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Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society

Title

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Journal

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society, 46(0)

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Publication Date

2024

Peer reviewed

Testing the persuasiveness of meme based arguments by analogy

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Abstract

Psychologists have noted that analogical reasoning is pervasive in argumentation (Kuhn, 1992; Holyoak, 1997), but the forms these arguments can take varies substantially. Memes are one common format or argument-by-analogy. Memes are widely recognized images or templates that compares two situations to each other for the purpose of making some (often questionable) point. Even though memes-as-arguments are readily visible on social media, the persuasiveness of this category of argument-by-analogy—and specifically the features that predict their persuasiveness—have not been established. This study investigates whether and in what ways arguments by analogy, delivered in the form of a meme, are persuasive. We develop a large set of memes representing common meme structures, political leaning, and familiarity and examined how these factors predict a meme’s perceived clarity, persuasiveness, and memorability, along with these memes effects on beliefs about issues such as climate change, immigration, and racism.