

A RHETORICAL APPROACH TO VISUAL DISCOURSE IN ADVERTISING

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SUMMARY

This investigation aims at bringing more clarity and distinction to the theoretical background against which one analyzes the rhetorical effects of advertising visual discourse. This rhetorical analysis of the *print ad* genre takes the reader on a cognitive trip of high complexity going through various exciting research fields, from which the author picks up valuable ideas that help her and the reader figure out the logic of visual discourse.

The first stop of this trip is made in the area of marketing communication, which helps define the purposes of a *print ad*. In order to understand the special traits that visual language has in the realm of advertising, we had to make clear for ourselves and the reader what are the defining traits of advertising as a genre, its discursive functions, its place in the economy of brand management, as well as its limits, given by its nature and scope. We have showed that it is necessary to give a more accurate theoretical account of the relationship between the diegetic content of a *print ad* and the semantic content it tries to attach to a brand name.

The second research area that was brought into the spotlight in our attempt to clarify the rhetorical effects of *print* advertising was the social critique of this phenomenon. We refined the current understanding on the effects

of advertising discourse by bringing together ideas that originated in two parallel research streams and giving a unitary account of the discursive effects of the frames an ad imposes on the (physical and social) reality it portrays. The value of this approach resides in its ability to give marketers and social critics the linguistic and conceptual tools for addressing the ethical problems of print advertising on various different levels: the level of the diegetic content, the brand meaning level or the third semantic level, whose existence I emphasize, the one that connects in different ways the two cognitive domains represented by the diegetic content and the brand. To explore this semantic connection between the two cognitive domains, we took another trip to the field of Cognitive Linguistics.

In the light of Blending Theory advanced by Mark Turner and Gilles Fauconnier, we looked at *print ads* as discursive expressions of blended mental spaces. The explanations provided by Blending Theory on the semantic transfer that occurs between the cognitive domains that form a blend and the resulting blended space helped us follow more accurately the changes in meaning that the brand, as well as the elements of the diegetic content, suffer while participating in the discursive constitution of a *print ad*.

We have managed to open the dialogue between different research streams and we hope that this open road can increase the clarity and distinction of any intelligent discussion regarding what ads do from a rhetorical point of view.