VISUAL AND VERBAL RHETORIC IN ADVERTISING: IMPACT ON EMOTIONS AND ATTITUDES

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Rhetoric, considered for a long time as reserved only for verbal discourse, is applied to image in advertising. Rhetoric figures act on consumer responses to advertisement. This study proposes to verify, through experimentation, the effect of visual and verbal rhetoric on emotions, attitude toward the advertising and attitude toward the brand. The moderating role of involvement is also tested. The results suggest that using figures can significantly enhance the effectiveness of print advertising. Visual figures have a better effect on emotions. Verbal figures led to a more favorable attitude toward the ad and attitude toward the brand.

Keywords: Visual rhetoric, Verbal rhetoric, Attitude, Brand, Emotions.

Introduction

Rhetoric is searching for the most efficient method to express an idea and the way to adapt the discourse to different situations. A proposition can be expressed in different manners among which, one is the most effective to influence the audience (Scott, 1994). When persuasion is the pursued aim, the rhetorical perspective suggests that the way to express a discourse is more important than its content. It uses discursive typology, rhetorical division of the discourse and all the figures. Research shows the increasing interest devoted to rhetoric in advertising (Bratu, 2010, Leigh 1994, Toncar and Munch, 2001, McGuire 2000, Phillips 1997, McQuarrie and Mick, 1992, 1999, 2003, McQuarrie and Phillips, 2005). The advertising discourse is presented in its definition and its goals, as a subtle mix of epideictic and deliberative forms. As epideictic discourse, advertising is meaningful and important to argumentation just because it reinforces a disposal of action by increasing the adherence to the values it exalts. It does not aim at persuading in the short term but at attracting the adherence to shared values, namely those of the brand. Epideictic discourse begins with a description followed by an argumentation. In advertising, persuasion is often behind the description. The message begins with a eulogistic and hyperbolic description of the product and ends with an advice, a deliberative action. The advertisement carries the "optimistic side" (Durand, 1970) of the epideictic discourse. Epideictic discourse seeks to consolidate an adhesion not to the truth of discourse but to the underlying idealized values.

This study focuses on the role of advertising rhetoric, both visual and verbal, in the process of persuasion. It investigates rhetoric used within the context of advertising and aims to check the effect of rhetorical figures on emotions, attitude toward the ad and attitude toward brand and finally to explore the moderating role of involvement. All of these are important questions, certainly for theory, but also for practitioners who must decide what kind of figures to include in ads to shift consumer attitude in the desired direction.
In order to clarify the relative position of visual and verbal rhetoric and its influence on persuasion, this research will first place rhetoric in a wider context; that of advertising. It will then illustrate the importance of advertising rhetoric in the persuasion process. The study will set out to assess not only the direct effect of visual and verbal rhetoric, but also the moderating role of involvement in the persuasion process. In the experiment reported below, we equate ad stimuli with style. We then measure the extent to which exposure to these figures can alter consumer attitude toward the advertisement and brand. We finally examine the extent to which this change of attitude, if it occurs, is moderated by involvement. The first section of this research presents a theoretical analysis of the existing literature about rhetoric in advertising. This is followed by the introduction and review of the effect of figures of rhetoric on emotions, attitude toward the ad and attitude toward brand. The second section of this study deals with the methodology involved in this research.

Background

Rhetorical figures in advertising

The first encompassing typology of figures in advertising is proposed by Durand (1970). In line with the findings of Bathes (1964), where he acknowledges that an advertisement is composed of two levels: denoted and connoted, Durand (1970) concludes that the creative advertising is based on the transposition of rhetorical figures to image advertising. The literal message appears as the basis of the "symbolic" message. The literal image is denoted and the symbolic image is connoted. Based on this typology, McQuarrie & Mick (1996, 1999, 2003) develop a new taxonomy of figures in advertising related to their complexity and deviation. McQuarrie & Mick define rhetoric as an artful deviation relative to audience expectation and propose a text-interpretive typology, in which they exploit the classical distinction between schemes and tropes, and which they apply to both visual and textual figures. Visual rhetoric fits into an interpretative approach (Durand 1970; McQuarrie 1989; Stern 1990 ; McQuarrie and Mick 1992 ; Scott 1994 a) which considers that the image and the text are likely to carry the meaning intended by the advertiser.

Effect of rhetorical figures on emotions

The exposure to a "new" stimulus excites the consumer and increases his pleasure (Berlyne, 1960). The deviation of rhetorical figures allows dispelling the receiver’s feeling of boredom as he/she is overwhelmed by a large number of advertisements. In a physiological sense, a rewarding event, such as comprehension after some effort, should produce a change in arousal level (Berlyne, 1960). Ambiguous and incongruous stimuli ought to stimulate arousal and have a pleasurable effect when such stimuli are decoded (Redfern 1982; Sheldon 1956). McQuarrie and Mick (1999) suggest that readers are expected to gain pleasure out of texts that require multiple readings, whereas one-dimensional texts that are effortlessly decoded are less likely to be sources of pleasure. "It's somewhat the pleasure one has when completing a given data grid" (Barthes, 1970). Pleasure of the Text is the positive affect that a reader experiences due to the successful comprehension of an initially incomprehensible text. Rhetorical figures are deviations from expectation. The initial ambiguity leads to incomprehension, which is unsettling, and the ensuing comprehension and the resolution of ambiguity are rewarding (Mohanty, 2008). This pleasure is
felt from the components and not from the message itself. At first glance, the receiver encounters some ambiguity which stimulates him/her but he/she will quickly be appeased by its resolution (Eco, 1979, McQuarrie and Mick, 1992; Peracchio and Meyers-Levy, 1994). A deviation from what is usually observed stimulates the consumer (Vlasis et al., 2008; Hung et al., 2011; Phillips and McQuarrie 2002). The incongruity of a stimulus affects positively arousal and evaluation (Mandler, 1982). A review of the literature shows that using figures has a positive effect on pleasure and arousal.

- **H 1:** Rhetorical figures have a positive effect on emotions.

**Effect of rhetorical figures on the attitude toward advertising:**

Reading an advertisement with rhetorical figures can lead to multiple interpretations (Delbaere et al., 2011; Jeong, 2008). The increased enjoyment the consumers experience while reading the ad should make them, overall, regard the ad more favorably (McQuarrie and Mick, 2003, 1999, 1992). That is, the pleasurable and affective responses brought about by figures should ultimately influence viewers’ attitudes (Ketelaar et al., 2010. Stella et Adam, 2008). Figures give rise to positive affective responses associated with the feeling of accomplishment felt after decoding the hidden meaning (Campelo et al., 2011; Bulmer et al., 2006; TonCar and Munch, 2001). The receiver will then look at the whole advertisement with a more favorable attitude (Mick, 1992, McQuarrie and Mick 2009, 1999, Ang and Ai Ching Lim, 2006; Ang and Low 2000).

- **H 2:** Rhetorical figures have a positive effect on attitude toward advertising.

**Effect of emotions on the attitude toward the advertisement**

De Barnier (2002) shows that attitude toward advertising explains all the emotional reactions generated by the message hence confirming the results of Batra and Ray (1986) and Holbrook and Batra (1987). Effect of emotions on attitude toward the advertisement differs from one dimension to another. Effect of arousal and pleasure is positive in contrast to control that exerts a negative influence. Hence, we test the following hypothesis:

- **H 3:** Pleasure and arousal dimensions of emotions have a positive effect on attitude toward advertising.
- **H 4:** Control dimension of emotions has a negative effect on attitude toward advertising.

**Effect of rhetorical figures on the attitude toward the brand:**

Rhetorical figures generate greater positive attitude toward the brand (McQuarrie and Mick 1992). The greater processing requirement of figures should inhibit viewers from careful ad claim evaluation, lead to less claim challenging, and, ultimately, exert a more favorable product evaluation (Toncar and Munch 2003). Attitude thus depends on the degree of deviation of the message. McGuire (2000), consistent with Petty & al. (1976), suggests that figures can be distracting, just as they can be attention enhancing. This kind of distraction effect occurs when the reader expends effort decoding the text, and not on contesting its message. When the reader is distracted, he is not able to develop counter-arguments. (McGuire 2000). McQuarrie and
Phillips (2005) observed that consumers are more receptive to multiple, distinct, and positive inferences about the brand when rhetoric advertising is adopted. This provides opportunities for conveying multiple messages about the brand (Smith et al., 2008; Brennan and Kenneth, 2006) that would otherwise be more challenging if non-rhetorical messages were used.

- **H 5:** Rhetorical figures have a positive effect on attitude toward the brand.

**Involvement**

The hypothesis of Elaboration Likelihood Model contends that for high involvement message processors make an evaluation based on the performances of the product. One argument in support of such a proposition is that the consumer is interested in the processing of the content of the message. Alternatively, weakly involved individuals will be influenced by peripheral stimuli (colors, music, staging...). Deviation of rhetorical figures represents a peripheral execution element of the advertisement. It presents the qualities of the product in a figurative manner.

- **H 6:** Involvement has a moderating effect on the relationship between rhetorical figures and attitude toward the advertisement.

**Research methodology**

**Subjects and Procedure**

In the experiment, the four test ads were based on actual magazine ads— for an energetic drink, a scanner—that were judged to contain instances of different visual figures and to be relevant to a student subject pool (high/low involvement). First, the original ad was duplicated, and then the key elements that made up the visual figure were abstracted. Each ad was produced in two versions, with the difference between the versions constituting the manipulation. For each ad, a small change of the visual and verbal element sufficient to remove or break the rhetorical figure was made: Two where the image used visual figure, two where the ad used another kind of verbal figure, and a third version where the only image was a large photo of the product package. For each version, a fictitious brand name was added.

A total of 512 undergraduates at a private university in Tunisia participated in the experiment. Subjects were divided into eight groups, with each group viewing different advertisements presented as either visual figure, verbal figure, or explicit claims. Subjects were told that this was a study of advertising, that the ads they were going to see were in rough and unfinished form, and that this type of pretesting was common in the industry. They were encouraged to imagine they were encountering these ads in a magazine and to respond as naturally as possible. Each Subject worked through the ads at their own pace, answering questions pertaining to an individual ad immediately after viewing it.
Selection of scales

*Emotions*

We considered the scale of Holbrook and Batra (1987), it consists of three dimensions: pleasure, arousal and control. The scale has 27 items representing the three factors. The pleasure dimension corresponds to a state of affection, gratitude and confidence. The arousal dimension represents the feelings of interest, activation and enthusiasm. The dominance reflects the melancholy, fear and skepticism.

*Attitude toward the advertisement*

We considered the scale of Olney, Holbrook and Batra (1991) composed of three dimensions: hedonism, utilitarianism and interest. This scale was adopted for two reasons. It represents the hedonic component of the attitude (Olney et al, 1991). It was adapted to the advertising field (Olney et al, 1991; Batra and Athol, 1991). It was used to test the effect of emotions as an antecedent (Holbrook and Batra, 1991). It is a semantic differential scale of seven points.

*Attitude toward the brand*

The scale of MacKenzie and Lutz (1986) is used to measure the attitude toward the brand. It has been empirically tested and validated by several studies: Good / bad, Pleasant / unpleasant, Favorable / unfavorable

*Involvement*

The scale used is the Zaichowsky’s scale (1987). It represents an inventory of personal involvement (IPI). It calculates a single score using the responses to twenty semantic differential items. It identifies a group with a high involvement (score ≥ 90) and a group with a low involvement (score <90). Its objective is to measure the lasting involvement for a product category or every object.

*Analysis procedure*

Scales pretest was performed using Component factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis. The first one allows for the estimation of the reliability of the scale, the dimensions and the items to be taken. The objective of the second is to confirm the result of the first analysis. The Likelihood Method of estimation is selected. Various indices are used to verify the quality of the whole measurement model. Hence, the interaction term in an ANOVA provides a test of whether the impact of the rhetoric treatment is greater in the case of images.

*Results*

In this research, the direct impact of verbal and visual figures on emotions is first studied. Rhetorical figures have an effect on the three dimensions of emotions: pleasure (p = 0.000, F = 5096), arousal (p = 0.01, F = 2664), pain (p = 0.00, F = 6630) and skepticism (p = 0.006).
Hypothesis H1 is validated. Descriptive statistics show that for the dimensions of pleasure, arousal and pain, visual figures have a significant effect higher than that of verbal figures. These have more effect on pain dimension. Rhetorical figures positively influence the first dimension of attitude toward the advertisement. The relationship between figures and utilitarianism dimension is indeed significant (p = 0.001, F = 3501) in contrast to that between figures and hedonism which is non-significant (p = 0.112, F = 1677). Hypothesis H2 is partly rejected. Results show that the effect of verbal figures on attitude toward the advertisement is higher than that of visual figures. Emotions have an influence on hedonism dimension. This effect appears for dimensions of pleasure and skepticism. Arousal and skepticism do not influence the hedonism dimension. The utilitarianism dimension is influenced by emotions. This effect is caused by pleasure and arousal. Hypothesis H3 is partly verified. Control has no impact on utilitarianism dimension of attitude toward the advertisement. Hypothesis H4 is partly rejected. Multivariate analysis shows that rhetorical figures have an effect on attitude toward the brand. The results are significant in terms of prescribed thresholds (p = 0.01, F = 3586). Hypothesis H.5 is thus verified. Descriptive statistics show that the influence of verbal figures on the attitude toward the brand is greater than that of visual figures.

In this research we are concerned with the moderating role of involvement with respect to the impact of figures of rhetoric on attitude toward the advertising. We therefore are interested in checking whether this link differs, depending on whether the subjects are strongly or weakly involved. According to Baron and Kenny (1986), this effect is verified by studying the interaction between the moderating and the independent variable. Results are significant. The hypothesis is hence accepted.

Table 1. Results for the direct effect of rhetorical figures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependant variable</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pleasure</td>
<td>5.096</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arousal</td>
<td>2.664</td>
<td>0.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pain</td>
<td>6.630</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skepticism</td>
<td>2.890</td>
<td>0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hedonism</td>
<td>1.677</td>
<td>0.112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilitarism</td>
<td>3.501</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abd</td>
<td>3.586</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for the direct effect of rhetorical figures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependant variable</th>
<th>Visual figure</th>
<th>Verbal figure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pleasure</td>
<td>3.8857</td>
<td>3.5109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arousal</td>
<td>3.6736</td>
<td>3.1227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pain</td>
<td>2.6259</td>
<td>2.7405</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skepticism</td>
<td>3.1735</td>
<td>2.9896</td>
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<td>Hedonism</td>
<td>3.6048</td>
<td>3.9115</td>
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<td>Utilitarism</td>
<td>3.5559</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abd</td>
<td>3.3286</td>
<td>3.9581</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

This paper provides evidence that visual and verbal rhetoric in print advertising can be a powerful persuasive tool. Rhetoric, defined as an artful deviation relative to audience
expectation, enhances a positive emotional consumer response. Rhetorical figures also made a positive response to the ad more probable, and produced more positive ad attitude, relative to the ad not using figures. These outcomes, in turn, led to increased liking for the brand. With respect to advertising practice, visual and verbal rhetoric appears to offer an excellent tool for advertisers who seek to build brand attitude and create an emotional connection with consumers. The findings suggest that figures, regardless of whether they are in verbal or pictorial form, influence emotions. That similar findings obtained for verbal and visual figures demonstrates the rigor of figures in influencing emotions.

Results show that rhetorical figures have an effect on dimensions of emotions. These findings confirm that deviation from what is usually observed influence emotions of consumers. Thus, the main pleasure effect of rhetorical figures that were reported by Barthes (1970) and McQuarrie and Mick (1999) were supported by the present study. Messages prompting multiple readings and interpretations are a source of pleasure for the receiver. Mohanty (2008) suggests that incongruity in figures renders the ad, incomprehensible at first glance. This causes arousal and stimulates the audience. The results are consistent with the major implication of Optimal arousal theory which is that individuals prefer original, surprising, or complex stimuli (Berlyne, 1971).

They represent a way to stimulate the consumer. The basic assumption that collative properties such as novelty, surprise, complexity, and incongruity effect arousal is verified.

Consistent with McQuarrie and Mick’s (1999) and McQuarrie and Phillips’s (2005) findings, the present study also found that rhetorical pictures elicit a more favorable attitude toward the ad and toward the brand than rhetorical headlines. Mick’s argument (McQuarrie and Mick 1996; Mick, 1992) that the pleasure of the text in figures is readily linked to the concept of attitude toward the ad does hold. The interpretation of the message composed of rhetorical figures following a reading of the advertisement causes an accomplishment feeling after the decoding of the hidden meaning. Hence, in and of themselves, figures add value by enhancing interest in the ad and the brand. Conclusions drawn by consumers concerning the characteristics of the brand enable to develop a positive attitude toward the brand. Toncar and Munch (2003) suggest that one likely explanation as to why figures may influence persuasion is because they tacitly assert the meaning of statements, implying rather than stating the claim’s intended conclusion, thus reducing counter-arguing. Such a theory lays support for the positive effect of figures on brand attitudes. The present findings suggest that managerially, figures can be strategically used to create the desired attitude toward the brand. Our results suggest that rhetorical pictures and rhetorical headlines are additional executive tools that advertisers can easily employ in ad creation to convince consumers. Consistent with the predictions of Toncar and Munch (2001), the results indicate that involvement has a moderating effect on the relationship between figures of rhetoric and the attitude toward the advertisement. Rhetorical ad is more likely to be appreciated by weakly-involved individuals. Furthermore figures induces fewer counterarguments and a more favorable attitude toward both the ad and brand than is reported by heavily-involved individuals.

**Limitations and future research**

This study was undertaken with a convenience sample of Tunisian university students, which may raise questions about the generalization of the findings to other populations (Sears 1986). However, prior literature on rhetorical figures contains a straight replication of college student results on a population of adult consumers (McQuarrie and Mick 1992). Further, a more realistic
ad setting should be used, taking the research outside of its laboratory setting. In a more natural processing environment, consumers’ responses may be different, where focus on the ad would (most likely) be voluntary. The single-exposure design might have influenced the results of our experiment. In real life, consumers are exposed to ads more than once in different editions of the same magazine or in different magazines within a certain time period. Repetition of rhetorical ads might facilitate processing and subsequently ad-liking, because it provides more opportunities to discover the ad’s intended messages.

The present research studies the influence of visual and verbal rhetoric on emotional and attitudinal responses to advertising. Future research may also examine the effect of the nature of a deviation (tropes/schemes) on advertising. In this regard, McQuarrie and Mick’s (1996) taxonomy of figures of speech based on regularity of deviation, and complexity, can be further developed to better understand their influence on consumer responses. This study met its objective of showing that visual and verbal rhetoric can, under specific conditions of ad exposure, produce selected positive outcomes. With this, we urge future researchers to integrate the most important moderating factors that determine when figures might be effective such as the need for cognition.

References