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Epistemically Dysfunctional Shortcuts in Advertising

Abstract: Epistemic injustice is a topic that has seldom been approached in the context of advertising representations. Yet, advertising has particular features that make it especially apt in creating, consolidating, or perpetuating epistemic injustice, in many of its forms: by providing elements that create a credibility deficit for a social category, by misrepresenting the point of view of a social group, by engaging in hermeneutical marginalization of the values that the members of the group adhere to. Among these features, a prominent one is advertising’s propensity for shortcuts, simplified cognitive routes that proceed from seemingly obvious *background knowledge* and lead to seemingly logical conclusions that often end up misinforming people about an important domain of social life. The present work proceeds from a description of the reasons why advertisers are tempted follow shortcuts in their creative work, followed by an outline of the epistemic dimension of advertising and by an explanation of basic notions of epistemic injustice. In the end, two examples are provided to show the rhetorical action of advertising shortcuts and to analyze their effect on the representations that different social groups cultivate about each other.

Keywords: representational practices in advertising, credibility deficit, hermeneutical marginalisation, epistemic injustice