

# Graphic Emotion in Online Children-Related Charity Communication in Poland: A Critical Rhetorical and Health Communication Analysis

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**Abstract:** This study explores dominant applications of graphic affordances in a sample of children-related charity appeals collected from the official websites of nine prominent Polish foundations in late 2016. It provides a systematic description of salient typographic and iconographic resources and an assessment of their rhetorical potential to solicit donations. The analysis focuses on three dominant discursive strategies used by charity communicators, namely how graphic affordances project utility (*logos*), confidence (*ethos*) and engagement (*pathos*). The article offers a critique of strategic emotional stimulation through aestheticized imagery and infantilizing graphics that replace arguments with connotators of ‘normal’ childhood. Such rhetorical practices generate a strong but incidental incentive to donate to ‘deserving victims’ motivated by moral superiority or ‘warm-glow’ altruism, but may not sustain the level of social capital indispensable to solidarity in charitable giving.

**Keywords:** charity communication; webpage design; graphics; visual rhetoric; children

## 1. Introduction

Media technologies keep prospective donors connected to (the possibility of) charitable giving, which renders charity communication an increasingly familiar, even mundane, form of persuasive discourse. In turn, charity communicators must strive to overcome indifference and desensitization by devising new ways to ‘mobilize sensibilities of care’: be they emotional, visual, entertaining, celebrity-oriented, or consumerist

(Chouliaraki & Orgad, 2011: 343). With the online medium rendering even complex visual designs more affordable, the persuasive potential of graphic affordances in charity communication has undoubtedly increased, particularly regarding typography (e.g., letterforms or pictograms and their color and spacing) and iconography (e.g., photos, signage or diagrams and their color and layout).

This study is based on the assumption that some combinations of graphic affordances ought to be treated as discursive strategies whose rhetorical potential can be assessed through data-driven socio-semiotic analysis. The study examines a sample of children-related charity appeals released by **nine prominent** Polish charity organizations on their official websites in late 2016. The foundations were selected due to their income and online visibility (GUS, 2015). The study showcases a few identifiable discursive strategies that emerge from an analysis of 221 individual ‘graphic ensembles’ (Kress, 2003), which are mostly combinations of writing and imagery, separated from the rest of the website design. Graphic ensembles are treated as basic units of analysis when, according to coders, they converge in conveying one identifiable message and fulfil one dominant communicative function (Bateman, 2008), e.g., index the organization through a logo, give an instruction to donate, describe a current campaign, illustrate the effects of a completed action, or provide an endorsement. These ensembles tend to be designed graphically to maximize the persuasive appeal in the sense of attracting new patrons, soliciting targeted donations or keeping regular donors loyal to the organization (Benedek & Nyíri, 2015), but deserve to be **approached critically** as any ideology-driven discourse, without detracting from their social and moral worth (Chouliaraki, 2013; Orgad & Seu, 2014a).

Methodologically, this study draws on social semiotics (in terms of exploring the social meaning of writing, iconography and design) (Halliday, 1978; Kress & van

Leeuwen, 1996; Machin, 2016), and rhetoric (in terms of assessing the persuasive potential of certain letterforms and icons). It assumes that rhetorically effective charity appeals (e.g., those emanating from the most prominent foundations) depend not only on the aptness of the verbal resources traditionally used for persuasion, but also on the suitability and expressiveness of graphic affordances. This follows from the classical Aristotelian notion of rhetoric as the art and craft of using ‘all available means’ of expression to persuade a diverse collective audience by applying the combined modes of *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos* (Aristotle, 1975). Traditionally, charity communication has tended to strategically combine these modes by (i) informing about the details of the plight to be relieved and instructing how to donate (*logos*), (ii) justifying the charitable cause/organization with **credible data** and claims to authority (*ethos*), and (iii) emotionalizing the appeals through culturally potent connotations (*pathos*) (Smith, 1996). Even though this study is limited in its scope to Polish data, it is a reflection of wider semiotic and rhetorical trends in visual persuasion, as resorted to by NGOs in the era of increased mediatization and marketization of charity in many (young) capitalist democracies (Krause, 2014).

To illustrate the charity appeals focused on here, let us examine a graphic ensemble found on the Polish-language website of the international organization SOS Children’s Villages (Fig. 1). **The heading informs us** that ‘Johnny is still waiting for his parents’. **We are** also implored to: ‘Make a home for such abandoned children as Johnny’ and to do so **we** might follow the button-hyperlinked instruction to ‘Become a foster parent with SOS’.

[Fig.1 here]



Fig. 1: ‘Johnny is still waiting for parents’ (7). Source: <https://wioskisos.org/>

In this appeal, one can ‘look into the eyes’ of a sad or scared boy, apparently stranded in an unidentifiable urban setting after dark. The ambiguity of the initial statement is a strategic device to draw one’s attention: Johnny is not waiting for his parents to be picked up after some sports activities outdoors (which would index normal childhood), but for someone to decide to take care of him as his foster parent. The strategic graphic resources include the choice of dim, greyish colors that indicate the late hour, but also signify the dark side of the orphan’s life, a blurred setting that might give the impression of being lost, and the ‘demand’ gaze (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996) of the boy in the photo, which was taken at such a close range that one can see his pale skin and the glassy reflections in his eyes. The photo is cropped to imply that Johnny is alone, which might further contribute to viewers’ emotional discomfort and urge to act on the cultural imperative to intervene.

The ‘evidential’ affordances of photography in this graphic ensemble complement the narrative sentence in the caption (Johnny is waiting for his parents), which is typographically made prominent with bolded white Arial font. The line arrangement makes use of size gradation that ‘boils down’ to a possible solution – you can become a foster parent with SOS. This green button is a clickable hyperlink to more information on how to apply, or, if you are not qualified, how to support the cause with

a donation. This graphic ensemble draws mainly on rhetorical *pathos* (less so on *ethos*, but the name of the well-known and established organization – SOS – enhances credibility and inspires confidence). However, this ensemble also interdiscursively accommodates the features of mediated (social) marketing campaigns that use ‘poster children’ to induce compassion and commitment (literally ‘SOS’ is a call to save lives, after all). In charity communication, children are traditionally taken as paragons of vulnerability, as ‘ideal victims’ whose suffering should be reduced at all costs (Moeller, 1999).

One objective of this study involves interrogating the ideological underpinnings of discursive strategies in children-related charity causes. It is assumed that such causes are being prioritized because they are easier to ‘boost’ rhetorically with the application of graphic affordances related to socio-semiotic resources that represent the main correlates of ‘normal’ childhood, namely innocence, play, powerlessness and vulnerability (Jenks, 1996). Mediated images of needy children in humanitarian communication induce complex emotions and dispositions, ranging from empathy and compassion to anxiety and guilt, so these graphic resources can become powerful mobilizers for charitable giving (Meyer, 2007). However, with the growing desensitization of the public and the recognition of manipulative communicative tactics involving children (in politics or marketing), there is a risk of overemphasizing child vulnerability and powerlessness and, in turn, disempowering children as subjects (Moeller, 1999) or making donors feel manipulated into charitable giving (van Dijk, 2006; Seu, 2015). Hence, a rhetorical assessment of children-related graphic ensembles should involve a critique of the implications of using disparate (yet patterned and pervasive) **discursive** constructions and/or visualizations of children’s attributes, which are aimed at inducing certain emotional dispositions and reproduce certain ideologies.

The role of emotional stimulation for charitable giving has recently been problematized. According to experimental literature on charitable solicitations, positively framed appeals seem to be more effective than negatively represented causes. A number of studies have pointed out that donating is associated with positive affect, and gives pleasure, for example, through the sense of utility, prestige and appreciation derived from acting altruistically for the benefit or satisfaction of others, which Andreoni (1990) called 'warm-glow giving'. This suggests that donating choices induced through positive imagery give rise to a general state of positive affect that motivates people to maintain that state (Smith & Berger, 1996). From a different perspective, sociologists (e.g., Sayer, 2005) trace charitable altruism to individuals' responsibility and religious beliefs, and highlight its practical and class-based character with the underlying distinctions into 'deserving' and 'undeserving' recipients of philanthropy. Sociologists also dismiss the understanding of donors acting on universal values or the need to tackle social injustice (Sanghera, 2016), and demonstrate that one's 'lay morality' underpins emotional dispositions that motivate donating and volunteering towards the alleviation of specific individuals' suffering. Finally, media studies literature on the witnessing of suffering stresses the 'emotional capital' that can be garnered from representing charitable causes through negative imagery of pain, loss, drama and disaster. Yet, the recent studies of reception indicate that affect-laden representations, except for certain news media contexts (Kyriakidou, 2015), are largely perceived as manipulative and alienating when engaged in by charitable institutions intent on increasing solicitations: 'buzzing flies, begging eyes and bloated bellies' are recognized as emotional heartstrings that distort the image of humanitarianism (Nathanson, 2013), and are now also largely eschewed by practitioners (Orgad & Seu, 2014a).

In the following parts of the article, first, a methodology to operationalize categories for a systematic rhetorical analysis of graphic ensembles is presented. Second, the analytic sections illustrate the identified patterns of graphic affordances and discuss the discursive strategies arising from the applications of rhetorical modes, particularly *pathos*. Simultaneously, the analysis adopts a critical perspective to see how, while strategically presenting their cause, charity communicators resort to practices that stimulate emotions and naturalize some representations of children **that** may ultimately be detrimental to building solidarity and social capital.

## **2. Design of promotional websites**

As a specific ‘medium’ (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001), online communication constitutes a constantly evolving set of signifying practices that make use of various affordances to achieve communicative goals. Graphic resources in many promotional websites, including the ones that solicit charitable donations, are no longer mere ‘illustrations’ but often provide the very ‘anchorage’ for persuasion (Barthes, 1977), and can even be used rhetorically without calling viewers’ attention to themselves (Bolter, 1991). At the same time a strategic exploitation of graphic affordances (e.g., cropping, distance and angle of viewing in press photography) has been demonstrated to enact ideological or emotional manipulation (Hart, 2016). Promotional websites, when compared to offline print-page appeals, are distinguished by their multimodal, dynamic, hypertextual and interactive character achieved through a range of functionalities that allow multiple navigational routes (Tagg, 2015; Unsworth, 2001). Nevertheless, charities should strive for consistent graphic and color coding that would help project a preferred ‘reading path’ in a ‘complex multimodal ensemble’ (Kress, 2003) **to** convince **the prospective** donor to explore the page and allow themselves to be mobilized to act

on its appeals. Complex graphic ensembles can be designed to draw attention to some parts of the message at the expense of others. Crystal (2006, p. 209) advises that ‘interactive areas need to be clear and practicable; words, pictures and icons need to be harmonized. There are substantial communicative demands, and the increased use of color is the main means of enabling them to be met’ (cf. Royce, 1998, on a related concept of multimodal synergy). Hence, the choices not only of photographs but also of background colors and styles of typeface are treated as important affordances to ensure rhetorical efficacy.

According to previous studies of websites, color, size or style dimensions of type are routinely diversified, for example to mark hyperlinks or functional text, or to establish a particular hierarchy of information (Puhalla, 2008). Font affordances and spatial arrangement are varied to distinguish **important** information from contextualizing information and to structure the body of the message through framing (Kress, 2003). Promotional texts strategically apply ‘standard’ typography, which renders itself transparent to index the authority of the communicator. This is because by cultural convention, some typefaces, font styles and colors, or lineation patterns that are predominantly used in institutional or print media texts tend to be naturalized and no longer draw attention to themselves (Machin, 2007, p. 86-92). At other times, typography projects a certain attitude or value through connotations. Persuasion-oriented graphic designs deploy ‘display’ typography (Stoeckl, 2005), or rhetorical ‘decorum’, and foreground embellished letterforms, pictograms or icons in order to draw attention, carry an emotional load, entertain, or provide aesthetic experience needed to induce engagement. Given the strong evidential function of photos and diagrams, as well as their potential to generate emotional and cognitive effects, charity images require analyzing **together with the overlapping typographic resources** (Machin,

2007, p. 39-43).

A review of literature on graphic affordances in online ensembles yields a picture of a complex field of research where some scholars are primarily interested in modelling graphic resources onto a ‘grammatical’ system (e.g., Stoeckl, 2005), whereas others are intent on aligning multimodal analyses with wider socio-semiotic considerations, including the critical interrogation of particular graphic affordances (Machin, 2016). The latter perspective is adopted here in relation to typography and iconography as used in charity appeals to demonstrate how spatial and organizational aspects of writing and the choice of icons and colour contribute to persuasive, ideological and cultural reproduction **in the context of the discursive construction of charity** (Massaris, 1996, p. v).

### ***Graphic affordances of typography and iconography***

Typography, apart from encoding linguistic messages, conveys subtle connotative meanings or even assumes ‘pictorial qualities’ with specific letterforms, pictograms, colors and arrangements used to realize various discursive strategies. For Stoeckl (2005, p. 210), typographic affordances include a repertoire of options at the micro-level (e.g., type size, style and color), meso-level (e.g., amount of print, letterform arrangement, introduction of pictorial elements), macro-level (text arrangement, emphasis, ornamentation, assemblage of text and image), and para-level, i.e. material aspect of presentation (e.g., print/handwriting, drawing/painting, photography).

If typography alone has a broad inventory of potential meanings, then some graphic ‘constellations’ or ensembles involving type can be deployed strategically to achieve specific rhetorical effects. Some of these effects may be rooted in embodied perception and spatial orientation, which transpires in some metaphorical associations (Forceville, 1996). For example, if thicker lines give an impression of stability and

endurance, then curvatures tend to be associated with gentleness or, in some cultures, with femininity; if black regular typeface represents officialdom, then colorful, handwritten and irregular letterforms may indicate childishness (Machin, 2007, p. 93-103). According to van Leeuwen (2005b), semiotic analysis involving typography should include such aspects of letterform as weight, expansion, curvature, connectivity, orientation, regularity and flourishes, as these tend to induce connotations that converge with and complement verbal messages. Here, these variables are attended to only in the case of increased salience that might imply a rhetorical application.

The meaning inventories of images of objects and social actors largely depend on signifying practices, values and ideas shared in a culture (Barthes, 1977). What or who is represented, from what angle, in what setting, at what distance, with what lighting or colors will have an effect on how the viewers perceive and evaluate the representation. According to Machin (2007, p. 26), professional communicators rely on ‘established connotators, carriers of connotations, which they feel confident their target audiences will understand (whether consciously or not).’ Rhetorically significant graphic affordances in images that are examined here include (i) participants (individuals or collectives that stand for a social class, a profession, an age/gender/ethnic group with certain stereotypical characteristics and values); (ii) participants’ bodily features and poses, facial expressions, gestures, gazes, which index states, attitudes, feelings and dispositions; (iii) objects that represent various cultural practices, social attributes and potent cultural symbols; (iv) settings that are suggestive of either **particular documented locations or universalized circumstances**; and (v) presentational styles (e.g., photographic, artistic) that overlay the image with additional connotations through manipulations of perspective, distance, color, focus, etc. In addition, it is acknowledged that each culture, due to its socio-semiotic tradition (its

stock of iconographic symbols, imaginaries) tends to have preferences for specific compositions, reading paths, and collective interpretations of images.

### 3. Sampling procedures

Polish **tax** law allows individual taxpayers to redirect 1% of their income tax to a selected registered non-governmental organization. This possibility generates intense promotional efforts by charity foundations to have a share in these funds.<sup>1</sup> At the time of the year when most taxpayers fill in their tax forms and decide which charity to support, mediated appeals are distributed, and foundations' websites are upgraded. Significantly, the charities that end up receiving most of 1% tax redistribution in Poland include those devoted to children-oriented domestic causes (MF [Ministry of Finance] 2015), including the domains of care that should, in fact, be provided for by the state, such as foster homes, healthcare, rehabilitation, hospices and social support.

The sample of graphic ensembles used in the present study was obtained through the following procedure: (i) based on the latest available tax redirection report (MF 2015), fifteen children-related charity organizations that received the highest subsidies from 1% tax redirections were selected; (ii) based on the number of Google hits obtained through keyword search 'fundacja+dzieci' (foundation+children), the fifteen most-searched nationwide charity organizations were selected (excluding sponsored links and local organizations); (iii) based on the overlap between the most funded and most popular organizations, nine organizations, each devoted to a different type of charity, were selected; (iv) altogether 221 screen-prints of graphic ensembles were sampled from these foundations' webpages every week (on different days of the week)

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<sup>1</sup> This seems to be effective. According to the Polish Central Statistical Office (GUS), in 2014, the 2,300 organizations which campaigned for 1% tax received 331 million PLN (1 PLN = 0.25 USD), while 4,200 that did not run any campaigns collected only 70 million PLN (GUS 2015).

throughout the 14 consecutive weeks in October, November and December 2016<sup>2</sup> and tagged with salient typographic and iconographic affordances by two coders. The differences of opinion were resolved through discussion.

The list below includes the nine children-oriented foundations, their priority cause(s), and the number of graphic ensembles garnered in the course of the sampling.

- (1) Fundacja Dzieciom Zdążyć z Pomocą – healthcare and rehabilitation – 22 units
- (2) Fundacja Rosa – health prevention and education – 28
- (3) Fundacja na Ratunek Dzieciom z Chorobą Nowotworową – cancer therapy – 18
- (4) Fundacja Ewy Błaszczak Akogo – therapy and care for comatose patients – 41
- (5) Fundacja Serce Dziecka – cardiac interventions for children – 17
- (6) Fundacja Jaś i Małgosia (JiM) – diagnosis and therapy of autism – 33
- (7) Fundacja SOS Wioski Dziecięce – foster homes – 32
- (8) Fundacja Dajemy Dzieciom Siłę – violence and child abuse – 21
- (9) Fundacja Dar Serca – poverty – 9

It should be noted that the sampled charity websites vary significantly regarding not only their graphic designs, but also the complexity of the websites (cf. Table 1 for the number of subpages within each site), and the regularity of the updates (cf. Table 2 for the frequency of updates).

[Table 1]

[Table 2]

In the case of complex online designs, it is important to identify salient patterns of graphic affordances; however, it is even more productive to note instances of ‘visual

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<sup>2</sup> Because the material is available in the public domain, and the images are not signed/copyrighted, the figures reproduced below are attributable to institutional sources only.

clustering' of typography and iconography, which might coincide with 'rhetorical clustering' (Bateman, 2008, p. 115) and instantiate a larger discursive strategy. Although each graphic ensemble has been also tagged according to its primary function (identification, description, plea, instruction, documentation, endorsement), many additionally function to call forth an aesthetic experience, establish cultural relevance, or provide an opportunity for entertainment or consumption. In the following sections the salient patterns of graphic affordances are illustrated and discussed in terms of the discursive strategies that project utility (*logos*), confidence (*ethos*), and engagement (*pathos*).

#### 4. Graphic patterns and their rhetorical functions

##### *Discursive construction of utility: graphic logos*

Utility is taken to mean the quantitative representation of preference, which amounts to textual and semiotic resources being recruited to induce the desired reaction in the recipient, assuming rational, culturally sanctioned behavior under conditions of uncertainty (Merin, 1999). The utility function of typography is realized in this sample by standard print and lineation choices where the shape and style of the font does not attract attention to itself and is subordinated to informational purposes (Machin, 2007, p. 96). Utility-driven graphic affordances are used to describe the mission of the foundation and to report on its actions. Utility typography can be discerned in charities' identification ensembles (e.g.,1,4,5,7,8,9),<sup>3</sup> which use consistent one-colored typeface of equal size and weight throughout the text without any flourishes that could distract the **viewer**. It is also a typical choice in most logotypes and headers (3,5,6,7,8). For

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<sup>3</sup> Numbers refer to the list of foundations in the section above

example, Fig. 2 illustrates the use of capitalized white font in the organization's name placed against a blue background to establish stable visual identification and thus enable the viewer to immediately recognize the SOS foundation. The logotype features two pictograms of children in dynamic poses implying some kind of activity. As children tend to be treated as 'deserving' or 'ideal' beneficiaries (Seu, 2015), it is indeed strategic to foreground this information graphically in a charity's logotype.

[Fig. 2 here]



Fig. 2: A utility-driven logotype (7) 'SOS children's villages.' Source: <https://wioskisos.org/>

Utility typography is also found in directories that map the sites, in the names of the foundations' current actions, and in directions to payment systems (1,5,7,9). Such distinct and unembellished letterforms are sometimes enlarged or confined to specifically framed spaces and involve stronger color contrasts to draw attention to donation instructions (virtual 'buttons' to click). In the cases of more extensive descriptions of children's needs, their medical conditions, or social problems the foundation is addressing, the font tends to be black and uniform, and the text neatly lined – sometimes with children's names or specific locations as hyperlinked captions (1,5,9).

Utility typography calls for not only orderliness and clarity but also appropriateness in orthographic and stylistic affordances, thus giving the impression of the foundation being a legitimate choice for donations, and dispelling doubts about this

being an online charity scam (Thompson, 2012). By the same token, formal lexis and jargon, pre-modified phrases typical of exposition genres, and complex sentences prevail in verbal presentations of charity objectives. These, however, often take the graphic form of lists and boxes, rather than paragraphed text (Fig. 3).

[Fig. 3 here]

**Tragiczne losy dzieci z Łodzi pokazują, jak niedoskonały jest w Polsce system ochrony dzieci.** Oto tylko kilka faktów i refleksji:

- Dzieci do 3. roku życia to grupa największego ryzyka urazów i śmierci w wyniku przemocy opiekunów.
- Co piąte dziecko w Polsce doświadcza przemocy fizycznej ze strony osób dorosłych. To trzykrotnie więcej niż np. w Wielkiej Brytanii.
- Nie mamy w Polsce systemu zapobiegania przemocy wobec dzieci w rodzinie – powszechnej edukacji i wsparcia dla młodych rodziców, systematycznego wspierania rodzin ryzyka, monitorowania sytuacji dzieci, które doświadczyły krzywdzenia. Nie mamy obowiązkowych standardów ochrony dzieci przed przemocą w placówkach opiekuńczych i oświatowych. Nie mamy specjalistycznych służb ochrony dzieci, badających zgłaszane podejrzenia, że dziecko jest krzywdzone.

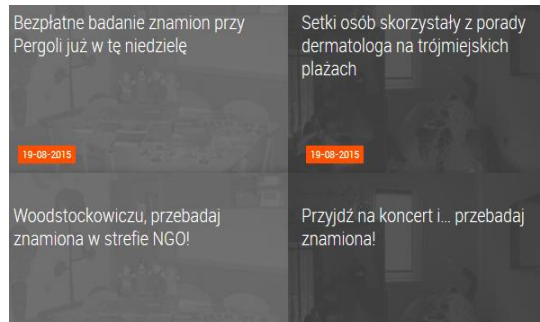


Fig. 3: Bullet-points and boxes for laying out information about needs and actions (8, 2): Sources:

<http://fdds.pl/aktualnosci/> <http://fundacjarosa.pl/jak-pomagamy/> [Translation: **Bullet points: Some facts about the tragedies involving children: • Children up to three most probably die or are hurt due to their caretakers' violent actions. • Every fifth child in Poland has experienced a violent act from an adult. The rate is three times that of the UK. • There is no programme in Poland to prevent violence to children .../ Boxes: Free skin cancer screening this Sunday; If you are at the Woodstock festival, get your skin checked in the NGO section; Hundreds of people screened by dermatologists on the beaches; Come to a concert and ... have your skin screened]**

The utility-driven discursive strategy is to lay out the top priorities clearly, document the actions meticulously, and typographically enhance the *logos* suggesting that the foundation has a transparent communication policy that ensures successful outreach and legitimizes solicitations.

Utility iconography can be realized through signage, imagery and pictorial elements. Each foundation uses images of children (for the sole purpose of being identified as working for them), be they photographs, drawings or schematic silhouettes of children (4,5,6,7,9). All nine sampled homepages include graphic ensembles with highly conventionalized imagery (heart-shaped objects, sun-resembling drawings,

photos of toys, or other items related strictly to children, e.g., story books, schoolbags, teddy bears, see Fig. 4).

[Fig. 4 here]



Fig. 4: Pictorial elements and drawings for conventionalized connotators of childhood (9). Source: <https://www.siepomaga.pl/fundacja-dar-serca>

Importantly, these signs are not merely informative; they also call forth positive connotations with normal, happy childhood, which the charity is trying to restore for its ill, destitute or neglected beneficiaries. In this respect, the graphic constructions of *logos* overlap with the emotion-instigating affordances of color and style of icons. Pictorial elements function as conventional metaphors or metonyms: hearts stand for affection, devotion and/or gratefulness, the sun signifies light and joy brought to children's lives, handshakes imply solidarity, and cuddly toys help keep the children happy by providing diversion from their problems (2,3,9). In a more critical vein, it can be noted that utility-driven iconography relies on unreflective and overgeneralized stereotypes of vulnerable children. Such affordances emotionalize informational ensembles, even infantilize the audience, specifically maternal female donors, who are 'interpellated' here as predisposed to act on impulses of sympathy for the needy children rather than on consideration of arguments and merits (van Zoonen, 1994).

### ***Discursive construction of confidence: graphic ethos***

Another major discursive strategy that is characteristic of this sample is the graphic reproduction of *ethos*, either through the construction of the foundation's institutional

credibility and record in providing relief or through projections of moral obligation to help (Sanghera, 2016). Online documents tend to be designed as more complex collections of graphic ensembles than is common, for example, for outdoor posters/billboards, print brochures or fundraising letters (Lipovsky, 2016), given their technical affordances to scroll, zoom and hyperlink. However, as there is a risk of overloading the webpage with institutional detail, complexity could be counterproductive since it might make the viewer abandon the site (Bennett, 2016).

The studied websites vary regarding graphic complexity, with foundations (2) and (3) favoring relatively simple designs and (4) and (8) using dense, more colorful and less spacious layouts. ‘Density’ here primarily means visual (not verbal) clustering of photos, pictograms, logotypes of patron institutions or companies, automated documentary slideshows, and color-laden diagrams (3,5,6) that boost credibility. It is only in the less accessible subpages that the organizations’ annual reports are presented at length. This is where the verbal mode starts to become more dominant than the graphics, and the persuasive statistics and exemplifications enable further confidence building and rationalization of donor loyalty (4,7,9). Such a way of hierarchizing information – where image-enhanced appeals precede logocentric arguments – seems to be relatively consistent in the sample; however, one would need more reference material to see if this is a strategy that is exclusive to children-related charity communication or a wider trend.

The majority of the studied foundations post their directions for donations at the top of the main page. Admittedly, the simpler and clearer the graphic affordances for payment instructions (e.g., large, bolded capitalized font; contrastive colors), the easier it is to locate them and follow the donation procedure. Sometimes the instruction text

consists solely of imperative clauses to help, donate, buy, send, visit, share, recycle, etc. (1,3,6,7,8,9), as in Fig. 5.

[Fig. 5 here]



Fig. 5: Simple graphic designs for instructions: ‘help regularly,’ ‘help-donate now,’ ‘donate’ (7,8,6). Sources: <https://wioskisos.org/> <http://fdds.pl/> <http://jim.org/>

Rhetorically, the positioning of donation instructions at the top of the page is similar to presenting the conclusion or recommendation before the arguments in a persuasive speech. Only three foundations (2,6,8) start with presenting their mission and ongoing operations before instructing the viewer ‘how you can contribute’. Such an order resembles the classical convention in argumentation, where warranted premises (and resonant *topoi*) precede the conclusion (Aristotle, 1975), and explain why it is morally and rationally justified to sponsor this particular cause.

Two foundations (2,3) use graphic designs that involve less complex compositions. Spacious and aestheticized homepages graphically index either the organizations’ narrowly defined goals, or their professionalism in communicating them. This strategy is based on projecting organizational *ethos* with subtle graphic connotators of institutional credibility (in contrast to, for example, explicit jargon-filled mission statement and statistics of child abuse found in (8)). Such graphic layouts rely on the following associations: clarity is transparency/trust, simplicity is truth, symmetry is balance and order. Although two websites (2,9) deploy dynamic visual solutions and automatically moving slates of imagery and text, most opt for rather conservative, stable presentation of the appeals that require viewers to scroll down the page as the preferred ‘reading path’. Many webpages keep a white background against which images and

texts or diagrams are laid out (Fig. 6). They also embed the more traditional genre of the poster (3,6,8) as an independent promotional element, particularly if they run a few campaigns simultaneously.

[Fig. 6 here]

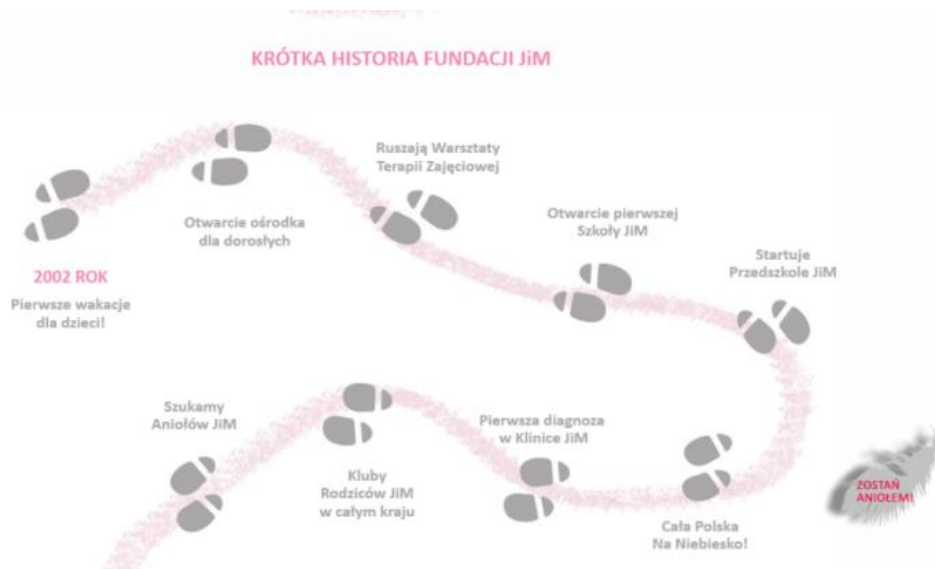


Fig. 6: ‘A brief history of JiM foundation’: a diagram with mild circular shapes and pastel colors (6). Source: <http://jim.org/> [Translation of the timeline: 2002 the first holiday camp; Adult center opened; First therapeutic workshops; First JiM school; Start of JiM kindergarten; Blue Poland campaign; First diagnosis in a JiM clinic; Parents’ Clubs across the country; Searching for JiM guardian angels]

With respect to instilling confidence in moral worth, responsibility and effectiveness, one graphic affordance is the use of diagrams. Fig. 6, for example, shows the multifarious nature of support and assistance offered to autistic children (6). The diagram illustrates ‘the steps’ taken by the foundation since 2002 and its success in reaching ever broader groups of beneficiaries. Also, the pastel colors and gentle curves in this visualization imply that the organization itself is subservient to public demand and the needs of parents of autistic children rather than to any rigid policy.

Most foundations use color with its inventory of cultural meaning affordances rather consistently (3,6,8), presumably to facilitate information-processing or to present the charity as acting according to a coherent strategy. Only (4) may be observed to be

less concerned with color and style synergy, while (9) occasionally deploys color disharmony. The vast majority of graphic ensembles analyzed here are marked for high aesthetic quality (e.g., enhanced brightness, contrast and sharpness in photos), thoughtful arrangement and artistic overlay (Chouliaraki, 2013). Some ensembles testify to the patterned use of special ‘visual’ styles (circularity rather than angularity, sepia, pastel palette), or consistent pictorial devices that complement the textual constructions of *ethos*. This instantiates a discursive strategy of foregrounding professionalization and evidences a growing **reliance on the conventions of corporate advertising and branding** to maximize appeals (Nickel & Eikenberry, 2009).

### ***Discursive construction of engagement: graphic pathos***

It can be observed that charity homepages are primarily designed either to foster emotional engagement and achieve the immediate (on-impulse) solicitation effect or to engender donor loyalty. Due to the diversity of the ‘rhetorical audiences’ (Aristotle, 1975) targeted through a website, a range of graphic affordances tend to be deployed. For example, both the textual and visual modes are used to privilege the viewer’s perceptual needs and emotional dispositions, including the sense of pleasure and self-worth derived from acting altruistically (Andreoni, 1990). Such viewer-orientation prevails in the sample and is most frequently expressed linguistically through imperatives in donation instructions, ‘here and now’ deixis, and direct address. Visually, viewer-orientation is instantiated through the large size of print/image, or spaciouly arranged compositions that are easy to navigate, or the engaging gaze, posture and angle of viewing in the representation of poster children, as in Fig. 1. discussed in the introduction.

Salient graphic affordances that tend to be used as attention-guiding devices include starkly contrastive colors (6) and their high saturation (1), as well as the use of

lighter print against a darker background (1,4,7) and enlarged or embellished font (3). Pictograms are used as shortcuts to action identification: ‘a schoolbag with wings’ is lighter to carry for schoolchildren, and ‘a shield’ is used to protect against risk factors leading to skin cancer (2). Emphasis is achieved by supersized font or bright childish colors (purple, pink or blue). In this manner, the viewer is guided into accepting the ideologically charged version of social reality in which certain children-related causes are prioritized by institutionalized agents/experts and should be embraced by donors.

Some of the most salient graphic strategies aim at instigating pity or anxiety regarding implied children’s suffering, or a sense of solidarity with parents of diseased children or **with** impoverished communities (cf. Orgad and Seu, 2014a on emotional capital). The strategic deployment of verbal, typographic and visual affordances allows effective mobilization through direct appeal **to engage in whichever of the available forms of charity**, and emotionally contingent incentive to donate if taking other actions is impossible. Some websites can be credited with discursively projecting a tightly-knit virtual community of people of good will, with the use of inclusive pronouns ‘we/us’ and photo-documentation of ‘our collective efforts’ (1,8,9).

Two examples of iconic affordances – ‘an angel’s feather’ (6, Fig. 6 **previous section**) and the ‘handle with care’ emblem (8, Fig. 7) – stand out as more innovative uses of iconography, even though they have strictly defined persuasive aims (Forceville, 1996). **First**, the feather metonymically indexes an angel (a positive religious and cultural reference) with the (loyal) donor being ‘interpellated’ as a mighty (even though invisible) guardian figure capable of ensuring that autistic children’s needs continue to be addressed by the foundation. **Second**, the ‘handle with care’ emblem on a cardboard box is used to alert adults who are still tolerant of corporal punishment that children’s bodies are fragile and can be easily damaged.

[Fig. 7 here]

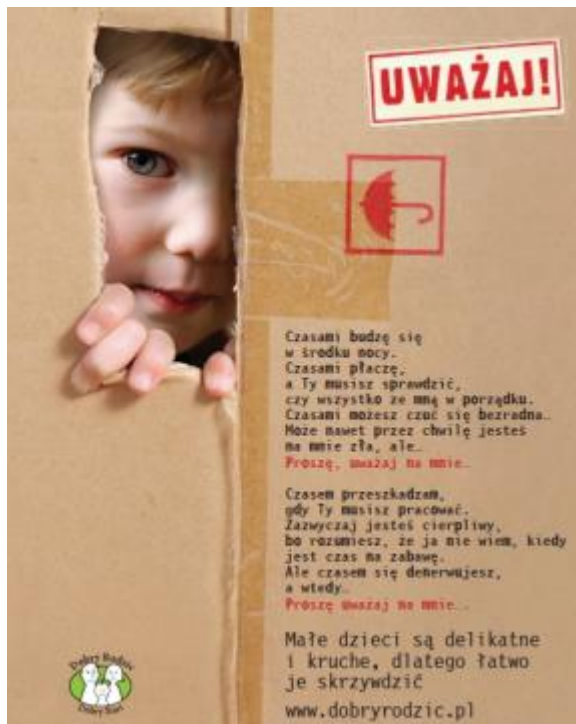


Fig. 7: ‘Please be careful: little children’s bodies are fragile so it is easy to damage them’: Handle-with-care signage in an anti-corporal punishment campaign (8). Source: <http://fdds.pl> [Translation of the body copy: Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night. Sometimes I cry, and you need to check if I am OK. Sometimes you can feel helpless, maybe even a little angry, but please be careful with me... Sometimes I disturb when you need to work. Usually you are patient because you know that I do not know when I should play or sit still. But sometimes you get upset and then please be careful with me...]

Although it might be perceived as an act of visual objectification of the child placed in a box, such a pictorial metaphor is paired with a personal letter authored by the child. The convergence of the graphic and textual modes is an example of ‘rhetorical clustering’ that raises broader awareness **that** physical force as a disciplining measure not only causes bodily harm but also has grave psychological consequences. At the same time the warning emblems, as used predominantly by manufacturing and transport companies, are not alienating enough to trigger defense mechanisms and can be effective in representing this emotion-laden issue in a new light.

The engagement function in typography is also realized when the letterforms and pictorial elements draw attention to themselves as formal ‘display’ devices (Stoeckl, 2005). This can be exemplified by a font that resembles handwriting/drawing (2,9) or stylized artistry (3). Decorative graphic affordances include mixed type/font/style and color in lettering, or overlaps between font and pictograms (1,3,5). One example of an embellished orthographic device is the logotype of Akogo? foundation (4, Fig. 8). Not only does it use a font resembling handwriting and different colors for each of the letters (something that children might have a preference for), but it also misspells the charity’s name (it should be ‘A kogo’), and reverses the question mark (another index of writing as might be produced by youngsters). Placed underneath a tinted photo of a young girl, the logo foregrounds the foundation’s children-oriented activities, even though the number of comatose adults the charity takes care of is also substantial.

[Fig. 8 here]



Fig. 8: Mixed-color graphic designs with decorative letterforms that index child-orientation (4,1,5).

Sources: <http://www.akogo.pl/> <http://dzieciom.pl/> <https://www.sercedziecka.org.pl/>

In addition, decorative or clever graphic affordances have an aestheticizing function to reduce the negative *pathos* or alienation involved in encounters with imagery related to children’s suffering (cf. Chouliaraki, 2006).

There are two salient patterns of how children are represented as objects of charity through photographic affordances. If they are ‘poster children’ whose faces and gazes are used to draw attention, they usually look sad and static – not involved in any activity but ‘waiting’ for the donor’s action (3,7,8, cf. Fig. 1). This is compatible with

Meyer's (2007) findings on a rhetorically potent moral framing of needy children or Kyriakidou's (2015) affective witnessing. However, in images representing children whom the foundation has already provided for, children are often pictured playing or learning, hence enjoying the outcomes of effective campaigns and adequate donations. Here, even suffering and ill children are shown smiling (1,2,9), which is a rhetorical maneuver used to foreground the positive results of actions and to rationalize donating based on the photo-documentation of the effectiveness of the organization's work. Unlike in the case of poster children, such allegedly naturalistic, unedited, amateurish, locally set photos might strike viewers as more authentic and credible.

Finally, the role of culturally resonant signs (cf. Massaris, 1996; Machin, 2007) should be discussed with respect to 'intepellating' the viewer as a prospective donor. Engagement can be achieved by accompanying charity solicitations with cultural icons, as could be the case with traditional Christmas-time charitability (4), images of sweet sleeping babies (3), or teddy bears and other cuddly toys, which are recognized as young children's primary attributes (1,5). The common use of children's first names (1) as labels describing targeted actions can also be classified as an engagement-enhancing device (Lipovsky, 2016). Engagement, even if rooted in negative emotions, is fostered with visual representations of such settings as hospitals, care facilities and foster homes, which, according to common cultural knowledge, are severely underfunded. One peculiar interactive graphic affordance identified in the sample is a scalar 'fund-o-meter' with numerical information on funds gathered/needed (1, Fig. 9) that might mobilize the viewer to compete in achieving the target goal of their choice **or to repeatedly return to the page to monitor the progress of fundraising.**

[Fig. 9 here]



Fig. 9: A culturally and emotionally resonant ensemble: photos of children in need, textual identifications of their predicaments, diagrams of the flow of funds for the actions in progress (1). Source:

<http://dzieciom.pl/> [Translation: Active charity actions: (clockwise from top left) Boys fighting for health together; The only chance to put down the fire in Hania's head; We will do anything to hear his voice one day; I could give up anything to be able to take my first step]

Graphic affordances to keep donors engaged might also include hypertextual options with listings/buttons that make donating easier: text messaging, downloading apps (1,5,7), or ones that enable indulging in the pleasures of consumption 'for the sake of children': buying branded gadgets, doing shopping via a specific portal, exchanging clothing, eating out at specific establishments.

More subtly, some donors might find the causes more resonant and engaging by virtue of their domestic location: all the charities foreground the fact that they work for the benefit of Polish children, which is often indexed through specific place-names and the surnames of beneficiaries. This discursive strategy pervades the materials in all sampled websites. With a rather low level of social capital and the sense of being at a disadvantage with respect to the standards of social services (Piechota, 2015), Polish donors would be very sensitive to any indication of improper spending. Images of devoted doctors and other professionals (3,5), endorsements by domestic celebrities (1,4), and videos of thankful parents (6) are some *other pathos*-charged affordances in this sample. However, as is the case with all narrowly targeted rhetorical means, such

graphic forms of fostering engagements, even if well intentioned, may fail to build stable involvements in charitability because they offer only an ‘illusion of intimacy’ and are generally lacking in authenticity (Orgad & Seu, 2014b, p. 929). Inducing someone to donate on impulse because of strong emotional appeal can be treated as a short-term technique based on manipulation because it (i) leads to gradual desensitization to emotional appeals, (ii) does not relate giving to moral systems that can sustain charitability, (iii) does not require argumentation or accountability from foundations.

## 5. Conclusion

Marketing specialists recommend that donation pages be brief, contain confidence-building messages designed to dispel doubts, include emotive imagery, and stimulate feelings of a ‘warm-glow’ and involvement in a charity’s priority cause (Bennett, 2016). This analysis largely confirms that prominent foundations in Poland apply **such** discursive strategies in the graphic ensembles publicized in their websites. It has demonstrated a strategic synergy between the persuasive (verbal) appeal and the graphic affordances drawn on with respect to cultural resonance and ‘interpellation’ of the viewer primarily as an emotionally motivated prospective donor (Royce, 1998). It also shows that the boundaries between semiotic modes of typography and iconography have been eroded to take strategic **advantage of various combinations of graphic affordances**. This suggests the increasing need for mapping of the ‘rhetorical clustering’ (Bateman, 2008) of textual, typographic and iconographic affordances.

One of the salient discursive strategies discovered here involves the graphic projection of utility, with some letterforms, icons and compositional choices specially chosen to help identify the charity appeal as children-oriented and thus most legitimate to donate to (*logos*). Another characteristic feature of the sample is the charities’ brief

and precise, confidence-inspiring and professional priority descriptions laid out in boxes and as lists, accompanied by clear donation instructions (*ethos*). However, the most salient discursive strategy is the graphic foregrounding of affect (*pathos*), with emphatic emotional direct addresses in slogans and photographic or iconic presentations of needy children who rely on donors' sympathy and **compassion**. Altruistic motivations and the experience of a 'warm-glow' (Andreoni, 1990) are facilitated by viewer-oriented typography and culturally resonant icons that cater to viewers' aesthetic needs, as well as enable charitability through consumption, which reproduces charitable giving as class related, and charity as part of neoliberal arrangement (Sayer, 2005; Krause, 2014).

It can be generalized that the traditional, static, print-dominated presentation of charity causes has been largely displaced by dynamic, visually enhanced ensembles that stimulate emotions and **complement** other pop-cultural imaginaries. This is evidenced in short, non-linear, snippet-like messages resembling slogans, the central role of aesthetized photographs, and the color/style synergy of typographic and pictorial devices (van Leeuwen, 2005a). The aggrandized status of the charity organization as a preferable, institutionalized conduit for donations is achieved graphically through logotypes and professional layout solutions, which do not fall far from branding and marketing conventions of larger consumer culture (Massaris, 1996).

Although the measure of persuasive efficacy cannot be established against one normative rhetorical standard, one can notice that graphic, emotional, viewer-oriented appeals ('what you can do') dominate **when** compared to traditional self-presentation techniques ('what we do'). In addition, it is shown here how online appeals **consolidate** 'lay moralities' to help the 'deserving' beneficiaries and build (**domestic**) communities through presuppositions of shared donor priorities and cultural values. Although this study is limited to a sample of charity appeals in the Polish context of campaigning for

individual donations and tax redistribution, it partly confirms Chouliaraki's (2013) observations on current fundraising communication being more contemplative and centered on the donors' needs. With posed images of children, slogan-like messages and visually embellished designs, this 'post-humanitarian' trend in charity communication seems to be largely based on visual pleasure and emotional stimulation. However, preliminary sociological studies on this trend (Piechota, 2015) suggest that such campaigns may not be conducive to fostering a civic society and building stable social capital, because they compete for donors' attention and resources, and use 'emotional capitalism' and managerial professionalism to legitimize the foundations' activities rather than entrench solidarity (Krause, 2014). Indeed, the websites rarely question the classed society with its systemic injustices, because, being focused on children, they represent the interests of the most deserving 'classless' type of beneficiaries (Nickel & Eikenberry, 2009).

One of the objectives of the study has been to review how typographic and iconographic affordances of children-related charity appeals reproduce the dominant cultural representations of normal childhood. Children have been found to be represented here as especially worthy of sympathy and compassion. This is a powerful solicitation mechanism, which is reflected in the charity communicators' explicit indexing of children's needs and, occasionally, **children's suffering to be alleviated immediately**. The efficacy of some of these appeals may lie in the way the representations of 'poster children' are convergent with the conventionalized, even simplistic, concepts related to childhood that are normalized in Polish culture. This includes vulnerability and innocence, which makes emotional appeals through childish graphics such as angels, hearts, the color white, or pastel palettes effective. Another correlate of childhood is play, and spontaneity, which are indexed by the choice of toy

icons, color contrasts and saturation, as well as childish drawings or handwritten letterforms. Arguably, if normal childhood involves warm sentiments and protection from harm, then representations of destitute, handicapped, neglected or ill children will mobilize parental instincts or guilt (Seu, 2015). However, the graphic affordances that project ‘childishness’ may well work to the detriment of the sustained commitments to charity, because they infantilize prospective donors and background argumentative and reflective stances.

The rhetorical potential of some of the graphic ensembles in the sample may also be based on the avoidance of strongly alienating images or shock value (Chouliaraki, 2006). Even if only implied (through framing, sepia or low modality), children’s suffering is seen as deeply problematic and likely to compel action, no matter whether it is to make schoolbags somewhat lighter or collect money for heart transplants. Such attention-**grabbing**, emotionally resonant graphic ensembles, even if not fully authentic, allow prospective donors to experience a sense of ‘warm-glow’ and to position themselves as morally superior, at least at a time when decisions on tax redistribution are to be taken. The question that remains open is whether this kind of strategically effective, on-impulse charity solicitation is conducive to a long-lasting sense of solidarity, or whether it will wear out with desensitization to increasingly emotional, trivial and superficial appeals, without building solid social capital.

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**List of tables**

Number of subpages	<10	11-20	21-30	31-40	40<
Number of foundations	1	2	4	1	1

Table 1: Subpages within a website (of 9 children-related charities)

Frequency of updates	none	regular, weekly	regular, monthly	irregular	complete redesign
Number of foundations	1	4	1	2	1

Table 2: Approximate regularity of updates (within a 14-week period)