



The Role and Usage of Visual Rhetoric in Advertising

Fatma Nazlı Köksal, Eastern Mediterranean University, Turkey

Abstract

With the starting of the usage of advertising as an influence and persuasion tool in mass communication, the role of advertisement becomes more important and advertisers use different persuasion techniques to place advertising messages to the mind of their target audiences. In this process, visual elements become important tools of advertisements and especially with using visual figures as rhetorical devices, advertisers try to communicate much more accurately and effectively. Therefore, the present study will focus on the role and usage of visual rhetoric in print advertising and it will show the analysis of two print advertisements which use the artwork images as a rhetorical figure.

Keywords: print advertising, visual rhetoric, artwork images

Introduction

Advertising and Visual Rhetoric

In recent years, with the increase of the variety of product and consumer awareness, marketing activities have increased dramatically and the role of advertisements becomes more important. When we look at the historical background of advertisements, we see that initially the aim was to inform people about any product or service. However, today the aim of advertisements which are used as an influence and persuasion tool in mass communication is to create the desired changes in behaviors of target market and by this way to sell the product. For this purpose, advertisers try to use various persuasion techniques and one of them is create a rhetorical language by using the effectiveness of visualization. Therefore, this study explores the meta-language of advertisement exposed through the case of visual rhetoric and it shows the analysis of two print advertisements which use the images of artworks as a visual rhetorical item.

With the starting of the usage of advertisements to convince the consumers, and the increasing role of visual communication in this process, direct to the advertisers for the usage of the power of visualization. “When Aristo defines the five senses approximately 2500 years ago, the first thing he had said was vision. After 2500 years, we can say that vision has been replaced by visuality. Visuality perceived as a form, shade, color, saturation, depth, motion, but all of them are coordinated in brain.” (Translation: F.N.K., Batı, p. 34). All of these items come together in advertising design and create a connotative meaning in the mind of receivers. However, although the product does not have any meaning on its own, the meaning interchange created by the advertisers through visual figures makes the product meaningful for the consumers. “In the process of signification, the product which is being advertised replaced with an image or emotion, and it appropriates the meaning of this image or emotion to itself.” (Translation: F.N.K., Batı, p264). Therefore, advertisers use visual rhetorical figures as a way of expression to aestheticize the visuality and by this way they increase the effectiveness of the process of meaning exchange and reinforce their communication process. “Traditionally, rhetoric was considered ‘the exclusive province of verbal language’ (Kenney and Scott, 2003, p19) where presentation of an argument was manipulated so as to be most impacting.” (Bulmer & Oliver, 2006, p.55). However, today every kind of figurative element

that is realized by visual text is also accepted as a kind rhetoric and it is called as a “visual rhetoric”.

“Visual rhetoric can be described as a form of communication that uses images for creating meaning or constructing an argument. Hence, an analysis of visual rhetoric considers how images work alone and collaborate with other elements to create an argument designed for moving a specific audience.” Bulmer & Oliver (2006, p.55)

From the perspective of these two definitions, the close relationship between the advertisement and visual rhetoric, and the requirement of advertisement to the persuasive language which is constructed by rhetorical figures is clearly seen. Because, the aim of advertisement is to present the most persuasive selling message to the right prospect, the usage of visual rhetorical figures by advertisers for enhances the persuasive expression of advertisement is not a random situation.

Furthermore, one of the visual rhetorical figure is using the artwork images in advertisements. “Art and advertising exchange forms of expression one with the other.” (Hetsroni, 2005, p.59), and advertisers “(...) transfer of cultural, social and aesthetic value from the appropriated art work to the advertised product.” (Lucian, 2004, p.8). By this way, they mask their selling purpose and they added an additional value to their product which comes from work of art.

Analysis

Usage of Artwork Images in Visual Rhetoric

Especially well known artwork image, such as “Mona Lisa has been used to sell almost anything, from hair-dye to alcoholic beverages (...).” (Gombrich, 1989, p.6). For example, Shop&Miles credit card uses the artwork images, Mona Lisa, for advertise its campaign and collaboration with Turkish Airlines.

Appropriation and quotation of painting



Figure 1a. Leonardo da Vinci, *Mona Lisa*,
Musee du Louvre, Paris, 1503-1506

Figure 1b. Advertisement for
Garanti Bank, Shop&Miles credit
card, by Alametifarika Advertising
Agency, 2004

“The advertisement transfer da Vinci’s painting from its original environment (the museum) to a new location, which loads it with a new commercial meaning.” (Hetsroni, 2005, p.64). In the ad, there is both appropriation and quotation of painting but, there are several changes have been made to the original of artwork image according to purposes of the message of advertisement.

First of all, in terms of the usage of artwork images in advertising, according to researches:

“A formal relationship between the work of art and the product can only be found in %8 of the cases. However, in 42% a semantic relationship was found. This leads to the assumption that a connection is mainly made through the content of a work of art rather than through its form.” (Dietzman, 2008, p. 25)

In Figure 1 a/b, we see the semantic relationship between work of art and advertisement. Advertisers transfer the meaning of Mona Lisa to the advertised product and this meaning

exchange constitute a meta-language for advertisement. Here, the prestige of da Vinci's work is given to the product which is advertised and by this way people who use this product gain a status. Because, "prestige signifies status. Advertising aim to make consumers believe that by consuming prestigious products they enhance their self-esteem, communicate themselves to others as people who are socially desirable, and gain a membership in respected clubs (Deeter, Schmelz, et.al., 2000; Garfein 1989)." (Hetsroni, 2005 p.64)

In this advertisement, there is both visual and verbal text. The portrait of Mona Lisa and plane of Turkish Airlines represent the visual figures and written text is used as a supporter of the semantic composition of visual items.

This artwork of Leonardo da Vinci is a portrait and during the process of portray, model should stand without moving according to request of painter. Already in the original picture, the figure of Mona Lisa is directly looking to the painter, and she is being viewed. However, in the advertisement she changed her view direction and her eyes are looking to the plane. The plane is the viewed and Mona Lisa is the viewer. Here, the message is that because of the attractiveness of the campaign which is advertised, even Mona Lisa, as a portrait wants to look at the plane of Turkish Airlines.

Furthermore, in this advertisement visuality is supported by verbal text and it creates a reference for product which is advertised. Text says that:

"Shop&miles.the original

Started the free flight trend

Attracted considerable interest from the frequency flying people

Recently, the campaign and points were attempted to be imitated

In the last 4 years, it is inimitable with its speciality which makes you win while you are flying." (Translation: F.N.K.)

In the main headline the word of “the original” represent the uniqueness of Mona Lisa and “in art, it is the aura of ‘one original’ that makes people interested (...) (Imesch 2006, p. 16)”. (Dietzmann, 2008, p.11) In this process, advertisers transfer the originality of Mona Lisa to the advertised product. In the continuous part of the text, the phrase of “attempted to be imitated” and the word of “inimitable” create a parallel relationship between the work of art and product. The message of advertisement is clear: although there are many reproduction of Mona Lisa, there is one original and it is still unique. There are many reproductions of this product, but it still continuous to be unique, too. Therefore, in this advertisement both visual power and semantic structure of Mona Lisa is supported by verbal text and all of these figures create a rhetorical expression.

Another example for the using of artwork images of da Vinci which is called “Last Supper” as rhetorical item is the advertisement against the dog abandonment by International Organization for Animal Protection (IPA).

Appropriation and Quotation of Painting



Figure 2a. Leonardo da Vinci, *Last Supper*, Maris delle Grazie, Milan, 1495-1498



Figure 2b. Advertisement Against Dog Santa Abandonment by Remember + Milan advertising agency, 2008

This fresco which is drawn to the wall of Santa Maria delle Grazie during 1495-1498 years, describes the moment of betrayal of Jesus. In this artwork, Jesus and his 12 apostles sit four different locations in group of threes behind a long dining table, and this sequence of them remind a theatrical posture, as if they know that people are looking them. In this picture, “Leonardo concentrated on the moment when Jesus sits down with his disciples and declares: ‘verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me’”. (Zöllner, 2000, p.50) In the artwork,

the impact and confusion of the declare of Jesus is described both in facial and body expression of each apostle. Jesus is also drawn with his award for the betrayal of him.

Last supper is the second best known artwork of da Vinci and again both the visuality and story of his artwork is used by advertisers to give the desired message. In the ad, the figure of Isa and his apostles replaced with dogs, but only Judas stay as a human figure. Their stand positions are exactly same with the original artwork.

Also, in original artwork Jesus sits in the middle of his apostles and this position represents to his guiding feature. In the ad, the figure of Jesus is replaced with a sheepdog which represents the same role. So, the selection of the kind of dog is not a random situation.

Furthermore, in this advertisement visual figures are supported by verbal text, like the Figure 1b, *Mona Lisa*. The headline is “UNO DI VOI CI TRADIRA, 150.000 volte l’ anno” which is centered and on the top of the figure of dog which represent the Jesus, and it means that “one of you betray to us, 150.000 in a year.” Here Judas (as a betrayer) represents whole people who abandon the dogs and so, the message of advertisement is that although people seem like friendly to the dogs, in fact, again they who betray to the dogs.

In addition to these, the aim of advertisements to give the right message to the target audiences and in this point, the choosing of the artwork for appropriation is critical. Because, during the appropriation process, “(...) companies also tried to reach the higher educated people who are interested in the arts (high involvement with arts) to recognize and appreciate their products.” (Dietzman, 2008, pp. 33-34) Therefore, the quotes of figures from artwork require a pre-establish knowledge in the mind of audiences to give the message accurately and effectively. (Dietzman, 2008, p. 37) However, sometimes the opposite situation can occur. “To reach target groups have only little or no interest in the art world as well as less educated people, art can still be appropriated. It just has to be either less dominant, serving mainly decorative purposes or be world famous like e.g. the “*Mona Lisa*.” (Dietzman, 2008, p.37)

Conclusion

In conclusion, with the increase of the variety of product, the physical differences between them began to disappear and they started to resemble each other. This situation enhances the

role and importance of advertisements as a persuasive communicational tool, and advertisers start to add an additional value to themselves and they mask their selling message. In this point, advertisers use some persuasion techniques and one of them is using the visual rhetoric in their communicational process.

This study emphasizes the role of visual rhetoric as one of the persuasion technique in advertising communication and it shows the usage of it on two different print advertisements one including social content. These advertisements use the well known artwork images as a visual rhetorical item for inspiring and influencing the consumers. They use both aesthetical and semantic structure and by this way they constitute a visual rhetorical expression. Also, the aim of the rhetoric is already to implement aesthetical expression to persuade the audiences effectively, so the usage of artwork images in advertisement is the revelation of the main idea which already in artwork. In this point, the usage of artwork images in advertising to create a visual rhetorical language can be an advantage for advertisers.

As a recommendation future research can focus on the effect of the usage of visual rhetoric in advertising on the audiences, it also may include the comparison of the advertisements which are using visual rhetoric with the ones which don't.



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