Chapter 3
Rhetoric of Seduction:
From an Iconocratic Advertising to a Tautological Culture

Paulo M. Barroso
Higher School of Education – Viseu, Portugal

ABSTRACT

Contemporary Western and industrialized societies have a profusion of messages with seductive and appealing meanings. Signs and images are used in advertising. They surround us to our consumption, satisfaction, pleasure, comfort, happiness, or social success. Their meanings comprise epidictic and apodictic messages of seduction. This chapter is about techniques of persuasion and effective communication through signs and images of advertising. Following a reflexive methodology, based on a theoretical research, the main objective is to understand how these techniques are more and more improved and able to develop new visual and popular forms of life, demonstrating that seduction is all about signs and images, i.e. it is a semiosis process of being able to send messages and read them accordingly.

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary societies, mainly in the Western and industrialized ones, globalization increases, on the one hand, the quantity and variety of products, including the range of people's options to satisfy psychological and material needs (i.e. commodities, services, and brands) and, on the other hand, messages with seductive and appealing meanings, i.e. signs and images used in advertising that surround us relating these products to our consumption, satisfaction, pleasure, comfort, happiness, or social success. According to this initial and general characterization, which defines a neo-Dionysian or *Carpe diem* hedonistic culture mainly interested in the ephemeral pleasure and the usufruct of immediate satisfaction, what is the role of seduction? Considering the profusion of products and messages, Jean Baudrillard designates it the consumer society, i.e. the great emphasis upon things and the fantastic conspicuousness of consumption and abundance which represents a mutation in the ecology of the human species (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 50).

Such profusion leads to the mass, unconscious, and conspicuous consumption, which apparently fulfils the individual self-realization: the expectation to achieve happiness and social success as a result of advertising claims and people involved in consumption. Baudrillard criticizes the consumer society because it produces signs and images of consumption and it consequently causes both a plethora and a profound transformation of the socio-cultural ecosystem. Regarding this mass, unconscious, and conspicuous consumption, Thorstein Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class* points out the importance of the means of communication and the mobility of the population to the exposure of the "individual to the observation of many people" (Veblen, 2007, p. 60). However, globalization also makes these products basically uniform, since the differences between them are diluted by the massiveness of global market. In essence, all products (belonging to the same family of goods for immediate consumption, regardless their brands) look the same or uniform either in their appearance (the packaging, including the message issued) or regarding their intrinsic properties.

Consequently, the present era seems propitious to effective language strategies be credible and pretentious (have truth pretentions), i.e. be used in such a manner to create a false appearance of great importance or worth. These speeches are epidictic and apodictic messages of seduction; they are properly advertising speeches. Therefore, the present era seems also auspicious to advertising, because it is an occasion to practice techniques of persuasion and effective communication which are able to differentiate what is uniform and uniformize what is different. Improved techniques in advertising are used for the development of new visual and popular forms of life. It is no longer sufficient to show merely the product; more effective is to use signs and images of seduction because "seduction is all about signs", i.e. it is "about being able to send them and read them" (Greene, 2003, p. 139).

Persuasion and seduction are two common, similar and old forms or abilities of communication. Both aim to influence people to do what is required, i.e. to get people to accept an action or a thought that they might not have otherwise accepted: persuasion is the ability to change someone's beliefs, attitudes, behaviors and actions about something through effective arguments; seduction goes further, it is the ability to lead astray by false or fallacious persuasion, usually by appealing to sexual desires, needs, and emotions (e.g. using young and attractive women in TV commercials to sell any product for immediate consumption). Seduction lies in affections, not in reasons. Advertising messages are more emotional than rational, i.e. they are designed for passionate reactions and not for intellectual impact, because it is easier to persuade through emotions (pathos) that through reasons (logos). However, while persuasion is the attempt to change one's mind, seduction is the more effective and persuasive attempt to do it through the use of a sexual appealing.

In an increasingly narcissistic and hedonistic "consumer society", advertising becomes a powerful agent of seduction. The free and global market of mass-production and mass-consumption, industrialization and technology also foster individualism and neo-Dionysian hedonism powered by seduction, spectacle, and immediate pleasure (Barroso, 2014, p. 371).

As an object of study, seduction in advertising is not (and cannot be) independent from the rhetorical strategies of public discourse which become, in this way, seductive. Rhetoric (from the Greek *retoriké*, the art of discourse) is a technique, an art, a form or mode of enunciating or saying. This mode improves the effect of the message, the influence of what is actually enunciated or said. This ability is intended by the emitter to persuade or motivate the receivers, because saying in a more convincing way, choosing carefully the best signs (words or images) is as much or more important than what is even said (the content). As a powerful technique or tool to influence or to persuade, the use of rhetoric in advertising is a strategic communication, using language effectively to please and to persuade people through public

Related Content

Country-of-Origin Effect and Digital Marketing: Evaluating Current and Future of Marketing
Fatih Pinarbasi (2023). *Origin and Branding in International Market Entry Processes (pp. 117-137).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/country-of-origin-effect-and-digital-marketing/330191

An Assessment of the Impact that Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction Possess on Customer Loyalty in Internet Banking
Tahir Iqbal (2020). *International Journal of Online Marketing (pp. 58-71).*
www.irma-international.org/article/an-assessment-of-the-impact-that-service-quality-and-customer-satisfaction-possess-on-customer-loyalty-in-internet-banking/243468

Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction in Online Banking
Vijayalakshmi Dharmavaramand Rajyalakshmi Nittala (2018). *International Journal of Online Marketing (pp. 45-56).*
www.irma-international.org/article/service-quality-and-customer-satisfaction-in-online-banking/203675

Impact of Social Media Marketing Activities on Purchase Intentions via Customer Equity Drivers: An Empirical Case Study on Smartphone Brands
Radhika Aggarwaland Sanjiv Mittal (2022). *International Journal of Online Marketing (pp. 1-19).*
www.irma-international.org/article/impact-of-social-media-marketing-activities-on-purchase-intentions-via-customer-equity-drivers/299402

The Role of Website Visual Design in Predicting Consumers' Purchase Intentions: An Empirical Study in a B2C Online Environment
Abubaker A AB Shaouf (2020). *International Journal of Online Marketing (pp. 1-17).*
www.irma-international.org/article/the-role-of-website-visual-design-in-predicting-consumers-purchase-intentions/263043