

# Contrast as a Persuasive Strategy in Social Advertising: A Case Study of Four Advertisings

*El contraste como estrategia persuasiva en la publicidad social:  
un estudio de caso de cuatro publicidades*

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## ABSTRACT

Social advertising, understood as a type of discourse, is characterized by the use of different persuasive strategies that are adopted regularly for the construction of such discourse.

The paper presents an analysis of some social advertisements, where contrast is used as an expression strategy for the construction of persuasive discourse. The research was carried out from the analysis of four advertisements selected for their use of contrast as a persuasive strategy. In the advertisements analyzed, *contrast* appears in both verbal and nonverbal signs, that is, in the text and in the image. Based on such analysis, contrasting concepts are identified and placed in semiotic squares to perform the analysis. Results show that in this type of advertising there is an exhortative macro-act, consisting of two subparts, a request speech act and a commissive speech act, which is structured in a cause-consequence relationship. The structure of the commission act creates a threat and functions as an argument of the request speech act.

**Keywords:** *contrast, persuasive strategies, social advertising, semiotic squares.*

## RESUMEN

La publicidad social, comprendida como un tipo de discurso, se caracteriza por el uso de diferentes estrategias persuasivas utilizadas de manera recurrente para la construcción de dicho tipo de discurso. El objetivo de este trabajo es presentar un análisis de algunas publicidades sociales que hacen uso del *contraste* como estrategia de expresión para la construcción del discurso persuasivo. La investigación fue llevada a cabo a partir del análisis de cuatro publicidades seleccionadas por el uso del contraste como estrategia persuasiva. En las publicidades analizadas el *contraste* aparece tanto en los signos verbales como en los no verbales, es decir, en el texto y en la imagen. A partir de allí, se identifican términos que contrastan y que permiten ubicarlos en cuadrados semióticos para realizar el análisis. Los resultados muestran que, en este tipo de publicidades, existe un macro-acto exhortativo, compuesto por dos subactos, uno de petición y uno comisivo que está estructurado en una relación de causa-consecuencia. La estructura del acto comisivo genera una amenaza y funciona como un argumento del acto de petición.

**Palabras clave:** *contraste, cuadrados semióticos, estrategias persuasivas, publicidad social.*

CURRENTLY, THE CONCEPTS OF MARKETING and advertising—and by the analogy of social marketing and social advertising—are often used interchangeably in various contexts such as in companies, NGOs, public institutions and even in the scientific literature (Santesmases, 2012). The definition of marketing has been discussed by different authors (see: Bell, 1979; Brown, 1925; Hartley, 1976; Kotler, 1972; Pride & Ferrell, 1980). For example, Kotler (1972) defines it as “the set of human activities directed at facilitating and consummating exchanges”<sup>1</sup> (p. 12). Thus, in marketing, a series of activities are combined, from planning to selling a product or service that meets the needs of a community.

The concept of social marketing was introduced by Kotler and Levy (1969) and reviewed by Kotler and Zaltman (1971). Social marketing brings together all marketing practices aimed at the social benefit and not the economic benefit. Social advertising, as part of this type of marketing, has to do with the communicative pieces whose main objective is a social benefit. These advertisements seek to influence behaviors that help the community to have a better quality of life, to prevent diseases, to protect the environment, to support less favored communities, and more recently to promote the economic well-being of people (Kotler & Lee, 2016).

One of these communication activities in social marketing is the conception of advertising discourse, which is an essential element in these processes since it allows communities to access information about the products or services offered or, in the case of social publicity, about the behaviors that seek to be changed (Dayan, 2003). In the present study, advertising is understood as

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1 The marketing is the set of human activities aimed at facilitating and achieving exchange.

a communicative piece, a text, addressed to a group of consumers, interlocutors, to invite them to perform an action (Baquero, Bonhomme, Reyes Rincón, & Rinn, 2011). To achieve its goal, different persuasive strategies are used in social advertising discourse that we are interested in analyzing.

Carrying out this type of study in this context is important since it allows us to understand better the production processes and structural regularities of persuasive messages, specifically in the field of social advertising.

Although some studies analyze the production procedures of persuasive messages (Dillard & Pfau, 2002; Georget, 2005; Nabi, 2002; Stewart, 2015) and more specifically in the field of social advertising (Baquero & Reyes, 2011; Penget al., 2018; Rinn, 2008; Shen, 2017; Yoon, 2015); there is little research related to the identification and understanding of the functioning of rhetorical devices as a strategy of persuasion in the creation of this type of message.

Previous research has mainly focused on the use of negative emotions, threat, and fear, as persuasion strategies (Cochrane & Quester, 2005; Hastings, Stead, & Webb, 2004; Hastings et al., 2004; Shen, 2017; Vermeir, De Bock, & Van Kenhove, 2017) and on the use of different rhetorical devices as expression strategies in the conception of social advertising messages (Dillard & Pfau, 2002; Pachocińska, 2011; Price Dillard, 2010); however, few studies have analyzed contrast and its effects in social advertising messages.

The main objective of this paper is to analyze, from a semiotic point of view, particularly from the theory of Greimas (1987), some social advertisements that use contrast as an expression strategy. The aim is to identify how contrast is used in some of these advertisements to achieve certain communicative intentions, the content and expression strategies used to reach the

interlocutor, and the types of linguistic acts used to persuade the interlocutor to modify her/his behavior.

This paper will describe the analysis of four social advertisements in which contrast is used as an expression strategy in the construction of persuasive discourse. This kind of analysis has become important in the field of discourse analysis and rhetoric because of the significant presence of advertising discourse in current social practices, and the need to point out the particularities that characterize persuasive processes in social advertising. Other researches that we are currently conducting has the main objective of better understanding other types of strategies used in the context of social advertising.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### The strategies

Human beings plan how to perform different tasks to achieve an objective in the best possible way. Strategies are those particular ways of approaching a goal. Consequently, any worker, scholar and, in general, anyone has their strategies to carry out different activities. For example, communicators deploy their strategies for the construction of a text. They must consider the type of audience to address, the means they will use to deliver their message, the selection of the information they will present, the type of emotion seek to generate in the interlocutor, etc. The final product, the text, or the communicative piece will show some strategies used to capture the attention of the possible interlocutor. Therefore, the analyst will be able to find them for talking about them and support their statements based on that product.

Within the process of conception of the text, then, the strategies can be related to the activities that precede the writing itself

or the final product. In the latter case, there will be strategies related to the content and expression style. They may vary, depending on the nature of the communicative act involved: informative, directive, commitment, or persuasive act. The strategies in advertising texts, for example, will have to adjust to the type of macro-act: persuading interlocutors to perform an action or dissuade<sup>2</sup> them from doing something (illocutive act or intention). The content and expression strategies cannot be identical for a piece of this nature than for a communicative piece in which a commitment is made.

Content strategies are related to the message to be transmitted, that is, what is said with the communicative act (i.e., the propositional content of the communicative act). As a content strategy, the enunciator may choose to transmit it directly or indirectly, literally or non-literally (J. Baquero & Pardo, 1983). The enunciator may also choose to thematize one or more aspects (product characteristics, price, the benefits gained with the product or service, the brand, the consequences of a behavior, etc.) or may opt to chain the arguments in a certain way, instead of another one (J. Baquero & Pardo, 1997).

Expressions strategies, meanwhile, are related to the signs, both verbal and nonverbal, and other linguistic and non-linguistic

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2. Some advertisements seek to persuade interlocutors to do something while others seek to dissuade them to stop doing something. The latter is not always presented as such since it always seems possible to say that what is done is to persuade them not to do something. However, authors such as Toro, J. A. O. (2010) indicate that “campaigns in which individuals are intended to wear a safety belt, to use a condom in sexual intercourse, or to go to a blood donation day are typical cases in which to be persuaded” (p. 171). On the other hand, campaigns in which “the purpose is to ask the community or the individual not to carry out certain harmful practices such as drug use, drive after drinking alcoholic beverages, avoid domestic violence, among others” are campaigns of dissuasion (p. 171).

resources (metaphors, exaggerations, repetitions, comparisons, analogies, etc.) that are used to deliver the message.

In an advertising campaign to reduce accidents related to alcohol consumption, the advertisers can organize the message directly and literally by selecting signs such as: “Do not drink alcohol if you are going to drive,” “Do not drive if you have drunk alcohol,” “Drive responsibly” or “Turn over your keys if you are going to drink.” However, they also can decide to write it indirectly and not literally with a sign like “Your children are waiting for you at home.” All of these can be different verbal signs that express the same message. These verbal signs also may be complemented by nonverbal signs that reinforce the content, make it more explicit, make it more interesting, or add information. In the construction of the message, a type of relationship is generated between the different signs to meet the communicative objective.

It remains to say that following the theory of speech acts (Searle, 1969), the communicative act issued, regardless of its nature, generates in the interlocutor moods, emotions, thoughts, attitudes, behaviors, and/or beliefs (perlocutionary act). The enunciators (“agents of change” in social advertising) can focus on one of these levels depending on the community they want to reach.

### The contrast

By performing a preliminary analysis of different strategies used in the social advertising messages, it can be identified that the contrast or comparison stands out in the expression strategies. This type of strategy is set up when opposite situations or marked differences are shown: *beauty/ugliness*, *comfort/discomfort*, *health/illness*, etc. The purpose when it is used may be to present the negative consequences or risks of



certain behaviors. In this way, content such as “the cigarette damages your lungs” can be reinforced by an image as showed in Figure 1, where the lungs of a smoker are displayed. The same message can also be accompanied by an image such as in Figure 2 that shows the contrast between a healthy lung and a damaged one.

Both strategies are valid, although we believe there are differences in the effects reception of the message depending on the nonverbal sign. The advertising creators will choose the one that they deem most appropriate to the proposed fines.

In this article, we will exclusively analyze social advertisements similar to that of Figure 2, in which contrast is used as an expression strategy, and our purpose is to carry out a semiotic analysis that may unravel what lies behind the use of this strategy.



*Figure 1.* Lung figure to reinforce the message. Xtremest. Retrieved from: <https://www.todayssrdh.com/how-to-discuss-periodontal-disease-lung-colon-cancer-with-patients/>



*Figure 2.* Contrast between a healthy lung and a damaged one.  
Retrieved from: <https://mundoasistencial.com/cancer-de-pulmon/>

## METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

In this paper, we established that social advertisements that use contrast in the expression level could be divided into two different groups depending on the receiver's implication in the situation. Thus, some advertisements deal with situations in which people to whom the advertising is targeted (receiver or behavior adopter) act in the manner suggested by the communication piece: they consume liquor, smoke cigarettes, use drugs, do not comply with standard behaviors, etc.; thereby, the behavior adopter is at the same time the change beneficiary. Other advertising messages describe an unfortunate situation for people other than the behavior adopter: bulimic or depressive people, individuals who have lost their homes or who consume water in poor conditions, etc. In this kind of advertising, the receiver or the

behavior adopter is not the direct beneficiary of its action. In any case, they all want the behavior adopter to do something for her/himself or another person so that the situation presented as negative is modified.

In this paper, we analyze some advertisements belonging to the first group: advertisements in which the receiver seeks to modify a behavior for her/his own benefit. Two specific topics were selected for this analysis, cigarette consumption and liquor consumption, and four advertisements using contrast as a persuasive strategy were selected to carry out the research. As this is a case study, the advertisements were not selected randomly; instead, we intentionally chose them due to their use of contrast and collected through the internet in 2019. These advertising texts have different communication channels, posters, magazines and postcards.

We analyze from a semiotic point of view, using the semiotic squares of Greimas (1987), the content and expression strategies used in the production of the message to persuade the interlocutors. From the linguistic point of view, the structuring of speech acts, directive macro-acts and commissive sub-acts will be analyzed. This analysis will be complemented with the study of contrast construction strategies in the image. The results of this research correspond to the analysis of the four selected advertisements; it becomes necessary, then, to carry out new investigations with a broader corpus of analysis to confirm or refute the results.

### **SOCIAL ADVERTISEMENTS THAT MAKE USE OF CONTRAST**

Figure 3 and Figure 4 show some examples of cigarette consumption. The two pieces thematize the consequences of cigarette smoking that are the risks of smoking. With the display

of these consequences, the receiver (smoking women or smoking men, depending on the figure) is sought to change a behavior, that is, to quit smoking. At the content level, then, the two separate pieces share part of the message (1) and are distinguished in the thematized aspect: (2) and (3) respectively.

1. Stop smoking.
2. Smoking will destroy your face.
3. Smoking will destroy your lungs.

In each one, the sequence between the propositions is based on a proposition that links two events in a causal relationship (smoking and destroys X) and acts as an argument to change the behavior. It is established, then, a plot relationship like the following, where (2) and (3) contain the causal relationship:

4. (1) ← (2) for Figure 3
5. (1) ← (3) for Figure 4

In the level of speech acts, these propositions perform a directive speech macro-act (an exhortative speech act<sup>3</sup>). As indicated, the advertisement message seeks that the interlocutor performs or stop performing an action in the future (stop smoking or do not smoke). It is justified based on a reason that contains a causal relationship between two events: the cause expressed through a verb (smoking) and the effect (expressed in the future tense, in the second-person singular), which exposes the risk that the agent of the action is at (will damage your face or your lungs). Consequently, such directive

3 Different dictionaries define exhortation as an incitement to someone to do or stop doing something through reasons or requests. From this point of view, the exhortation would involve two parts: the incitement and the presentation of reasons or requests that is the reason why we have called the macro-act in this way.

macro-act consists of two sub-parts, a commissive speech act (categorized in advertising as a threat) and a directive speech act: the request (1). Commissive sub-act works as an argument to modify the interlocutor behavior in the direction proposed by the directive request sub-act.



*Figure 3.* Your beauty. Up in Smoke. (McCann, 2015). Retrieved from: <https://campaignsoftheworld.com/print/your-beauty-up-in-smoke/>

In the expression level, the differences are evident in these two advertisements. In the first one, a picture of a woman's face is presented in the foreground, with a burning cigarette between her index and middle fingers. Half of her face is shown as not exposed to the cigarette, whereas the other half shows what smoking can cause, that is, what happens after smoking.

Contrast is displayed between a young, beautiful, and lush face (right side of the woman) and an old and emaciated face after the smoking cigarettes (left side of the woman). The image is reinforced with a superior text *Your beauty. Up in Smoke* and a complementary text *Tobacco will destroy your face cell by cell, from the inside out. That's the ugly truth. World no tobacco day. Ugly truth.*

In the second advertisement, a white poster superimposed on a black background is shown. There is a silhouette of a man smoking; this silhouette is cropped resulting in a twofold picture. In the black background, the image of a man smoking peacefully is displayed, while the cropped image will be used to view the inside of his body. Specifically, the area of the lungs shows a black spot. The image is accompanied by the following text *One thing leads to another. Quit smoking now.*



*Figure 4.* One thing leads to another. ADESF. Retrieved from: <https://advertisingrow.com/advertising/campaigns/advertising-campaign-adesf-one-thing-leads-to-another-2/>

Each advertisement is different in the expression of the contents of each act. Thus, the directive speech sub-act is not explicitly expressed in the communicative piece of Figure 3. It must be inferred by the interlocutors through what they find in the text: the explicit presence of the smoking effects, the fact that it is an advertisement and that it is an advertising piece within the *World no tobacco day* campaign, leads to the conclusion that the message is “quit smoking.” In Figure 4, however, this content is expressed literally and directly. *Quit smoking now* is the verbal sign that expresses the directive speech sub-act. The imperative clause is the typical way of expressing this kind of directive acts and the words showing their denotative meaning. That is the reason why we argue that there is a direct and literal speech act.

If linguistic expressions are examined, the opposite occurs with the commissive sub-act; it is literal and direct in the first case, and clearly contains the characteristics of a threatening statement as it addresses the second person, (*Your beauty. Up in Smoke, Tobacco will destroy your face cell by cell, from the inside out*) and that proposes something that endangers the target adopter in the future<sup>4</sup> (“His beauty vanishes,” “the cigarette will destroy his face”). In the second advertising (Figure 4), however, there is no corresponding linguistic expression, but it can be inferred. *One thing leads to another* means that smoking damages the lungs, and as the message is addressed to the second person (“Stop smoking”) it is inferred that what is claimed is that smoking will damage your lungs, the threat. In both cases, the image contributes to the expression of the content, but in a different way. In the advertising of the woman's face, the image is testimonial and

4 This future is presented farther in the first advertisement and nearer in the second

reinforces the text, but in the other, the image is the one that expresses the content of the threat.<sup>5</sup>

The contrast is shown in the first case between the aging of the side of the face behind the smoke and the beautiful and young side of the face that is not exposed to smoke, but also through phrases such as *Your beauty. Up in smoke*, the mode complements *cell by cell, from the inside out*, and the expression *That's the ugly truth*, which reinforces the commissive sub act. In the second case, however, there is no greater intensification than the one presented in the image: the area of the lungs is completely black. The commissive sub-act, not literal, not direct in the second add, simply refers to the image, which clearly shows the consequences. The expression *One thing leads to the other* does not indicate what is “the one” and what is “the other”, while the image contains it clearly. The phrase forces, then, to observe the image and interpret it, within a set of possible options: “smoking leads to lung problems” or “smoking causes lung cancer” or “Smoking ruins the lungs”, etc. In both advertisements, the consequences are presented as a health risk; it is the latent probability that smoking cigarettes produces certain negative effects.

The contrast strategy presents in the first advertisement two situations corresponding to different moments in time: before and after smoking. The second advertisement, on the other hand, contrasts two situations of the same moment: the outside reflecting enjoyment (the black silhouette) and the inside with the black spot (the part that falls). In terms of Greimas (1987), these contrasts pose a movement within a semiotic square corresponding to a step

5 This is a commissive speech act of threat, although it does not commit the enunciator to do something in the future against the listener (something that usually characterizes the act of threat). In return, the receiver is presented as a possible patient of a negative event (he/she is put in danger). There is no agent, but a cause, which is the behavior of the same receiver (smoking).



from positive deixis (*beauty/enjoy*) to negative deixis (*ugliness/disease*), if tobacco consumption is maintained or started; the proposal is to abandon this consumption to stay in positive deixis.

Thus, the word *beauty* in Figure 3 refers to the right side of the woman and is located in the positive deixis (left axis) of a semiotic square (Figure 5); the corresponding contrary and/or contradictory: “ugliness” and “no beauty” (right axis) are deployed in the semiotic square.

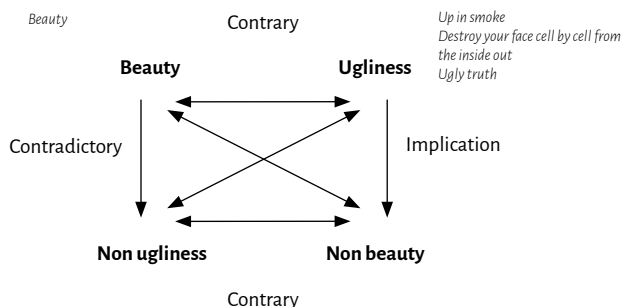


Figure 5. Semiotic square of the terms to update Figure 3.

Therefore, the face behind the smoke, to which the expression *Up in smoke* refers, is associated with “no beauty” but also with “ugliness” (right axis). That is not only because of the update of the opposite to the term *beauty* but also by the expression “[Go] up in smoke” that speaks of the loss of beauty. We can say, then, that smoking tobacco is presented as the cause of this movement within the semiotic square from a positive to negative deixis. It could be argued that by evoking this contrast, which appears in this advertising campaign both in the text and in the image, this advertisement shows aging or old age, or rather, premature aging as something negative and as a latent danger if smoking is not abandoned.

The verb *destroy*, meanwhile, is a process verb, associated with undoing something or ending it. In this advertising, the first semantic argument “tobacco smoking” has the thematic role of cause and the second argument is the patient (the face, and therefore the smoker). So, it is spoken of the destruction of the face by the cigarette, destruction that is observed as unnatural aging. In turn, the text complements adds new information that the image does not have and suppresses a possible redundancy between text and image: *cell by cell from the inside out* that in turn assigns a greater negative force. This expression suggests a slow process, which ends each cell and is not visible in a short time because it goes inside out.

In the second advertisement (Figure 4), the contrasting terms can be taken out from the image: The “enjoyment” that can be perceived in the black background image becomes almost simultaneously, according to the text, the “disease” (The inside black spot showed in the white image). It is again a threat addressed to the behavior adopter, which is intended to intimidate him (who?) (disease > cancer > death)<sup>6</sup>, as a perlocutionary strategy whose effect could be behavior change: quitting smoking<sup>7</sup>.

In contrast, the communicative pieces of Figure 7 and Figure 9 related to liquor consumption do not share any proposition between them. The aim in the first case is that the behavior adopter stops consuming liquor while in the second is that the receiver does not drive after consuming it. Again, the consequences of

6 This type of intimidation, however, doesn't seem to generate fear in all people.

7 We believe, however, that these advertisements do not achieve the desired perlocutionary effect, because for most of the cigarette consumer community, the information given is not new. Therefore, we believe it is necessary to think of strategies that transcend the simple change of expressive strategy. The work should focus even more on content modifications.

adopting certain behaviors are thematized and this information is recovered through verbal and nonverbal signs.

6. Stop drinking
7. Not driving after consuming liquor
8. Liquor consumption could lead to alcoholism.
9. Drunk driving makes you a criminal

The propositions (6) and (7) carry out a directive request sub act, justified through a commissive act of threat. This, like the commissive act of the previous advertisements, involves a causal relationship between two events: liquor consumption → alcoholism; drunk driving → becoming a criminal. Superficially, these propositions are organized at the argumental level in the way proposed in (10) and (11), and they are part of an exhortative directive speech macro-act. It is intended, in global terms that the interlocutor behaves in the future in a certain way based on the motivation or reasons offered.

10. (6)←(8) for Figure 7
11. (7)←(9) for Figure 9

In summary, it is an exhortative macro-act that involves two subacts, one request directive and another commissive that contains a causal relationship as proposed in Figure 6:

Following the expressional plane, the communicative piece of Figure 7 exposes a man's face disfigured in one part by the presence in the foreground of an alcoholic bottle. Only the part of the face that overlaps the bottle is affected. The other one shows the normal features of the person serving as a model. That shows in the image the contrast between "disease" and "health". The text, meanwhile, clarifies what the image shows: a disease, not an accident, because of the presence of the word *disease* in the text.

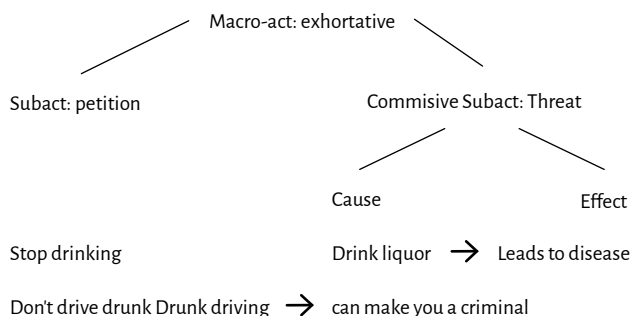


Figure 6. Exhortative macro-act.

As we can see in the full text (Cfr. (12)), the commissive act, that we can utter as (13), is not expressed literally. Two phrases are containing the corresponding information: the interrogative (14) and the affirmative (15). None of these expressions contain words related to liquor consumption or alcoholism, as such. The image and some expressions in the text allow us to infer the content. The image makes it by the presence of the bottle and by the contrast between the two parts of the face. The text allows the inference through the use of the word *disease*, through the reference to the entity Alcoholics Anonymous and through the presence of the expression *yourself*, which refers to the second person and makes the act to be interpreted as a threat.

12. *Suddenly it got scary? It's hard to tell when fun becomes disease. Don't try to check it yourself. Rzeczpospolita supports Alcoholics Anonymous. Infoline 000001.*
13. The liquor consumption could lead you to alcoholism
14. *Suddenly it got scary?*
15. *It's hard to tell when fun becomes disease.*

The directive sub-act, which in this opportunity is expressed in an imperative sentence, is also non-literal. “Don’t try to check it yourself” suggests that the interlocutor should not try to check something, but this sentence does not explicitly say “stop drinking”. Since the two acts are non-literal, the interpretation can vary a little between the different receivers (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Suddenly it got scary? Retrieved from: <https://alcoholcampaign.org/2016/01/31/suddenly-it-got-scary/>

On this occasion, as will be further explained, the contrast can be seen in the image (the two parts of the face) but also in the text (the presence of the words *fun* and *disease*). Neither the image nor the text can separately express the intentioned message. That is, between the image and the text a necessary relationship is established. This relationship is different from that given with the advertisements of Figure 3 and Figure 4, where the image has respectively a testimonial function and a communicative function

(the image expresses what is needed to say). Likewise, although the relationship between drinking and disease is of cause-consequence, what the image presents is not a direct consequence of that behavior. In fact, liquor consumption does not disfigure the face. So, the image functions as a metaphor, and for that reason, the necessary relationship between image and text.

Terms such as *scary* and *disease* are negative, and, therefore, they are located in the negative deixis of the semiotic square, while *fun*, that tells us about the opposite, is located in the positive deixis, thereby updating the entire semiotic square.

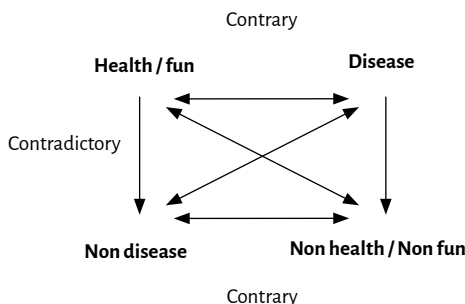


Figure 8. Semiotic square of figure 7.

It is suggested in Figure 7 that alcohol leads to diseases, among which is alcoholism, but also if liquor is not consumed, the problem is solved. Of course, if it is alcoholism, the problem is solved when we stop drinking, but this cannot be generalized with other diseases.

In the expressive level, the advertisement in Figure 9 shows at first foreground the photo of a woman from behind, looking at herself in a public bathroom mirror. Maybe it is a bathroom of a bar based on the clothes that she is wearing and the presence of an advertisement shown in the mirror. The woman in the

foreground represents the “before”, a woman who is supposedly drinking in this bar, there is not enough evidence in the image that she is drunken. Her reflection characterizes the “after” of driving drunk, by suggesting that the woman would be taken to prison. This is concluded based on the white poster printed in black with the measures of height in inches, such as those that usually appear in the photographs of people in jail.

The image is accompanied by the text *Drunk driving makes you a criminal* (commissive act), and below *Give us a call and get home safe 0861Rikkis* (directive act). So, it is an advertisement made by the taxi company Rikkis in Cape Town, Africa. It is an advertisement issued by an entity interested in “providing a service” from which it obtains an economic gain, but at the same time tries to solve a social problem, creating awareness in the community that people must drive responsibly; it is a case of social responsibility marketing.



*Figure 9.* Drunk driving makes you a criminal. (Ad Age, 2009).  
Retrieved from: [https://adage.com/article/media-idea-of-the-week/  
creative-media-idea-mirror-tells-people-drive-drunk/134876](https://adage.com/article/media-idea-of-the-week/creative-media-idea-mirror-tells-people-drive-drunk/134876)

The commissive act, as can be seen, is expressed by a literal and direct verbal sign that contains all the keywords to interpret the image and the advertisement as a threat: *drunk, driving, you* and *criminal*. The word *criminal* refers to a person who commits a crime, which is related to an action or an omission typified by law as unlawful or punishable. In the specific case of the context created by the first two words, this action can only be seriously injuring or killing another person in a car accident after consuming liquor. Understandably, the consequences of drunk driving suggested are highly dangerous for the receiver.

Note that “drinking” and “driving” by themselves would not be in the negative deixis, but the link of them would be. Pairs as “life of a third person/interlocutor freedom”, “death of another/detention of the interlocutor” are updated; in this movement, the interlocutor would become responsible, and therefore the criminal. Again, we would have the following semiotic square updated by the word criminal.

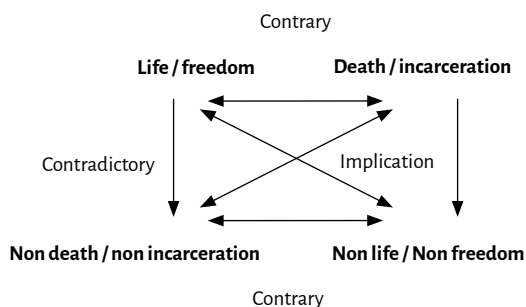


Figure 10. Semiotic square of figure 9.

The people who enter the bathroom and stand in front of the mirror must decide if they perform what is suggested in the



directive act or if they take the risk of drunk driving with all the consequences that such an action would bring about.

The strategy is the contrast between the two moments, and the mirror is the surface used for exhibiting the contrast, by the reflection of one consequence of drunk driving. Of course, this last advertisement has a series of more or less explicit propositions such as the following, which could be organized in a network of argumentative and non-argumentative relationships such as (19).

- 16. Driving drunk can take you to jail.
- 17. Call us and we will take you home safely
- 18. Driving drunk could lead to an accident and even a person's death
- 19.  $((17):(7)) \leftarrow (9) \& (16) \leftarrow (18)$

In Figure 9 the proposal is not to avoid driving drunk, but rather calling the taxis, this is based on the fact that driving drunk can make a person a criminal (9) and can take her/him to jail (12), considering that a person could have or cause an accident (14).

Finally, the four advertisements analyzed here have the following characteristics:

- 1. In all of them, because we decided so, the contrast is presented as a strategy of expression. The contrast intensifies or gives greater force to the exhortative communicative act, and more specifically to the commissive act.
- 2. The contrast appears clearly in all cases in the image, but the way of presenting it differs among them.
- 3. The text also contains contrasting terms that allow them to be placed in semiotic squares.
- 4. In all cases, an exhortative macro-act contains a request and a motivation in the form of a threat.

5. The reason is a statement composed of two events: a cause and its effect, which is expressed as a threat.
6. The threat in all cases is in the image, but somehow also in the text. It ends up being very clear, in that it always addresses a second person directly (using the second grammatical person in the text in contrasting terms) or indirectly (using the second grammatical person only in the directive act), which suggests that the commissive act should be understood as directed at the second person.
7. Speech acts are not always presented in the same way. They can be literal or not, direct or not, or inferable by context, as presented in the following table as a summary:

TABLE 1. *Advertising macro-acts analysis.*

	MACRO-ACT Directive sub act	EXHORTATIVE DIRECTIVE commissive sub-act
<b>Figure 3</b>	Inferable by context	Literal and direct with intensifications
<b>Figure 4</b>	Literal and direct	Expressed in the image
<b>Figure 5</b>	Inferable by context	Inferable by context
<b>Figure 6</b>	Literal and direct	Literal and direct and other budgets

## CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we carried out an analysis of social advertisements where contrast is used as a persuasive strategy. Ways of using the contrast to achieve communicative intention were described and content and expression strategies were identified, as well as the types of speech acts used to persuade interlocutors. The results show that in this type of advertising there is an exhortative macro-act, consisting of two subparts, a request speech act (stop drinking, do not drive drunk, stop smoking, etc.) and a commissive speech

act structured in a cause-consequence relationship (drinking/smoking causes illness, drunk driving can make you a criminal, etc.). The structure of the commissive act creates a threat and functions as an argument of the petition act.

Although the analyzes presented in this research study allow to identify a structure of construction of speech acts and their relationships in the context of social advertising discourse, it is necessary to carry out new studies with a more robust corpus and from different approaches to endorse the results of the present research.

Finally, it is also worth analyzing the operation of other types of rhetorical devices such as irony, metaphors, etc., in the construction of the persuasive discourse of social advertising. Likewise, it is important to identify the perlocutive effects and to assess the effectiveness that this type of strategies can have on the interlocutors.

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