

# The Place of Advertising in Persuasion

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## Abstract

In Rhetoric, Aristotle states that there are as many types of speech as classes of listeners, establishing that they are only three but the appearance of a new agent, an audiovisual and interactive medium, able to overcome the contingency of both the orator's and the auditorium's impossibility to share the same physical space, as well as the existence of new classes of listeners – or new profiles of consumers, attending to Advertising's specific language – are transforming the relationship between these two elements of classic Rhetoric, allowing the transmission of images capable to change the classic speeches but also the character of the listener.

With this paper, our goal is to accomplish an improvement of the Aristotelian rhetorical model, motivated by the perception of audiovisual and interactive media's strong intervention in the definition of the contemporary persuasive speeches, among which is the advertising discourse.

**Keywords:** Advertising; Rhetoric; Genre; Social media; Image

## Introduction

The historical moment which was given to us to live has, among its many idiosyncrasies, two brands, closely related to each other, which we often take as a sign of our time: the presence of technique and, through it, the omnipresence of the image. The prominence that image enjoys at present as a shape (literal) of (and of) knowledge (and experience itself) benefits the disciplines that have better control of their mechanisms. Among them, the advertising stands out effortlessly because, at a time when communication sees its imagery size emphasized and, with it, a certain superficial character, fragmented, lacking in context, this discipline emphasizes the power of the image to communication and persuasion under the guise of a permanent seduction but also of dialogue. Consequently, advertising emerges in contemporary culture as a distinctly imagetic nature of speech, capable of affect all the others, vulnerable to the seductive power of the image. We started by talking about signs of the times and, in a way, such as Advertising, rhetoric was also born as a sign of the time and place that generated it: the Athens of the age of Pericles, had, in the use of the word, in the cult of orality, in the eloquence of the public discourse, the mark of true citizenship. However, as Antonio Fidalgo stated "today the public discourse is transmitted by the mass media, especially television, and the use of image in this speech becomes more and more vital"[1]. And from there emerges our problem. Or answer.

The thesis expressed in Rhetoric by Aristotle is that there are as many types of speeches as classes of listeners or number of auditoriums, allowing you to put in doubt if we consider the three Aristotelian genre - deliberative, judicial and epideictic - as separate forms that any speech of media society must adapt, or if we must consider Aristotle's Rhetoric as an argument treaty suitable to the old reality, therefore requiring an upgrade. We decided to follow the second way. The radical evolution that the mass media have been reflecting since the 20<sup>th</sup> century with particular emphasis on its second half, could not leave untouched any universe of human communication, including the persuasive discourse of advertising. It's not only the nature of persuasive speech that is changed by the progressive dematerialization of cultural forms operated by technology, it is the very essence and the speaker and audience positioning, of a transmitter and a fully redesigned receiver and, with them, inevitably, the message and a number of adjacent elements to this issue, including, notions of presence and absence, distance and proximity. In this line, the work of Harold Innis and,

then (most strikingly), Marshall McLuhan [2] becomes an essential reference (particularly with *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*) for contemporary thinking about mediatization and mediation, inspiring the concept proposed by Antonio Fidalgo and Ivone Ferreira [1] of a mediated Rhetoric, with which advances the possibility that the persuasive speech has been radically changed by the media, particularly due to the presence of some devices occupy in them - like the image - of undeniable potential.

In fact, the image has been proved to be profoundly effective in diluting the distance between speaker and audience, as well as its contribution to the credibility of products and services and the transformation of the discourse itself. The recognition of its power and distinct agency that catalyzes causes that, throughout the twentieth century and to our present day, suitable for media and languages such as Photography, Cinema, TV or Internet, Rhetoric has become noticeably visual and dialogic, reinforcing the persuasive eloquence of the word with the image seductive magnetism.

António Fidalgo and Ivone Ferreira are incisive on this issue, stressing that the appearance of a new agent, the medium, able to overcome the contingency of the speaker impossibility and audience share the same physical space, has forcefully change the relationship between these two elements of classical Rhetoric, allowing and facilitating the transmission of images and texts capable, by their nature, to change the old speeches, following the one-way model in a multimedia and dialogic model that we find, for excellence, in advertising in social media. Fidalgo defends, therefore, that, in large part, the difference between Greek Rhetoric and contemporary Rhetoric can be analyzed from different forms of democracy associated with one and the other: direct democracy in the case of classical Greece, where "citizens were called to examine the proposed laws, to hear different arguments about

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its usefulness or uselessness, and at the end to decide" (Idem: 10) and representative and mediatic democracies of the contemporary world that are establishing with the advent of social media, where citizens are called to vote for parties, professional politicians and their programs in a mitigated political participation [3-10].

Analyzed the three factors of Bakhtin's genre characterization that seem to directly establish more the need for the autonomy of rhetoric Advertising - whose communicational practices represent today a very particular pattern of utterances - it is time to allude to the first reason or most directly linked to the inadequacy of the Aristotelian rhetorical genres when it comes to realize the models, strategies and persuasive principles that make Advertising what it is today. This reason relates to the social-historical dimension to which Bakhtin links the notion of genre and, contemporaneously, has to do with the emergence of the consumer society, non-existent, as is known, in the purely Greek artisan economy, were there as no consumers in the current sense of the word. These occur only in the industrial society, with the abundance and competition, with the mass production of numerous equivalent goods, which makes the choice of the so called consumer increasingly difficult or problematic.

We now know that the solution has gone and continues to go through the advertised information and persuasion, which quickly became subject of a highly specialized and tending to be a creative professional activity that, at the same time, was claiming as a domain of increasing knowledge of interest to many scientific disciplines and, in particular, to the theorists of Marketing, Public Relations and Advertising, the latter, covering much of the first two. Hence the urgency to test if the classical Rhetoric still responds fully to the challenges of the current discourse of mass media advertising.

The rhetorical speech is a live speech of communication and, as such, mutates and reproduces itself, in the spoken relation, written or seen among individuals in a free society [3], in which the channel is no more orality, but mediatic discourses constituted by images, slogans, brief narratives, user generated contents or augmented reality that appear on a screen that can be a computer, a tablet, an iPhone, or even glasses, giving consumers (no more "listeners") the possibility to act, to dialogue with brands but also to create communities of followers which are then transferred to the offline World. According to Kotler [4], we are at the Marketing 3.0 era. Reached the Internet maturity, brands are oriented to the individual customer, skeptical and intelligent, participative and collaborative. It is the beginning of the individual age. The consumer's mind and heart win, the company wants to conquer his mind, making a "human spirit marketing" (Idem: 42) and turning him into a co-creator of their communication strategies.

Social networks play an important role here, turning any user in an opinion maker, at zero cost and more naturally than any paid Public Relations [11]. The word to mouth is able to trigger flash mobs with the participation of thousands of people, street manifestations without any Advertising expenses, or even to relaunch a brand. We are in the era of content generated by "neutral" users, where communication is elaborated jointly by the company and the customer, in what is now called Relationship or Engagement Marketing. In Portugal, the beer brand SuperBock's initiative "Our image is yours", in 2011, challenged young students, Design and Advertising professionals to pick up one of their letters, published on the Facebook page brand, and customize it. The best one was published and the author received an award. Equally important was the campaign "20 years of SIC," a private TV station in Portugal, that, in the first half of 2012, presented the challenge "The history of Portuguese television passes through you. (...) Do you accept

the challenge?". In the suggested script they don't call on famous people, but they challenge to show how SIC is present in ordinary people's daily routine.

The initiatives of these two brands are in line of what Kotler defends, because we are dealing with advertising co-creation strategies where brands seek to keep updated to give the consumer what he seeks: new experiences, exceeded expectations, wholesome brands. In this author point of view, consumers are the new brand's owners, revealing to be more and more informed, aware of a growing field of different technological devices. The prosumer takes time to believe in a brand's image, but expect it to keep its identity and that it is plausible. If the brand fails, the company can expect the consumer to trigger a riot on his blog, get it off his chest on a TV online, that refers to a consumer protection, that he makes public the company's setback and, finally, that he abandons the brand. It is a new era for Rhetoric, seen in every Advertising dialogic and imagetic discourse, putting together listeners (now, prosumers) and speakers (both agencies and consumers).

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