not be supported by evidence. Claims can be made with either images or words, or—as in this case—a combination of the two.

What claims are made in this advertisement? The most prominent claim is that “More doctor’s smoke Camels than any other cigarette.” Some of the surrounding text seeks to support this claim by saying that it is based on “repeated nationwide surveys” in which “doctors in every branch of medicine” were allegedly asked what brand they smoked. The ad goes on to claim that, “The doctors’ choice is America’s choice!” This claim is implicitly supported by the celebrity endorsements at the bottom of the ad. Finally, the ad challenges the reader to test the cigarettes in his or her “T-Zone (T for Throat, T for Taste)” for 30 days.

The ad combines three simple lines of argument that support each other. First, it suggests that the reader should smoke Camels because Camel cigarettes are safe—maybe even healthy! (If they weren’t safe, doctors would not smoke them, would they?) Second, the ad suggests that smoking Camels might make the reader more popular, like the celebrities shown. Finally, R.J. Reynolds wants to remind the reader that smoking is pleasurable. Notice how the “T-Zone” image draws our attention to the luscious lips of a woman who looks just like Marilyn Monroe.

IV. Evaluating Arguments: Research and Logic

Unlike most advertising arguments, academic arguments generally use credible research and sound logic. Research provides evidence to support or refute claims. Logic guides how we conduct research, how we put the pieces of research together, and how we present our arguments. If an argument were a high-rise building, the research sources might be durable materials integrated in the construction, while sound logic would be the engineering knowledge necessary for the building to stand. An argument based on sound logic is more stable and durable than an argument based on faulty logic.

The “More doctors smoke Camels” ad presents a weak argument because it is based on faulty logic. It contains logical errors, which are called logical fallacies. Just because doctors and celebrities smoke Camels does not mean that smoking Camels is a good idea. This idea—that you should do something because everyone else is doing it—is a specific logical fallacy called the bandwagon fallacy. The bandwagon fallacy is part of a whole category of logical fallacies called emotional appeals. You may be able to identify other emotional appeals in this ad. (See the Fallacy Gallery for examples of some common logical fallacies.)

The emotional content of the ad is hidden beneath a thin veneer of academic credibility. After all, doctors are a trusted source of information. Also, like some scientific studies, the claims in
the ad were supposedly based on surveys, and surveys can be a valid method of conducting research. However, the surveys that the R.J. Reynolds Company conducted were dubious at best. According to Allan M. Brandt (2007), company representatives visited medical conferences and handed out free samples. They then asked the conference attendees to answer the question, “What brand are you carrying now?” This is an example of biased research. Biased research is designed to “prove” a pre-determined point. It sets out support the views of a company, organization, or individual at all costs.

Credible research, on the other hand, starts with a provisional idea. (In scientific research, this idea is called a hypothesis.) Then research is conducted to test the idea. If the research does not support the idea, that is what the researcher reports to the reader. Do you see the difference? Not only is this kind of research more credible than biased research, it is also far more adventurous!

Academic writers generally seek to base their arguments on credible research and sound logic. That does not mean that they always succeed. You should read every argument carefully and evaluate it on its own merits.

V. Finding a body of secondary research: The case of anti-smoking research

In this class, you are being asked to formulate an idea that could help to solve a problem. After coming up with your provisional idea or hypothesis, you will need to conduct preliminary research in order to explore whether the idea is likely to be effective (that is, helpful in solving the problem). If the results of that preliminary research are promising, then the next goal of research might be to find out how to make the idea as effective as it can be and how to put your plan into action.

We already discussed the deceptive argument made by the R.J. Reynolds Company ad. Now we will look at some current research that focuses on how to make an anti-smoking campaign that will strongly motivate smokers to quit smoking. The specific “big idea” that is tested in this research is whether graphic warnings on cigarette packs are more effective than verbal warnings alone.

Canada started requiring cigarette manufacturers to put graphic warnings on cigarette packs in 2002. Since then, other countries have adopted this strategy. In this study, which is published on the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website](https://www.cdc.gov), O’Hegarty, Pederson, Yenokyan, Nelson & Wortley (2007) investigate the potential effectiveness of such a policy in the United States. Please read the article. We will discuss it in seminar.

VI. Applying what you have learned: Writing a working thesis statement

A thesis is the main idea expressed in a written or visual work. A thesis statement is brief, written version of that main idea. This distinction is important. For instance, some advertisements do not have a thesis statement, but they all have a thesis.
In the written portion of your final project, you will need to have a thesis statement that makes a debatable claim. However, since you have not finished your research yet, you cannot set your thesis statement down in stone yet. However, you can generate a **working thesis statement**, which is what you think you might say based on your current knowledge. A working thesis statement is similar to a hypothesis in a scientific study. In both cases, an idea is tested through research. The only difference is that a hypothesis never changes within a particular study. It is only proven or disproven by the research. A working thesis statement can be revised once you are sure what you want to say.

In your presentation, which is the other component of the final project, you should also have a thesis. The thesis should be clearly communicated.
References
