

Advertising as a means of propagating ideology: cosmetic ads shaping beauty patterns through the ages

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Abstract

Advertising discourse is eminently persuasive and hence shares many of the features related to propaganda, namely its persuasive nature, for some, manipulative and deceitful, but rather pervasive and influential in today's consumer society. Its need for the audience's adhesion makes it go along (besides influencing) with mainstream ideas, which makes it a relevant sociological mirror, and therefore pertinent for the purpose of this analysis. This study aims to provide an overview of the way discursive features and, particularly, argumentative strategies have evolved (if so) in beauty care products advertising, so as to infer the major concerns and ideologies

that have been present in society throughout the time. For this purpose, we will resort to discourse studies, mainly argumentation studies, which may provide adequate models for analysis, such as Charaudeau's (2008) modes of reasoning (deduction, analogy, opposition) and the framework proposed by Ruiz Ruiz (2014) which provides different ways of unveiling implicitness in discourse. This study will use advertisements by Elizabeth Arden, as this provides a representative time span for our purposes. This brief analysis seems to point to some, yet few, alterations in the argumentation strategies, as well as in the main topoi in beauty products.

Keywords: Advertising; Beauty; Skincare; Argumentation; Elizabeth Arden.

A publicidade como meio de propagação da ideologia: os anúncios de cosméticos na construção dos padrões de beleza ao longo dos anos

Resumo

O discurso publicitário é eminentemente persuasivo e, por isso, partilha muitas das características associadas à propaganda, nomeadamente a sua natureza persuasiva — para alguns, manipuladora e enganosa — mas, sobretudo, profundamente persuasiva e influente na sociedade de consumo contemporânea. A sua necessidade de obter a adesão do público leva-o a acompanhar (além de influenciar) as ideias dominantes, o que o torna um espelho sociológico relevante e, portanto, pertinente para os objetivos desta análise.

Este estudo procura oferecer uma visão geral da forma como as características discursivas e, em particular, as estratégias argumentativas evoluíram (se é que evoluíram) na publicidade de produtos de cuidados de beleza, de modo a inferir as

principais preocupações e ideologias presentes na sociedade ao longo do tempo. Para tal, recorreremos aos estudos do discurso, sobretudo aos estudos da argumentação, que fornecem modelos adequados de análise, como os modos de raciocínio de Charaudeau (2008) (dedução, analogia, oposição) e o enquadramento proposto por Ruiz Ruiz (2014), que oferece diferentes formas de revelar a implicitude no discurso.

O corpus selecionado de anúncios da marca Elizabeth Arden oferece uma amplitude temporal representativa para os propósitos da análise. Os resultados sugerem algumas, ainda que limitadas, mudanças nas estratégias de argumentação e nos principais *topoi* associados aos produtos de beleza

Palavras-chave: Publicidade; Beleza; Cuidados de pele; Argumentação; Elizabeth Arden.

Data de submissão: 2026-01-17. Data de aprovação: 2026-04-16.

Revista Estudos em Comunicação é financiada por Fundos FEDER através do Programa Operacional Factores de Competitividade – COMPETE e por Fundos Nacionais através da FCT – Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia no âmbito do projeto *LabCom – Comunicação e Artes*, UIDB/00661/2020.

Introduction

It is difficult to address issues related to propaganda without stumbling on a myriad of rather pejorative concepts and definitions, as it is almost inevitably connected with manipulation, deception, and falsehood (Huckin, 2016), commonly associated with a political agenda, and not rarely with rather controversial ethical matters. Most approaches, whether coming from media and social studies, politics, or still from research in the area of psychology, acknowledge that it is an unstable term, which has suffered alterations throughout the time and that presents itself under many forms (Henderson and Braun, 2016; Black, 2001).

Notwithstanding the tight bond propaganda bears with politics and social movements, this concept has recurrently been used in the commercial context of marketing, particularly its persuasive instruments, such as advertising and public relations (Black, 2016; Weaver et al., 2006), a dimension which dictionaries and encyclopaedias include (Britannica). This association is not surprising, especially if we consider the role advertising plays in society, as it is commonly held responsible for the ideological framework of society, or at least for confirming or corroborating – rather than just mirroring – (dominant) ideologies (Williamson, 1978; Goffman, 1979; Cluley, 2017), even if we recognise the audience's advertising literacy (Cook, 1992). Moreover, advertising discourse clearly shares many features with traditional views of propaganda: it is somehow manipulative, addressed to a mass audience, disseminated systematically, and often one-sided (Huckin, 2016). The same holds true for propaganda, as it shares discursive features with advertising. In fact, while analytically distinct, propaganda and advertising share common foundations as strategic forms of communication designed to shape perceptions and behaviour, and they can be understood as historically related forms of organised persuasion within modern mass communication systems (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2015).

Thus, taking into account the role of advertising in the dissemination of ideas, and its affinities with more conventional views of propagandistic features, this study explores the way advertising has contributed and contributes to the transmission of dominant ideologies, namely stereotypes of beauty, as conveyed by cosmetic adverts. By means of models of linguistic argumentation analysis (Charaudeau, 2008; Ruiz Ruiz, 2014; Grice, 1975), we will look into adverts by Elizabeth Arden, from the 1920's to the present day, in an attempt to infer and demonstrate covert and overt forms of spreading, mirroring and confirming notions of beauty, and how these are aligned with (and hence have adapted to) predominant ideologies, according to the respective contexts.

This study will hence begin by offering an overview of the main concept-related stages of advertising and propaganda, so as to consider the position of this discourse in social interaction throughout time. This will be followed by a diachronic outline of skincare and cosmetic products and brands advertising so as to provide an insight into the main developments and contexts in which they occurred. This initial background aims to provide a context for the analyses carried out, focussing, as mentioned, in the main claims, argumentative structures and themes.

1. Advertising and the propagation of ideas

Propaganda quickly lost its initial 1622 missionary aura of the *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* (Congregation for Propagation of the Faith), and has acquired less honourable contours, with its association with the (manipulative) diffusion of dangerous political and social ideologies, especially during the Great Wars, and extreme political movements, such as Nazism, maintaining those pejorative connotations to these days (see, for example, Britannica 2022; Black, 2001; Huckin, 2016). These authors point to a connection with advertising as an activity, in the economic system, and a discourse that is aimed at persuasion, which resorts to many of the rhetorical techniques of propaganda, as well as to its features, especially the fact that it is goal oriented, aimed at influencing and altering attitudes and behaviours, a

“loaded language” (Leech, 1966), not to mention that these terms are often used interchangeably. Even in the domain of the media, studies show the inextricable bond between advertising and the media, as a relevant source of financing, from the beginnings of the press (Brownlees, 2017), a connection that some argue compromises news media integrity and impartiality. The inheritance of these negative connotations, in addition to its role in the consumer circle (Baudrillard 1981), often, too ubiquitous and intrusive (Cook, 1992) have also lent advertising a rather derogatory quality. As Cluley (2017) puts it, much of the work on social and critical studies “tends to take a very negative view of advertising. It sees it as producing false needs, false consciousness and so on” (Cluley, 2017: 149).

Scholars who have looked into the ideological implications of advertising, more or less intensively, more or less critically, such as Williamson (1977), Schudson (1984), Dyer (1982), Cook (1992), or Myers (1999), recognise that it is indeed a discourse and an activity that have an impact on the way societies and their consumers assess, or even judge, what surrounds them, often drawing on people’s assumptions, preconceptions and stereotypes of what they regard as acceptable, desirable, or the other way round. As an activity, and hence a discourse, that requires the attention, involvement, empathy and adhesion of the audience to its claims, advertising has to draw on what is assumedly viewed as positive (or negative, if that is the purpose) and accepted, which means that, notwithstanding its tendency to be somehow surprising, and to enjoy a great deal of discursive freedom (Cook, 1992), more often than not advertising goes along with dominant ideologies. This view of conventional display (also thoroughly discussed by Goffman, 1978) present in adverts is not normally contested, but rather complemented by the idea that, as most media discourses, advertising also contributes to the shaping – even if only by confirmation – of prevalent ideas and behaviours: among other, social roles, beauty stereotypes, gendered conducts and expectations.

1.1 Advertising beauty care (then and now)

Beauty products, by their own nature, feed on patterns of attractiveness, as well as on social assumptions about what it means to look good – or perfect – and advertising for such products resorts amply to validating referent systems, such as nature and science (health) (Williamson, 1977, Dyer 1982). It has been so since the establishment of perfumery and beauty care as a thriving consumer industry, at the turn of the 19th century (Jones, 2010, p.44):

When it came to moving the work of beauty from the home to the market, the perfumers were matched in imagination by a new set of entrepreneurial actors whose expertise lay in hairdressing and salons, pharmacy and theatrical make-up, and who had no hesitation about using health claims, enticing advertising, and other devices to pitch their new beauty products.

The cosmetic industry – whether for perfume, skincare or makeup – has long relied on advertising to confirm and spread self-fulfilling values and concepts, thus playing a very relevant – often controversial – role in the spread of ideals. As demonstrated by Jones (2010), very early, beauty care products were divulged in a way to accommodate the mainstream image of women at a given historic moment, but this industry also proposed and promoted ideals of femininity, thus providing their own suggestions, such as the long-lived brand Nivea (Jones, 2010, p. 57).

Along with *topoi* borrowed from health issues, the business of beauty has consistently resorted to the human craving for youthfulness, a value that has always been crueller towards women, thus displaying young-looking (beautiful) models and making promises according to such ideals (Jones, 2010, p.66):

The brands were advertised in women’s magazines. The beauty of a woman was identified with youth, which was certainly not a new idea, but more novel were the claims of the industry to preserve this

youth even as the years passed. Western cities, celebrities, and fashions set the benchmark for aspirations. White faces, skins, and blonde hair were the focus of the beauty norms that were disseminated worldwide.

It is not surprising, then, that advertising has stood out amongst media discourses as a major promoter of stereotyped views of beauty – particularly female patterns of attractiveness – as well as of patterned behaviours and social roles that nourish the consumer society. Throughout the years, these adverts have displayed models of beauty, normally according to mainstream ideals of each moment, which has led to accusations concerning the confirmation and support of inaccessible (often unrealistic) bodies, some of which connected with excessive thinness, and (distorted) images that are incompatible with most (real) women (Sirqueira et al., 2021; Bissel & Rask, 2010).

Relying on *topoi*, which lend argumentation key accepted social standpoints, generally accepted opinions (Zompetti, 2006), provides advertising messages with self-fulfilling propositions, thus making them more effective. *Topoi* related to beauty assumptions are commonly built around premises that foster the idea that beauty and ageing are irreconcilable, unless the ageing signs are suppressed.

More recently, as advertising rapidly incorporates not only criticism, but also social circumstances, concerns and relevant trends, some brands have focused their advertising promises and appeals on what they call more real(istic) body images, healthy options, and natural, environmentally friendly products. Brands, like Dove, have fully adopted a strategy based on “real beauty” (see, for example, Bissel & Rask, 2010; Syaharani, 2021) and despite controversial views on this approach, as it draws on subjective concepts such as “real beauty”, and its adverts involve some degree of performance (Millard, 2009), studies, in general, recognise that advertising does have a saying in the shaping of mentalities and ideologies, contributing to pertinent changes (Terskikh & Zaytseva, 2021; Confetto et al., 2023).

These more ground-breaking approaches continue to co-exist with (and to integrate) very traditional appeals, mostly related to the maintenance of a youthful appearance. Actually, studies on the way new media portray body images show that there may be a narrowing of features due to filters that propose standardized patterns:

There is evidence that excessive use of these filters online has harmful effects on mental health, especially for young girls. “Instagram face” is a recognized aesthetic template: ethnically ambiguous and featuring the flawless skin, big eyes, full lips, small nose, and perfectly contoured curves made accessible in large part by filters. (Ryan & Mosley, 2022, p. 74)

It seems we have reached a period when paradoxical and sometimes conflicting ideas and ideals cohabit: there is certainly social pressure to make changes in gender roles and gender issues, fostering inclusion, as well as to question standards and stereotypes heavily disseminated by the media, namely advertising. On the other hand, these more progressive moves appear to co-exist with discourses that continue to corroborate rather traditional views: display of very conventional images of beauty, commonly endorsed by popular good-looking celebrities, a craving for (flawless) youthfulness or agelessness (Ellison, 2014), assisted by arguments of healthiness, naturalness and fitness, as well as century-old appeals to (pseudo)scientific formulae as guarantee of results in the battle against ageing (Arroyo, 2013). Even the more alternative ethically-committed approaches to beauty in product ads fall into the old allure for youthfulness and ideals of attractiveness (Tuna, 2019).

The arguments displayed in the website for Dove, for example, focus on a concept of “real beauty” which does not conform to generalised patterns of beauty, but on healthiness¹.

1. <https://www.dove.com/us/en/skin-care.html>

(1) Deeply restoring body lotion for all skin types: Give your body the love it deserves with Dove Coconut & Cocoa Butter body lotion for softer, smoother, healthier-looking skin with every application.

However, this argumentative path cohabits with very common appeals to youthfulness²:

(2) Tips for resilient skin: younger-looking skin for longer.

(3) Whether you have dry skin, oily skin, or need a moisturizer with anti-ageing benefits (...).

(4) From the #1 dermatologist recommended body wash brand.

Despite the brand's distinctive approach, by adopting more inclusive and activist stands (Confetto et al., 2023), it still conforms to socially dominant views, broadly disseminated in the media, regarding the dominion of youthfulness and the fight against (inevitable) ageing. Likewise, it takes hold of arguments based on health and science ("From the #1 dermatologist recommended body wash brand"), which is definitely not uncommon nowadays, in advertising messages for these products, and was not uncommon before, as the 1913 ad below may demonstrate:

(5) The daily use of this soothing, healing, invigorating toilet necessity will give you that delicate clear complexion of girlish freshness you desire.³ (1913 Hinds Almond and Honey Cream)

It is undeniable that ads for beauty products have evolved, and as a result, have undergone changes in strategies and approaches, incorporating social trends, namely the ones concerning inclusivity and environmental concerns. Confetto et al. (2023) look into the way beauty and personal care brands – activist brands – integrate and develop sustainable development goals into their communication strategies. McDonald et al. (2021) point out advertisers' effort to align their campaigns with the society they are a part of, so as to build messages that are welcome and comfortable, thus producing a positive response. Several studies demonstrate changes in advertising as societal values change, which is likely due, in part, to the reduced risk of alienating customers and other stakeholders (McDonald et al., 2021, p.589).

Pounders (2018) points out the urge for brands to consider greater inclusion and diversity in their campaigns, as a result not only of an increased (self) perception concerning images that truly mirror representativeness, but also of the vehicle provided by new social media for consumers to share their opinions, thus the need for brands to monitor their social media and to draw conclusions thereof: "Today, there is a predominant call among women for more inclusivity in advertising; brands would do well to heed it" (Pounders, 2018, p. 136).

It is also a fact, though, that beauty care ads have maintained many features detectable in earlier advertising messages, too. Now, advertising counts on good quality pictures and on a more consolidated scientific research (and discourse), in addition to different media and forms of advertising. Yet, it is not so linear that beauty products have fully abandoned primordial concerns, and diachronic analysis of advertising texts – whichever mode they use – may point to relevant argumentation features and reveal alterations or preservation in such approaches. In addition, it may demonstrate actual relationships of advertising discourse with contextual and historical circumstances.

2. <https://www.dove.com/us/en/stories/tips-and-how-to/skin-care-tips-advice/how-to-get-the-most-out-of-your-skin-care-products.html>

3. <https://www.atticpaper.com/proddetail.php?prod=1913-hinds-skin-cream-ad-lady-tennis-player>

2. Argumentation in ad analysis

As persuasion is an intrinsic characteristic of adverts, looking at the pathways and strategies designed to persuade audiences to go along with their proposed views, and, if possible, to act accordingly, using models coming from argumentation studies, seems rather appropriate. As confirmed by Ripley (2008), an ad is an argument. Its architecture is meant to create messages aimed at constituting a persuasive act, that is, a text produced with precise objectives of somehow changing addressees' attitudes or actions, frequently based on models that have been applied since Aristotle's classical rhetoric, namely with regard to the three modes of persuasion: *ethos*, related to the credibility of the sender, *pathos*, which focuses on the emotions and feelings of the recipient, and *logos*, which involves the text itself and the evidence it provides – forms of reasoning (Aristotle, 1984 [1954]).

Indeed, advertising discourse conforms to Van Emmeren's (2016, p.246) view on the general principles of argumentation: (1) argumentation as a "communicative act complex in defence of a standpoint", with both verbal and non-verbal composition; (2) argumentation as an "interactional act complex", in that it is directed at, and seeks response and acceptance of a standpoint, from a real or imagined interlocutor; (3) argumentation as consisting of propositions and commitments on the part of that who is responsible for the argumentation; (4) argumentation as "an appeal to a rational critic who judges reasonably", in that the argument provider tries to convince the other party of the reasonability of the standpoint, assuming they share the same understanding/standards. These principles are reflected in advertising discourse, since the argumentative structure of these messages presupposes a point of view to be expressed and supported through different codes (verbal or non-verbal), requiring the interlocutor to adhere to the propositions set forth, to which the advertiser is committed, i.e. they must be in line with the proposition or they will be considered fallacious or misleading.

Actually, advertising discourse can be particularly challenging (yet enlightening) given the range of possibilities it benefits from, as a result of constant re-invention to avoid boredom and scepticism (Leech, 1966; Cook, 1991), the linguistic freedom it enjoys, and its eminent multimodal character (Simões, 2019), which provides various codes to build the message. In addition, advertising can use multiple (simultaneously or not) channels to transmit its messages, an advantage that digital media have maximised. Thus, to analyse ads' argumentation mapping, it is necessary to consider the myriad of possibilities and frequent multiple layers of meaning and strategies.

When looking into argumentation in ads, Charaudeau's (2008) perspective may provide an insight of their persuasive structure. As argumentative acts in the sense proposed by Charaudeau (2008), they comply with the conditions for the discursive enactment of the argumentative act: "problematize", or to present the situation, "take a stand", and "prove", which establishes the force of the argument, considering a given communicational situation. In fact, every advert will present a proposition or situation, which may be a problem they offer to resolve, as well as the respective standpoint, as they are never neutral. Then, in the proving phase, they will attempt to demonstrate or validate the standpoint presented. Indeed, some of the circumstances and arguments presented in ads refer to eventual anticipated attitudes of the target audiences to the argumentation presented, based on assumed (and shared) worldviews and preconceptions, thus, constituting proleptic arguments in the sense proposed by Walton (2009).

The different forms of reasoning proposed by Charaudeau (2008) to deal with the proving phase are often found in the argumentative pathways of advertising: "deduction", as ads often establish cause-effect connections, a reasoning that borders on the *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* fallacy, whereby temporal succession is presented as evidence of causal connection; "analogy", which involves a comparison (facts, behaviours), which allude not only to a comparison with competitors' products, but also invites the audiences to relate their own experience/image to that proposed by the ad; "opposition", which points to contradictions, opposing ideas, often used in counter-argumentation, and, in ads, could be an

argumentative resource to demonstrate a course of action that may be conflicting with the audience's purpose, thus proposing the 'right' one; and calculation, which resorts to more rational – mathematical – forms of reasoning (operations of equality, reciprocal interpretation, transitivity, and proportionality), giving arguments a sense of rigour, which ads use when providing arguments that are apparently based on rational, linear reasoning. The latter stream of argumentation is actually quite frequent in pseudo-scientific lines of reasoning used in beauty care products.

As mentioned above, ads require an analysis of multiple layers of meaning, not all of them explicitly presented. All the layers count on the audience's awareness of the contextual circumstances that allow them to draw all the meanings at stake. Grice's (1962) notion of (conversational) implicature⁴ is quite useful here as it corresponds to inferences assumed or presumed by the participants, taking into account the context and objectives, as well as what lies beyond the surface of the messages, the implicit, which makes room for ambiguity and obscurity, and irony, among other features.

It is precisely about implicitness in discourse that Ruiz Ruiz (2014) conducts an analysis of discourse, claiming that all social discourse includes both explicit and implicit elements, and that the latter derive from explicit discourse, not only based on verbal elements, but also on context and non-verbal cues. The author adds that there might be contradiction and draws attention to the multiple forms implicit discourse may assume. This approach is particularly useful to uncover and understand the arguments underlying many advertising messages, and to identify additional meanings and appeals.

Ruiz Ruiz (2014) proposes four dimensions of implicit discourse, which may, *prima facie*, be intentional or unintentional, and may or may not be visibly present in discourse: the insinuated dimension (in this type of implicit discourse, the explicit elements induce or incite to infer the implicit elements); the concealed or silenced dimension (omission), considered a non-discourse, since it is an intentional omission on the part of the discourse producer; the failed dimension (the dimension of implicit discourse that entails implicitly saying something that is intended to be hidden); and the underlying dimension or what remains unnoticed by those involved (what is said implicitly, but which is not intended to be said, nor does one want it not to be said). It seems reasonable to affirm that, as carefully designed messages, implicitness in ads tends to be intentional, though it might actually be through explicit elements that lead up to infer implicit meanings (insinuated discourse), or through intentional omission, either to avoid criticism or because the missing elements can be easily filled by the addressees, thus involving them in the construction of the message. We could argue that non-intentionality may also exist, especially if we consider that certain ideological stances are so rooted in society that the producers of the advertising messages may be drawing on them unaware of the underlying ideology.

Discourse used in social interaction draws as much on explicitness as on implicitness, even if only assumptions about the way messages are produced and received. We infer meaning from all utterances that is likely to go beyond the surface structure of the message. Advertising is counting on the addressees' ability to do just that and to decipher and engage in the argumentative pathway proposed. Studies from critical discourse analysis refer to that shared background as MRs – members' resources – (Fairclough 1992) or the array of contextual assumptions (language knowledge, representations of the natural and social worlds they inhabit, values, beliefs).

4. Implicature (conventional or not), as proposed by Grice (1962) is an especially relevant concept in argumentation, hence in advertising, because it refers to the inferences that interlocutors assume or presume, taking into account the context (in a broad sense) and objectives, as well as what lies beyond the surface of the messages, the implicit, which makes it possible to deal with ambiguity and obscurity, and irony, among other resources.

3. Beauty(care) in Elizabeth Arden's ads throughout the ages

3.1. Methodology

As stated above, Elizabeth Arden has been in the beauty care business, using advertising, long enough (1910) to provide a relevant diachronic perspective on the way advertising for such products has evolved and/or changed, adapted to social, economic and political contexts, as well as to different media landscapes. It is a brand that has advertised thoroughly, which means it has produced a considerable plethora of ads. For this reason, we have opted for selecting one per decade, from the 1920s to the 2010s, to carry out a more detailed analysis, though the overall analysis also draws on other advertisements from different decades as supporting material, providing a comparative framework that reinforces the interpretation of the primary case study. As the earlier ads by this brands date back to the beginning of the twentieth century, one of the main concerns was to locate and identify the release date of the campaigns. For that reason, and also to ensure accuracy, the sources were narrowed down to the links provided in the footnotes, as they offer reliable comprehensive information about the advertisements used. We have also attempted to select ads that are representative of the main products launched in the decades at stake.

In our analysis we will consider both visual and verbal elements, with special attention to argumentation lines, to infer modes of persuasion, categories of argumentation used in the stage of proving, as proposed by Charaudeau (2008; see above), and the degree and type of implicitness (Ruiz Ruiz, 2014, explained above), which will provide relevant information concerning the various layers present in the advertising messages. *Topoi* and appeals will also be considered, as they are an inevitable part of argumentation in advertising messages.

3.2. Looking into adverts in different decades:

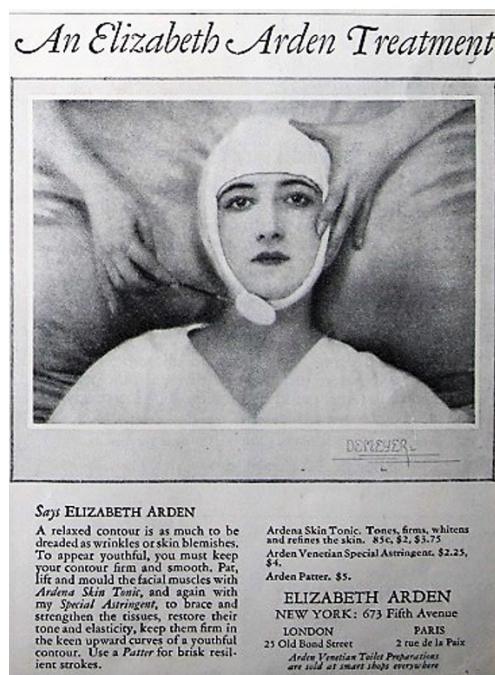


Figure 1: 1925 ad⁵

5. <https://witness2fashion.wordpress.com/tag/elizabeth-arden-salon-ads-beauty-products-1920s/>

(6) Says Elizabeth Arden

A relaxed contour is as much to be dreaded as wrinkles or skin blemishes. To appear youthful, you must keep contour firm and smooth. Par, lift and mould the facial muscles with *Ardena Skin Tonic*, and again with my *Special Astringent*, to brace and strengthen the tissues, restore their tone and elasticity, keep them firm in the keen upward curves of youthful contour. Use *Patter* for brisk resilient strokes.

As we may see in this 1920's ad, there is a patent concern to offer a product that promises to fight undesirable traces of ageing, such as “a relaxed contour”. It presents the audience a very simple line of argument: a solution for a problem. The proving stages will resort to cause – consequence: using the product will prevent the “dreaded” signs that risk a youthful appearance, providing an explanation of the properties and functions of each product and how it will help resolve the problem. As the argumentation is rather explicit in “dreaded wrinkles and blemishes” and “to appear youthful”, we may presume there is general acceptance that people want to look younger, and that signs of ageing are not viewed positively. We may also infer that Elizabeth Arden already enjoyed a status that made her a credible source of information, as the ad blatantly refers to her as the authority speaker (*ethos*): “Says Elizabeth Arden”. The picture that goes with the ad – a lady wearing bandage as in plastic surgery – points to beauty care as treatment, an allusion to the beauty salons that had become so common and fashionable in Paris and elsewhere (Jones, 2010).

15 minute
REST CURE! with

VELVA CREAM MASQUE
BY
Elizabeth Arden

Just smooth on the Masque, close your eyes, and dream about how lovely you would like to look. You don't even have to pat! You merely laze away while the Masque makes you over.

Meanwhile the Masque is giving you a marvellously efficient face treatment . . . doing half a dozen things at once. After fifteen minutes you remove it. This, too, is no bother at all. You quickly wash it off with lukewarm water. And soothe with Ardena Velva Cream. Then you check on results

Lines? they're smoothed away
Contours? nicely picked up
Pores? refined to invisibility
Puffs about the eyes? completely gone
Sallowness? cleared to transparent delicacy
Texture? cool and smooth and fresh as a rose

After using Velva Cream Masque, you look as if you had spent days at a health farm instead of fifteen minutes on your chaise longue

ARDENA VELVA CREAM MASQUE . . . 21/-
ARDENA SKIN TONIC . . . 3/6 to 75/-
ARDENA VELVA CREAM . . . 4/6 to 22/6

Elizabeth Arden
LONDON 25 OLD BOND STREET W1
NEW YORK PARIS Elizabeth Arden S.A. BERLIN ROME

Figure 2: 1936 Elizabeth Arden Velva Mask⁶

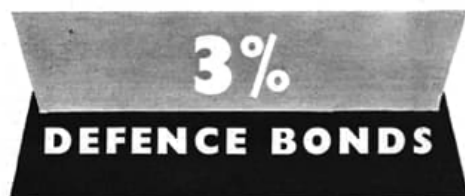
6. <https://witness2fashion.wordpress.com/tag/elizabeth-arden-salon-ads-beauty-products-1920s/>

With an identical picture, this ad keeps the concept of treatment. Despite the great depression, which affected the beauty care business, Elizabeth Arden maintained a resilient communication through advertising. In addition to promising effective results in the battle against “Lines, Contours, Pores, Puffs, Sallowiness, Texture”, and very similar choices of argumentative strategies – posing a problem, and solving, through cause-effect – there is a clear appeal to a feeling of comfort, when comparing the sensation of product use to relaxing on “health farm”. The underlying implicit (insinuated discourse) idea is still that ageing signs must be prevented or, at least, concealed, as well as an association with health treatment. In 1935, this brand launches a campaign: “Farewell to Age”, which establishes the idea that there was a negative social predisposition towards seniority in women.



**SAVE –
AND STAY
BEAUTIFUL!**

No one suggests that in wartime you should throw away your beauty or forgo your feminine privilege of charming and encouraging. To remain fresh, radiant, unruffled in spite of difficulties is good for your own morale and for the morale of others; but to spend on a lavish scale is nowadays unthinkable. Supplies, moreover, are restricted; nor as a patriotic woman would you wish it otherwise. Concentrate on the essentials of beauty. Invest in a few precious preparations and make them last and last. Put the money you save straight into




ELIZABETH ARDEN, 25, OLD BOND STREET, W.1

Figure 3: 1943 Elizabeth Arden save money for defence bonds⁷

7. <https://cosmeticsandskin.com/companies/elizabeth-arden-1945.php>

This advert explicitly establishes a connection with the historic moment of the Second World War. Both the image, displaying a goddess-like woman's statue face, and the text, build up a rather insightful argument, starting from the title "save – and be beautiful", making an association between maintaining a good appearance despite the war and encouraging, by being "charming". It seems a rather farfetched argumentation, but the copy goes on focusing on the idea that it is part of ("patriotic") women's mission in such difficult times to maintain a beautiful appearance – though spending less – and saving for defence bonds. If we consider the more implicit layers of insinuated discourse, we may elicit mainstream social ideologies connected with the role of women – as ornaments – since they are not expected to actively get involved in the war – but to look beautiful and hence 'encouraging' and patriotic. Nonetheless, this advertisement avoids depicting the use of a beauty product, thereby shifting the focus away from conventional, superficial representations of cosmetic application. Even for those women actually involved in the war, there was an open concern for maintaining the standards, as a 1942 lipstick shades for service women ad boasts: "Finally, he was fascinated". This advert shows an illustration of a woman in army uniform and wearing red lipstick in the foreground, and a young male civilian in the background⁸.

this **O**ne bottle
can help
you look
years
younger!



Firmo-Lift Treatment Lotion

**a remarkable lotion
that works against wrinkles,
puffiness and age lines!**

What other preparation can give you the age-defying action of Elizabeth Arden's unique Firmo-Lift Lotion! There is nothing else quite like it for double chin, heavy contour, crepey neck skin, puffiness, surface lines.

How can one lotion do so much!

Firmo-Lift Treatment Lotion contains both vital restoring oils and other special ingredients that help to lift, firm, smooth and tighten with amazing effect!

A younger-looking skin

There are enough treatments in one bottle of Firmo-Lift Treatment Lotion to help make a great difference in the appearance of your skin and contours. Why lose another moment before you try it? 35/-



Elizabeth Arden
25 OLD BOND STREET LONDON W.1

Figure 4: 1951 Firmo Lift Ad⁹

8. <https://cosmeticsandskin.com/companies/elizabeth-arden-1930.php>

9. <https://cosmeticsandskin.com/companies/elizabeth-arden-1945.php>

The promise used in this ad follows the usual concern with ageing: “This one bottle can help you look years younger. Firmo Lift Treatment, a remarkable lotion that works against wrinkles, puffiness and age lines!” This has been delineated as a prevalent appeal, which points to the importance given to the value of youthfulness and the derogative status of ageing. The inclusion of photography is, at this time, more frequent and additional visual prominence is given to the product bottle. The copy carries out the argumentative path, detailing the problems created by ageing, which this lotion will fight, literally. The advert follows a question – answer structure, using proleptic argumentation, in other words, anticipating eventual questions or scepticism. It presents a rationale, based on a proving phase through calculation (transitivity), by showing “rationally” what this lotion has that will ensure a given result:

(7) How can the lotion do so much?

Firm Lift Treatment contains both vital restoring oils and other special ingredients that help to lift, firm, smooth and tighten with amazing effect!

It is especially relevant here to look into the rational argument more thoroughly, namely the insinuated discourse, and also the concealed dimension of implicit discourse. Though apparently, the audience is given a scientific-like explanation of what contributes to the product’s efficacy, there is no mention of which “restoring” oils are used, nor what is meant by “special ingredients”. We may assume the aura of a technical discourse is enough, or that the advertiser does not credit their target audience with much knowledge on these areas.

In another ad of the same decade (1955), for Ardena Moisture Cream and Moisture Oil, a more thorough explanation is provided, including the ingredients (to an extent), once again assuming ageing is a problem that must be dealt with: “Moisture Oil gently firming, deeply penetrating, prepares the skin for Moisture Cream, rich in egg yolks and oils to replace natural moisture”. A strategy equally followed by the 1957 Firmo Lift Lotion: “A younger look...another life”. In this advert, in addition to reference to the Arden “method”, there is a strong reliance on the authority of the argument setter: “Miss Arden will bring you all this through the magic of the famous Firmo-Lift Treatment” (see how this operates through processes of symbolic transfer, in which meaning is produced not rationally but through associative and connotative leaps, as proposed by Williamson (1978)).



**Elizabeth Arden puts
Spring in your skin
with “Night Beauty,”
a superb moisture cream
that is the world’s
newest form of revival.**

Everything about Night Beauty
is new. It was created for the
woman who needs a highly effective
moisturiser but prefers
a lightly textured cream.
With Night Beauty we predict a dawn
of fresher, more enlightened skin.
Two sizes, \$5.00 and \$7.50



Figure 5: Night Beauty Ad (1968)¹⁰

The picture in this advert reflects the changes in women’s appearance during the sixties (and seventies), as the after war prosperity witnessed a growth in beauty products, and a democratisation of the beauty market (Jones, 2010), as well as a more liberal society, where the role of women was being actively questioned. Ads for Elizabeth Arden would reflect this evolution in the images depicted, though the appeals in adverts maintained common concerns:

10. <https://cosmeticsandskin.com/companies/elizabeth-arden-1945.php>

There were, however few radical changes to the long-established borders of beauty. The industry's attention was heavily focused on women between the late teens and the mid-thirties, whom it promised to make more attractive, and, as they aged, to keep them looking younger. (Jones, 2010, p. 189)

The title in the ad shows precisely that: "Elizabeth Arden puts spring in your skin with 'Night Beauty,' a superb moisture cream that is the world's newest form of revival". The focus on novelty is evident in the lexical choices, and the allusion to age is less explicit, but present through insinuated discourse – "revival" – and "woman who need highly effective moisturiser", probably due to ageing effects. The symbolic references to "spring", revival and the presence of a seed in the image reinforce the thematic association with ageing, suggesting renewal, regeneration and the cyclical nature of life as a counterpoint to decline. A significant note is the introduction of products – and advertising – for men (1962 Arden for Men)¹¹. It is a decade actually marked by more inclusive approaches, which include allusion to diversity in skin colour: 1964 Elizabeth Arden Sun Bloc Lotion, Sun Pruf, Sun Control, and Sun Tan Oil, which claims "Because all skin types are different, Elizabeth Arden doesn't expect one sun tan preparation to be right for them all".

21 Today...30 Tomorrow

RARE HERBAL WATERS
plus delicate oils
in Arden's Skin Tonic
give a fresh,
vitalising treatment
to prepare your skin
for the day ahead.

THE SPECIAL CLEANSER
incorporated in
Arden's Cleansing Cream
actually penetrates
into every little pore.
The secret is a unique
super thin consistency.

RICH CREAM
in Velva Moisture Film
allows you to smooth
in a healthy, fresh
gloss plus the extra
moisture your skin so
desperately needs now
to neutralise the
sun's ageing effect.

EXTRACT OF SEA MOSS
in Velva Cream Masque
peeps up tired skin,
gives your complexion
an angelic gloss
and glow.
Use after cleansing.
Leave on for
15 to 25 minutes.

MOISTURE
built into Night Beauty
helps bathe the
complexion. Makes
skin resilient, natural.
Pat on after cleansing
at night.

Hold time at bay. Elizabeth Arden has a
'beauty survival plan' already programmed
for your type of skin.
If you have one of those absolutely
dreamy smooth complexions, we'll help
keep it that way. If you haven't, we'll
show you a new way to get it.
Ask any Elizabeth Arden con-
sultant for your plan of attack
on the passing years.
Call for your essential skin
survival kit at any
Elizabeth Arden counter.

Elizabeth Arden
SYDNEY, LONDON, NEW YORK, PARIS

Figure 6: 1970 "beauty survival plan"¹²

11. <https://cosmeticsandskin.com/companies/elizabeth-arden-1945.php>
12. <https://ro.pinterest.com/pin/514043744947230428/>

The major appeal of this 1970s ad is exposed right from the start, in the title: “21 Today ... 30 Tomorrow”, aided by a picture displaying various female participants within that age range. As expected, the argumentation of this advert begins by overtly posing the problem and, then, offering the solution, mostly by connections of cause-effect and providing ways of “rationally” solving this problem, by means of the treatment proposed, naturally. The line of reasoning does not differ so much from previous approaches: a proposed attack to the consequences of the passing time. Actually, we have seen these lexical choices connected with war jargon above, and in this copy the argumentation reveals an assumption of ageing as a problem to prevent and fight:

(8) Hold time at bay. Elizabeth Arden has a ‘beauty survival plan’ already programmed for your type of skin. (...) Ask Elizabeth Arden consultant for your plan of attack on passing years. Call for your essential skin survival kit at any Elizabeth Arden counter”

Next to each product, argumentation is reinforced by explanations on the product function, ingredients, with a continued reference to nature – both as an agent of aggression (provoking ageing) and as a solution (natural ingredients) – and to health and treatment. The concern with the harmful effects of sun and nature, as well as prevailing concerns of this time with the consequences of pollution and other agents, is patent in a 1974 ad for this brand’s Directionale. In this argument, the brand states clearly a relationship between aggressions coming from an unhealthy environment and the response of science to that:

(9) Introducing completely new allergy-tested skincare and makeup system specifically created to cope with the syndrome of the seventies, air pollution, dirt infiltration, dieting, pills – all the environmental factors of our time that affect the beauty of your skin. (...) Directionale is a scientifically-gearred cosmetic, delicately scented with a dermatologically-tested fragrance.

There is an emphasis on the problems caused and on endowing the claims with credibility – through science – which points (explicitly and implicitly) to the overriding status of scientific discourse, as a result of technological advances that were taking place. And yet the major ‘problem’ to overcome is persistently connected with the passing years, an argument which, though concealed, is implied in the line of argument.



**Advanced
Energizing Extract**

The breakthrough new emulsion that can make all others obsolete.

From this moment on, the traditional concept of skin care is obsolete. Today's measure of beautiful skin is based on skin texture, not just skin type.

New Advanced Energizing Extract:

- Energizes skin's regenerative activity.
- Penetrates vital moisture-rich extracts
- Reduces the ageing effect of the sun through a screening ingredient.

Result?
Dramatically improved skin texture no matter what your skin type.

Suddenly, your skin is the best it can possibly be.

Elizabeth Arden
DERMATOLOGIST, CLINICALLY, ALLERGY TESTED

Figure 7: 1980s Advanced Energizing Extract¹³

With a very conventional picture of a model, this 1980s ad claims focus on the novelty introduced, which does not only cover various skin types, but also different skin textures. The reasoning and argumentation evolve around the lexical field of science, thus, prove comes under the guise of cause-effect deductive arguments, aided by a rationale of analogy – “a breakthrough new emulsion that can make all others obsolete”. We are led through deduction (implicit discourse) to believe that all other products have been doing it wrongly, then. However, if it looks like the worry has changed and is now about skin type, the next arguments bring back the habitual appeals “regenerative activity” and “reduces the ageing effects of the sun”. The audience is drawn again to the lexical field of (pseudo) science: “breakthrough”, “vital moisture-rich extracts”, “a screening ingredient”. These terms are vague, but imbued with an aura of credibility, motivated by an overall assumption that seems to be enough – that science is a credible validating system.

13. <https://www.bridgemanimages.com/en/noartistknown/elizabeth-arden-magazine-advert-uk-1980s/nomedium/asset/3453206>



Figure 8: 1990s ad for Immunage collection¹⁴

As the product name indicates, the 1990s maintain a course of argumentation strongly based on the lexical field of science/health. Though the picture signals advancement in the quality of design, it is still rather conventional – with a rather luxurious scenery and props, and an attractive young-looking model – in addition to a conventional title and copy, and argumentation, too: “UV defence system is 15 times more protective in your fight against wrinkles”. The copy adds the long-standing problem: “premature aging due to photoaging”. Actually the repetition of “age” becomes a prevailing feature of the argumentation in this ad, which promises to protect, but openly states: “Looks younger, prettier, day after day”. The audience is thus invited to make the connection between young and pretty, as if youthfulness is a *sine qua non* condition (deduction).

14. <https://pt.pinterest.com/pin/154177987229592965/>



Figure 9: 2006 ad for Ceramide Skincare¹⁵

When this ad is launched, there is an unquestioned domain of technologies – from communication to engineering and health, scientific discourse is widely accepted in all spheres, including academia. This advert reflects precisely that impact, from the product name, which refers to “Ceramide” (waxy lipid molecules) to lexical choices from the field of science and technology: “Advanced anti-aging technology”, “Capsules”, “potency of next generation science”, “future of anti-aging technology”. Katherine Zeta Jones, a Hollywood actress, endorses this product, and is depicted with a futuristic aura, projecting AI creations. The argumentation pathways resort to identical appeals, though, and what is possible to elicit from the surface message, through deduction, is that all terms related to science and technology are actually very vague, and we might question whether people are actually aware of what Ceramide is or can do for one’s skin. This somehow ties back to much earlier ads (1951 ad, above, for example), in which proving comes under the guise of (pseudo) scientific discourse, in the end, quite opaque for the layperson (Arroyo, 2013).

15. <https://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-2000s-uk-elizabeth-arden-magazine-advert-85349607.html>

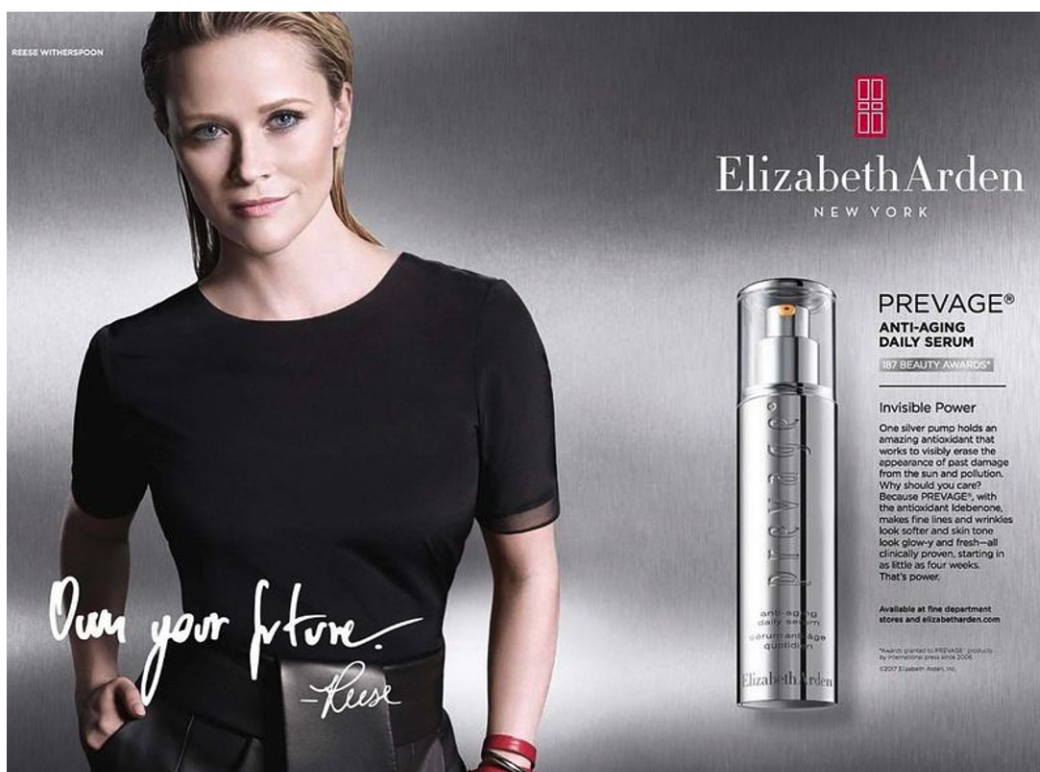


Figure 10: 2017 ad for PreVage¹⁶

Alluding to “prevent age”, we may affirm that the brand has maintained its major appeals. Featuring Reese Witherspoon, also a Hollywood actress, the argumentation revolves around the guarantee scientific research may provide to the longstanding fight of the brand against (inevitable) ageing. It is also a trend in the brand’s strategy to transfer the credibility of the speaker (ethos), formerly assumed by Elizabeth Arden, to the endorsement by celebrities. In the proving phase – assuming the problem posed is ageing again – this “anti-aging” product, with “187 beauty awards” promises to “visibly erase the appearance of past damage from sun and pollution”. These are ancient ‘enemies’, but this concern actually mirrors the current society’s environmental problems. Then, by means of deduction, it provides a question, “Why should you care?”, to which the brand answers: “Because Pevage, with antioxidant idebenone makes fine lines and wrinkles look softer (...) all clinically proven (...)”. Again, the answer implies – through deduction – that wrinkles and lines are to be avoided, and that regardless of our knowledge of the ingredients, they certainly point to the acknowledged social credibility of science. Actually idebenone is quite a controversial drug, as some studies point out (Gueven, 2021). Another advert for Ceramide Capsules¹⁷ (Youth Resttoring Cerum), in the same year, and featuring the same actress, makes identical promises, through identical arguments and goes as far as claiming the capsules “help restore lost ceramides, so skin looks firm and radiant, and *up to 10 years younger*” [italics added]. The apparently scientific grounding of the whole argumentation seems to be sufficient to validate the promise and convince the audience.

16. <https://models.com/work/elizabeth-arden-elizabeth-arden/727606><https://models.com/work/elizabeth-arden-elizabeth-arden/727606>

17. <https://models.com/work/elizabeth-arden-elizabeth-arden/727605>

Concluding Remarks

The overview of the beauty products advertising approach has revealed and signalled changes and evolution, but also re-occurrences, which indicate that social changes are not linear, nor superficial.

Argumentation models have demonstrated that advertising messages for these products depend a lot on establishing rather conventional pathways – posing the problem, providing a solution and proving (Charadeau, 2008). In the latter phase, which is fundamental to establish credibility, we have seen that strategies have consistently used deduction and, sometimes, calculation, as they provide a more credible and easy-to-follow reasoning. To do so arguments resort to longstanding *topoi*, such as youth, health, perfection and attractiveness, which they combine with other, more contemporary, claims. Such *topoi* have been consistently used throughout the ages, regardless of mainstream variations in stereotypes of beauty, and notwithstanding developments in the industry and in societies.

Despite more recent approaches that reclaim inclusiveness (age, race, gender), science seems to maintain its authority as an unrivalled reference system; ageing is still the major battle, and youthfulness (even if just apparent) remains the greatest aspiration in these ads. Argumentative reasoning in beauty products is still built to guide consumers' conceptions of key issues such as health and well-being, in a manner that it suits advertising claims, in a rather circular manner: healthy means young (or young-looking), natural means good-looking, and good-looking means youthful.

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