

PHD THESIS SUMMARY

Author: **Patrycja Bilińska**

Supervisor: **prof. UMCS, dr hab. Marta Wójcicka**

Topic: **Cultural Persuasion in Parenting Blogs**

The dissertation deals with three important present day phenomena, including blogging, persuasion and family. The primary objective of the work is to describe selected persuasive activities (i.e. strategies, methods and techniques) used by parenting bloggers. Importantly, the dissertation attempts at answering such questions as: *Who are those who persuade? In what way, and what do they convince of?* and finally *What is their intended effect?*

Persuasion was perceived as a communicative game with the recipient - requiring the transparency of the sender's intentions and respect for the recipient's right to freedom. The fundamental term is "cultural persuasion", referring to verbal and non-verbal actions, which in turn point to the resources and texts of culture in order to influence the recipient. The purpose of references is to arouse interest, change beliefs, attitudes, and ultimately induce a certain behavior. Activities within the scope of cultural persuasion intentionally refer to specific functional styles of the Polish language, specific genres of speech evoking specific feelings, associations in the recipient, as well as cultural texts such as films, music, or literary texts. This category of persuasion involves allusions to political and social events, along with Internet phenomena. Using cultural persuasion, one may allude to figures and people of cultural significance as well as stereotypes, myths, customs, social "obligations", *savoir-vivre* in a given culture or subculture.

The content of 182 parenting blogs published from 2014 till the end of 2021 was analyzed and interpreted. The methodology of multimodality was applied in the present study. Importantly, this perspective has not been used for the analysis of parenting blogs so far. The Author believes that contemporary blogs cannot only be perceived as a collection of written texts. Bloggers' narrative, including linguistic means, is an element of a multimodal structure. The narration coexists with static visual forms including, among many, photos, graphics, memes, and video or audio forms. Following the assumptions of media linguistics, the content of blogs was treated as ideological products, representing a specific vision of reality and certain phenomena, in particular, concerning the family. The Author assumed that bloggers describing phenomena related to the family create media images of the world, and hence, they construct visions of the reality.

Taking into account the transformation that blogs have undergone (from e-diaries to image creation tools), the Author proposed a definition that captures the changes and rejects outdated distinguishing features. Here, blogs are treated as a way of communication, characterized by shortening the distance between the sender and the recipient, taking into account the continuous feedback (in the form of posts, reactions to comments and messages). Blogging is a way of social behavior that covers the overall activities of bloggers. These include not only the publishing posts, but also other activities aimed at maintaining the created reality via social media entries, writing back to their readers or participating in actions and campaigns as a kind of celebrity. The Author perceives blogs as multi-code message in which the global meaning results from the perception of many modalities, most often linguistic and visual modalities. Above mentioned assumptions result from applied specific point of view focused on an encoded message. A blog is a macro sign, a multimodal text, a hybrid creation that

combines graphics, images, films and audio. It is essential to note that a blog is never completed, and it is constantly being created. Hence, it is therefore not only a structure but also a process.

In the present study, three types of families were distinguished: *traditional family* (an unambiguously rigid division of household duties into female and male: a man provides for the family, the wife takes care of the house and children; the roles are clearly defined: they are passed on from one generation to another in the form of ready-made patterns of behavior), *modern family* (higher status of a woman as a result of their permanent employment) and *postmodern family* (partnership, democracy, high position of the child). The above presented types of families not only constitute models of family life, but also serve as role models and ways of fulfilling their responsibilities.

Drawing on the analysis of blogs written by women, three characteristic types of mothers were selected: *intensive motherhood* (representative of *hypermotherhood*), *bad mother* (a woman involved not only in family life, but also personal and professional, narrative style in the current of motherhood without sugarcoating) and *an activist mother* (mother of a disabled child). The *engaged dad* (bloggers prefer to call themselves "dad" rather than "father") is a representative of a postmodern family where the division of responsibilities does not result from social expectations, rather from the spouses' agreement. This type of father cares about the quality of a partner relationship with his wife and children, understands their individual needs, is sensitive and full of empathy. As it was confirmed by the presented analysis, parenting blogs are not written by traditional fathers.

Selected persuasive actions were discussed in the dissertation. One of the fundamental strategy is creating the image of the sender as an educational authority. This kind of approach is frequently implemented by arousing sympathy, referring to the sources of competence, causing fear, using various forms of narration and showing the attractiveness of one's own family life. Additionally, attributes, among many toys, games and accessories related to childcare, books play a large role in building the image of a blogger specializing in childcare. By doing this, bloggers strive to portray themselves as atypical, modern, leadership, motivating, competent, and trustworthy.

Building relationships with readers is correlated with achieve marketing goals. A blogger takes several roles in relation to his *followers*: leader, trendsetter, motivational speaker, life advisor, expert, close friend.

As indicated, the way to create a professional image is to present yourself as a parent. Being a parent is perceived as a way to broaden competences, and as a result better perform one's job. The role of the parent and the professional role clearly overlap and complement each other. Such a phenomenon is well illustrated in specialized parenting blogs. Introducing personal issues into professional content results from the premises: *due to the fact that I am a parent, I am a better specialist, owing to the fact that I am a specialist, I am a better parent.*

The style of expression was considered as the basic technique of persuasion, which in turn results from the chosen persuasive strategy. It should be noted that the strategy is associated with creating the image of a "cool", "laid-back" man, one of us (colloquial style), professional (journalistic style, elements of scientific style) or emotional/sensitive (artistic style). Notably, the colloquial style appears to be commonplace in contemporary parenting blogs, whereas the journalistic (as a variation of the colloquial) or artistic style is less often observed. It can be expected that the popular scientific style in blogs will soon develop, as already indicated by individual entries modeled on scientific language. When comparisons are made between blog styles from the early and modern periods, some minor discrepancies can be observed. The earliest blogs, more often than modern ones, contained texts written in an artistic style rather

than journalistic. Nowadays, the trend for modelling on journalistic-like articles is becoming increasingly popular. Interestingly, it is the colloquial style that was used in the past and is still present. As the Internet communication developed, it was considered justified to perceive the language of the Internet as a new style of functional Polish, and thus to consider the language of bloggers in the context of its values and representatives.

Multimodality was considered as a tool of persuasion. Based on that premise, both the use of multiple modes and the relationship between modes are perceived by the Author as a way in which bloggers try to achieve their goals. Multicoding is used to increase attractiveness and maximize the chances of gaining and maintaining the attention of the recipients. A reader who is familiar with not only the linguistic layer, but also the visual or audiovisual one, will focus longer on the content presented by the blogger. Notably, multimodality provides a new quality of communication and increases the possibilities of persuasion.

As a part of cultural persuasion, the strategy of creating a modern lifestyle was described (*lajfstajl*). According to the Author, the Polish word *lajfstajl* cannot be defined by the neutral term 'lifestyle'. The Anglicism took on a new meaning and was no longer used as a neutral way of determining someone's way of life. Currently, it is associated with a specific ideology that influences the way *lajfstajlers* function. *Lifestylers* lead a consumptive style of life. Bloggers take the phenomenon seriously, and even link it with philosophy, owing to which they gain the image of a modern, fashionable person living in luxury. Once the concept *lifestyle* is used by bloggers, it is aimed at attracting the attention of readers - a precisely defined target group of parents: young, success-oriented, who care about prestige and respect. Yet, such words as tradition, poverty and introversion have become the opposites to the popular term. Meanwhile, *Lajfstajl* is to be associated with luxury, spending money, a big city, youth and a corporation. Based on the analysis of blogs, one can define a *lifestyle* as a set of individually selected rules and beliefs influencing consumers' choices.

The concept of embodiment was treated as a method of persuasion consisting in presenting oneself in such a way as to emphasize its physicality, including sexuality. The appearance of the body is to determine the value of a given individual. Embodiment may also refer to people who has so far been perceived more through the prism of cognitive values and features relating more to the spirit than the body - as in the case of mothers (cf. the asexuality of the Polish Mother). Embodiment is a phenomenon that fits in with the nature of contemporary media and is related to the striptease culture, referring to nudity, sex and exhibitionism. This basic principle of the functioning of a certain group is neatly summed up by Aleksandra Powierska, who states that: "A modern woman may not be a perfect mother, she may give up marriage and cohabit, nonetheless she cannot resign from taking care of her beauty – because this is her duty" [Powierska 2013: 70, translation PB].

A common way of cultural persuasion on blogs is appealing to stereotypes, mainly of mother, father and motherhood. This procedure is conducive to creating a dichotomy between good and bad behaviors, attitudes, but also parents. The stereotype becomes a point of reference, an anti-example, in opposition to which the blogger's image as a parent and a new vision of parenthood are built. By evoking a negatively assessed image, bloggers model themselves on exceptional, better and real parents. In consequence, they become authority figures among other parents. By rejecting traditional patterns, they determine what should be the norm - bloggers impose new conditions on their *followers*. Additionally, chaos and contradictory expectations of what a good parent should be favor following tips and persuasions of bloggers.

The basis for simplified, schematic thinking of bloggers about the family, its members, motherhood or a woman can be found, among others, in the myth of the Polish

Mother. The term "Polish Mother" does not have a political or religious context attached to it in the analyzed blogs. However, it carries some social associations and, most importantly, is perceived pejoratively. Of special importance is her selfless dedication for the sake of others at the expense of her own happiness. According to the Author, it seems justifiable to differentiate between the figure of the Polish Mother in the traditional sense and her contemporary image. Therefore, the distinction in spelling was proposed. The figure of a woman devoted to her family and resigning from her own aspirations imagined by bloggers is referred to as a *Polish mother*, the romantic myth of the Polish Mother, which, although it is the basis of modern stereotypes, is, however, slightly different from them. *A Polish mother* is a type of a woman revealed in bloggers' narratives, whose image is based on the myth of the Polish Mother.

It should be noted that the concept of a self-sacrificing woman (*a Polish mother*) has a historical and cultural underpinnings. They are based on current, postmodern aspirations to realize values such as freedom, self-fulfillment or individual happiness. The myth of the Polish Mother as well as the stereotype of the *Polish mother* are used by bloggers to build an image based on negation and to create a distinction between valuable and less valuable mothers. Such references are also used to promote a consumptive way of life (*lifestyle*) as well as to contradict the values and the sense of traditional family models. A Polish Mother/*Polish mother* is frequently linked in contemporary blogs with a traditional mother: neglected, overworked, unhappy, without ambition and at the same time with a typical mother.

Although bloggers seek to discredit unhappy *Polish mothers* as those who agree to be forced to choose their path in life, simultaneously they approve of housewives, i.e. women who have consciously chosen this lifestyle. All in all, a blogger who is a housewife becomes an *influencer* in terms of home management.

Referring to well-known verbal texts (intertextuality) and images (intericonism) builds a conviction in the recipients of the community of the world, and at the same time arouses their sympathy for a blogger who shows interest in the same cultural products. Such a form of persuasion in a playful form is a procedure aimed at creating the blogger's image as a person with a sense of humor and the ability to look objectively at life.

In today's world it can be clearly noticed that readers are open to the content presented by the bloggers, which in turn proves the effectiveness of bloggers' persuasive influence. For example, readers comply with the opinions presented on blogs or buy promoted products. Importantly, the verbal admiration towards bloggers reveals the effectiveness of those strategies that help to create the bloggers' image and strengthen their position in the lifestyle and influencer/celebrity world. The number of followers on their social networking profiles, and inviting bloggers to offline activities and TV programs seems to be an undeniable indicator of bloggers' influence over their readers.

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Petycja Bilimska