

USE OF HYPERBOLES IN ADVERTISING EFFECTIVENESS

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Abstract: *The use of rhetorical figures in advertising communication is more than obvious; their powerful ability of representation opens an easy way to perception and understanding for the masses. However, research in this area is relatively limited in the communication field, as it intersects literature, psychology and communication models. One type of visual and textual figure that has been little analysed, yet enjoys wide popularity in today's advertisement production, is hyperbole. Portraying people, products, and services in ways that far exceed their capability is a common strategy used to gain attention, generate humour, and underline product qualities. However, the little analysis and understanding of visual hyperboles has led researchers and consumers to dismiss this popular figure as an instance of advertising's exaggerated or false praise. Therefore this study is aimed to make important distinctions among these terms, analyse types of hyperboles used in commercial communication. Based on comparative analysis, we will try to show how and why hyperbolic emphasised ads produce more ad and content liking than non-hyperbolic ads. As a case study we will take into consideration the way hyperbole is used in alimentary and gustative imaginary of advertising production and effectiveness. Two visual advertisements (one containing hyperboles and one without hyperboles) will be qualitatively analysed (Hermeneutical analysis of advertising symbols) and focus group results will be compared. The research is aimed to emphasis on the powerful representative role of hyper-bolas in promoting alimentary related products and their advertising effectiveness. However, our preliminary analysis suggests that subjects measuring high in advertising skepticism and those who fail to comprehend the figurative nature of the hyperboles used respond more negatively toward the ads. Various causes of flawed perception of the message will be suggested briefly, as the question remains debatable: does the use of hyperboles fall short, meet or exceed subjects' expectation. Is hyperbole used in advertising as a visual puffery or does it appeal to more?*

Keywords: *hyperbole, advertising, alimentary, symbol*

1. PURPOSE

This paper investigates one of the most common used figures of speech in the persuasive context of the advertising discourse. We will not particularly emphasis on the persuasive aspects of the advertisements, but rather on the possible impact of using hyperboles as a communication tool. Our research will be developed by semiotically interpreting a hyperbolised printed ad and qualitatively analysing the results of two focus groups conducted in the spring of 2015.

2. METHODOLOGY

The objectives of this paper are to investigate:
a. the role of hyperboles in advertising's discourse and their influence in visual rhetorics; b. some of the possible effects a hyperbole can produce to it's consumers; c. the effectiveness it has in promoting an advertised product. By means of a semiotic analysis and the results of a qualitative research

(two focus groups, each with twelve respondents), we will capture the correspondent attributes emerged from the ads. The purpose of our analysis is mainly to understand how a hyperbole works and what are its main features as a communication tool. Assuming that a rhetorical figure, such as hyperbola, can be approached as a sharp-witted arrangement of words, images or meanings, meant to produce a specific effect on an audience, we will try to underline the specific tone of hyperboles in advertisements, its high impact on consumers and possible threats.

3. BACKGROUND

As Edward F. McQuarri (1993:309-313) states, "A rhetorical figure can be defined as an artful deviation in the form taken by a statement". Therefore, a figure of speech can be explained as an sharp-witted arrangement of words, images or meanings meant to produce a specific effect on an audience. Since Aristotle's work, dozens of figures

have been recorded and listed, starting from the familiar ones (rhyme, pun), to the most frequent used (metaphor, hyperbole), and to the less used (*antimetabole*). Despite the persistent presence of rhetorical figures in print advertisements and, even more present in online advertising, their role and outcome into advertising theory and research has been somehow minimal. Nowadays their use is more and more linked to a certain kind of pictorial argumentation, namely *visual tropology* that enables viewer's understanding and decoding.

One type of visual device that has been somehow neglected, yet enjoys wide popularity in today's ads, is hyperbole. Outlining people, products, and objects in ways that far exceed their abilities, using hyperboles in an advertising discourse is a common strategy used to capture attention, insert humour in an argumentative discourse, and emphasise emotions or product attributes. However, a lack of understanding of visual hyperboles has led some researchers and consumers to dismiss this popular figure as "an instance of advertising puffery".

However, to argue in favour of this research, we should take into consideration that several works have been accounted for the existence of visual communication (e.g. Finnegan, 2001; Birdsell and Groarke, 2007; Kjeldsen, 2007; Groarke, 2009) and more and more researchers see both as possible and beneficial to consider pictures and other sample of visual communication as argumentation. Our paper is in accordance with Professor J.E. Kjeldsen (2001:132-157) view that

visual argumentation is designated by an enthymematic process in which the visuals function as indicators that evoke intended meanings, premises and lines of reasoning.

This function becomes possible, as Jens E. Kjeldsen (2010) arguments, because an argument, whether visual or verbal, is not a text, or "a thing to be looked for, but rather a concept people use, a perspective they take" (Brockriede 1992).

Approaching advertising in this context, from a structural-linguistic perspective, we observe that semiotic analysis are often made on the intrinsic description and analysis of the message, which is considered to be in itself the carrier of means, being the prior container of the significance. This analysis has the role of clearing the intentional meaning of the advertising message, but it is incomplete if it lacks the taking into account of the social and cultural context in which the communication takes place. Because advertising is

a contextual form of communication, a great role is held by its public, who not only receives and decodes the message, but also – as we are going to reveal later on – establishes a personal meaning.

Pictures, I suggest, argue primarily by means of context and condensation. They offer a rhetorical enthymematic process where something is omitted, and, as a consequence, the spectator has to provide the unspoken premises. Rational condensation in pictures, then, is the visual counterpart of verbal argumentation. However, the spectator needs certain directions to be able to (re)construct the arguments, i.e. some cognitive schemes to make use of. (Kjeldsen, 2010).

In the advertisements' discourse, the viewer's (re)assembling of arguments is enabled through visual tropes and figures. Metaphor and metonymy, juxtaposing and hyperbole, ellipsis and contrasts are the most common variety of visual argumentation (e.g. Kjeldsen, 2000, 2008; McQuarrie & Mick, 2003; Forceville, 2006).

As a primary form of its activity, the informative dimension of the advertising message has, for the first time, awakened the public's interest in consumption and the objects that surround it. In its most common sense, advertising represents a discursive presence aimed at its public. This means: drawing attention towards something with a double iconic meaning: both visual and textual; talking up a material, social or cultural benefice, that up to this point was not revealed. It's exactly because of this, that advertising has become today such a huge argumentative system that uses both visual and textual rhetorics and operates at a large social scale. Assuming that argumentation is a communicative action, we will approach advertising as a communicative compound which is designed, performed, evoked, and must be understood in a rhetorical context by its participants.

4. VISUAL RHETORICS AND THE USE OF HYPERBOLES IN ADVERTISEMENTS

Recently, more theorists have started to focus their attention on the effects of the visual components of advertising such as visual hyperbole (Callister and Stern, 2007) and visual metaphor (McQuarrie and Phillips, 2005) stating that both the verbal and visual information presented in an advertisement can impact the way an advertising message is processed and perceived by the viewer.



Fig.1 Hamburger “extra big” advertisement

Consider the hamburger ad in Figure 1. This ad deviates from realistic representation in ads (such as ordinary products and their typical uses) by showing an augmented reality juxtaposed on a realistic character. The huge opened mouth painted on the character’s face, over his lips, chin and neck, creates an optical (and intended designed) illusion, focusing viewers’ attention on this central point. From the perspective of Daniel Berlyne (1971:3-12), like an aesthetic object, a rhetorical device, such as a hyperbole, offers a means to make what is known, unknown and the natural, unnatural. The deviation is, in this case, a way to create what the researchers of the society of consumption call contextual dissonance. Thus, rhetoric dissonance could explain the way in which certain types of textual structures, metaphors for example, can produce displacements of meaning in advertising texts.

Nonetheless, this is exactly how an image “talks” to us (Kjeldsen, 2007:124-132); they argue primarily by considering context (i.e food, hunger, “bigger hamburger for same price” argument) and condensation. Kjeldsen defines this condensation as a rhetorical enthymematic process where something is intentionally excluded, and, as a consequence, the viewer has to come up with the unspoken premises. “Rational condensation in pictures, then, is the visual counterpart of verbal argumentation” (Kjeldsen, 2007). However, the viewer needs certain hints to be able to (re)build the arguments, some cognitive schemes to rely on. Visual structures, like all rhetorical figures, are

essentially built on the correlation of one thing with another (McQuarri and Mick, 1993).

Following our argumentation, Kjeldsen argues that a visual figure must present two elements on a printed page, as there are three possible ways to perform visual argumentation. The easiest way is to juxtapose two image elements side by side; this is how a comparison is created. A more complex structure involves merging two image elements together, such as in the hamburger ad shown in Figure 1, where an oversized body painting is fused with other normal body parts; this method creates metaphors and hyperboles. The third and most elaborate way to present two image elements is to have one replace the other in such a way that the present image calls to mind the absent image and its role. In our advertisement, the oversized mouth replaced the mouth of the character pointing out his appetite and desire for the product. Furthermore, the focus group results will clarify more on the impact of the image shift.

As our focus group will show, consumers are unlikely to consider the ad as a blunder ; they have seen this type of communication tool used in advertisements before. We therefore suggest that this image (the oversized moth) is in fact a visual rhetorical figure, not significantly different from the verbal epithet or hyperbole. Consequently, although many different interpretations of the ad are possible, most are likely to rest on positive similarities between the advertised food (the extra big hamburger) and hunger (a natural need)

(Phillips, 1997; Tanaka, 1994): bigger product (big mouth), delicious (opened big mouth with visible teeth, tongue and uvula), and hunger as a familiar feeling (big opened mouth with teeth painted on someone's face, chin and neck). As researchers show, this is because consumers know that they should look for similarities when they encounter a visual template of this kind.

Such visual rhetorical figures in advertisements, have appeared with increasing frequency over the past 50 years (Phillips and McQuarrie, 2003) with the purpose of drawing attention or emphasising on the advertised product. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) defines puffery as a

term frequently used to denote the exaggerations reasonably to be expected of a seller as to the degree of quality of his product, the truth or falsity of which cannot be precisely determined. (DeFrancis, 2004:10-12).

The exaggerated replacement of a human mouth in Figure 1 is so beyond belief that a logical mind would not take the claim seriously, but may influence his attention as the image can be appreciated for other reasons (aesthetically, contextually etc.). Advertisers use puffery - exaggeration and hyperboles - to get people's attention and make their message notable. Because the claims in advertising puffery are obviously amplified, and because exaggeration works to get people's attention, puffery is an accepted and highly used advertising technique.

4.1 Hyperboles' effectiveness. Even if, at a discursive level we are dealing only with the text-image couple, the broad spectrum of organisational forms of the rhetorical figures in advertisements, such as using hyperboles, is based mainly on the great availability/flexibility of each component to express its contents in diverse forms. Even when the lexical level is concerned, the advertising discourse seems not to be bound by any rules. Its openness toward increasingly more varied categories of terms, its propensity towards polysemy, insinuation and reading between the lines make advertising a contemporary discourse of great originality and dynamism. Moreover, that which linguists call deviations from the rules of language (meta-plastic or onomatopoeic changes of words) have come to be seen as distinctive traits of this kind of discourse. The exaggeration of the size (Extra Big hamburger), the adding of sounds (Mirindaaaaa!, Bambuchaaa!), using onomatopoeic formations (Galina Blanca, bul-bul!, Hei Psst Cichi

Cichi, Kltz Pmz Aahh!), replacing sounds or mixing words (Méganemaipomenit = Mégane + nemaipomenit - catchphrase in the Romanian commercial for Renault Megane, a mix between the name of the product and the word nemaipomenit - en. amazing), are commonplace techniques for generating the advertising characteristic fervent discourse.

From a pragmatic perspective, advertising visual argumentation are more evocative than explicit; they don't communicate raw information but a meaning and rarely talk about a direct benefit. Most often the visual is generated as a fusion between a benefit, an offered value and a sensory fact or promise highlighted in a visual way. A slogan like *Sans parfum, la peau est muette* (en. Without perfume the skin is mute) creates an entire synaesthetic interpretation (in Figure 1: hunger-big appetite-big food), the accommodation to the product being facilitated once we familiarise ourselves with it on a sensory level.

In this regard, after the shock effect usually generated by hyperboles, rhetorical figures often lead to what Roland Barthes called "the pleasure of the text" - a reward that comes from an intelligent information processing of a sequence of signs. The same premise underlies Roland Barthes in his "Rhetoric of the image" (1964), where two levels of image analysis, simultaneously perceived by the human eye, are presented: the *denotative* level, which is purely theoretical for image analysis, as it is hard to conceive an image without connotations. When referring to the "fashion system" for example, Barthes identifies a specific language of combinations between colours and dimensions, which provides the subject with an additional meaning through the way in which it is presented. On the other hand Barthes describes the symbolic level, *of connotation* - at which the reading of the visual image varies according to the receiver and the codes which he associates with the message. The latter, emerges at the interpretation level, where the perceptive intelligence of the subject activates according to the socio-cultural meanings. The denotative layer plays a very important part as it represents the foundation for the connotative dimension. This action of processing visual rhetorical figures corresponds to Daniel Berlyne's argument (1971:56) which states that the deviation of interpretation from the commonly understood meaning can generate the pleasant feeling of inspiration and even profound understanding. The rewards of meaning deviation suggest thus that the figurative language of advertising, by comparison

to literary language, should produce a more positive attitude; advertising texts and images are liked, referred to and remembered more easily.

On the other hand, by using hyperboles in the advertising discourse, the message sent to the viewer can have transformational effects. Transformational advertising, as defined by William Wells (1984:638-643), is effective by

developing associations with the brand use experience that transforms that experience into something different than it would be in the absence of the advertising ...

“transformational advertising creates, alters, or intensifies feelings” (Aaker and Stayman, 1992:239) and attempts to move the consumer emotionally to a point of greater product acceptance (Cutler *et al.*, 2000). In that respect, transformational advertising enhance mostly hedonic and symbolic benefits but it does not appear to affect evaluations of functional benefits or the final process of product choice, as our focus group will outline.

5. SEMIOTIC FOCUS GROUP ANALYSIS

5.1. Methodology and theoretical background.

So far only a few theorists (Corbett, 1990; McQuarrie and Mick, 1999; Morgan and Reichert, 1999; McQuarrie and Mick, 2003a; McQuarrie and Phillips, 2005) have applied visual rhetoric analysis as an interpretative theory in advertising research. Nevertheless, Phillips and McQuarrie (2002) show that metaphors and hyperbole, which are figurative expressions that imply visual or verbal intentionally exaggerated statements, appear in 17.3% of advertisement pictures and 44% of headlines and have increased steadily since the 1960s.

More recently, Callister and Stern (2007) looked at the use of visual hyperbole as an engaging form of exaggeration in advertising, emphasising people’s need for alternate, hyper or augmented realities. To do so, people focus on the description of the rhetorical figures present in ads and try to (re)build the argumentation. The focus group we conducted followed this hypothesis: Like rhetoric analysis, semiotic analysis can also be used by the researcher to assess the effects of images and symbols (McQuarrie and Mick, 2002). As such, “they make relatively simple and straightforward assumptions about the human system, concentrating instead on the development of elaborated structures that can be used to differentiate types of visual content in

advertisements” (McQuarrie and Mick, 2003b:192). A qualitative interpretation (by using semiotic analysis) of the gathered data was operated.

5.2 Data Collection. In addition to these theoretical findings we supplemented our study with an actual focus group evaluation. Two groups of 12 people, both male and female, age between 18 and over 50, were group interviewed after visualising an advertising poster where a visual hyperbola was used (Figure 1). After gathering the open answers regarding “what does the image depicted in the ad represent to them”, in the second section, an individual questionnaire with multiple choice answers was applied to each of them.

The participants were asked to answer questions relevant to the presented ad. The questions required subjects to describe how they interpreted the ad’s visual discourse, what is its focus point, appreciate the ad’s effectiveness at a personal level and also how the rhetorical figure made them feel. Subjects were also asked to identify the rhetorical figure used in the ad and answer freely about it’s commercial intentions.

5.3 Viewers’ expectations and evaluation.

The focus group method was selected as it is known for its stimulative effect; listening to others’ verbalised opinion stimulates memories, ideas, and experiences in participants. As a result, two focus group discussions (each with 12 participants, both male 40% and female 60%) were conducted in order to underline shared understanding and common views related to Figure 1 ad. Bringing together all the opinion that an individual makes in order can enable the researcher to determine whether their view changes in the course of discussion and, if so, further examination of the transcript may reveal which contributions by other focus group members brought about the change. After ten minutes of exposure to the selected ad, each participant was asked to interpret the visual message. Interactions between group members were encouraged. The answers of the participants were only recorded without giving any direction to what kind of answer is correct or not.

Recording the participants’ answers shows that one of our hypothesis is confirmed. A majority of 78% recognised the image as an advertisement that uses exaggeration as a communication tool. Moreover, even if they recognised the ad as a puffery, consumers did not consider the ad as inaccurate and were not bothered by its visual representation; Each one of them confirmed that they have seen this type of communication tool used in advertisements before and they do not

believe it to fall under true/false criteria. Therefore, we suggest that this image (the oversized moth) was recognised by the participants as visual communication, and is in fact a visual rhetorical figure, not significantly different from the verbal epithet or hyperbole. When asked if this image “tells them something”, participants recognised discursive elements such as the visual representation of hunger, the exaggerated painting and the greedy posture of the character’s body. Comments were made over the link between the exaggerated representation and the promoted public, only 62% of the participants linking hunger to the oversized mouth and the extra large hamburger presented in the upper right corner. As a communication technique, through bodily distortion, the hyperbole creates an argument based on a symptomatic argument scheme, claiming that the hamburger belongs to the categories of big things:

Claim: Buy this hamburger
 Ground1: It is extra big
 Warrant: You should buy big hamburgers.

One interesting observation was made by a male (age 18-24) who did not recognise the advertised product and considered the exaggerated image to cloud the general message. "I don't really know what it represents, but I wouldn't think of a hamburger. It's too much". This is recognised by Jens Kjeldsen (2012) as one of the possible threats a rhetorical figure can bring to an argument, meaning the setting aside the prior message (advertising a bigger hamburger). The fact that a hyperbole is capable of undermining the general discursive claim can be associated with what Ketelaar (2008) called “the openness” of an ad. Such open ads have the common characteristic that viewers are not directly pointed towards a certain interpretation, and that the presence of rhetorical figures are one of five antecedents rendering an advertisement more open; the others being presence of a prominent visual, absence of the

product, absence of verbal anchoring, and a low level of brand anchoring. However, the focus group discussions underlined that, in general, precisely because of the presence of a visual rhetorical figure and its transformational effect, one can delimit possible interpretations, guiding the viewer’s reconstruction of the argument in a constructed context.

“I don’t see the product, but I can feel the hunger” (female, age 24). This answer, confirmed by most participants, is rooted in hyperbole’s sensory effect; it creates an entire synaesthetic interpretation (hunger-big appetite-big food), the accommodation to the product being facilitated once the viewer is familiarised with its message on a sensory level. In that respect, the transformational effect of the advertisement enhanced in our participants mostly hedonic and symbolic meanings without affecting the evaluation of functional benefits. These type of arguments may be relatively easy to decode by the viewer because of their familiarity, presuming of course that the viewer’s attention has been caught.

5.4 Questionnaire interpretation and discussion. In the second part a number of 6 multiple choice questions and one open answer question were given as part of the individual interview. Participants were asked to answer based on their opinion and the shared points of view with the focus group. The individual survey was conducted as proof for the effectiveness of the hyperbolised ad, it’s emotional impact on possible consumers. The questions that were part of the survey covered their personal interpretation of the ad’s visual discourse (open question answers), what its focus point is, recognise the ad’s effectiveness at a personal level and also, outline how the rhetorical figure made them feel. Subjects were also asked to identify the rhetorical figure used in the ad and answer freely about it’s commercial intentions.

A. First question: *Your age is...*

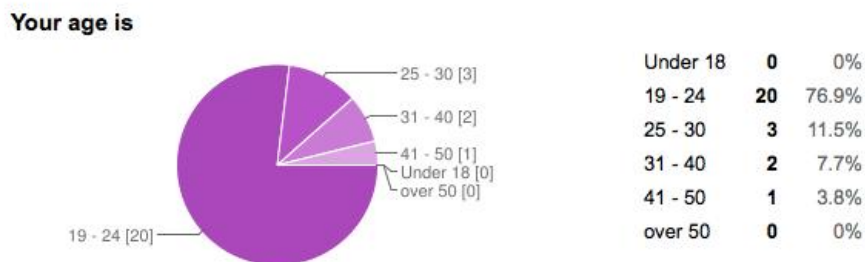


Fig.2 First question: *Your age is...*

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The participants to the focus group and the survey were selected according to the product's target defined by the main character presented in the ad (young male character, age over 18, dressed in an informal outfit, short sleeves, proactive attitude suggested by his leaned forward body): male and female, age over 18, with an active social life, who sometimes buy fast-food products. Most

participants (20) were enrolled from the 19-24 age group, 3 from the 25-30 group, 2 from the 31-40 age group, and one participant was over 40 years old. After participating to the group discussions, they were asked to give their personal opinion on the ad.

B. Second question: *What does this image represent for you?*

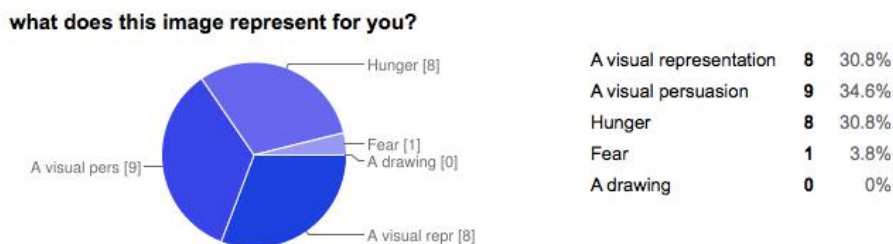


Fig.3 Second question: *What does this image represent for you?*

All the participants recognised the image as an advertising poster. A majority of 65,4% recognised this image as a visual representation or a visual persuasion image, confirming our assumed hypothesis that visual rhetorics is recognised and interpreted by its viewers. 30,8% of the

participants deepened their interpretation by recognising the image to be the representation of hunger, only 3,8% of them misinterpreting the message as “fear”.

C. Third question: *What strikes you more in this image?*

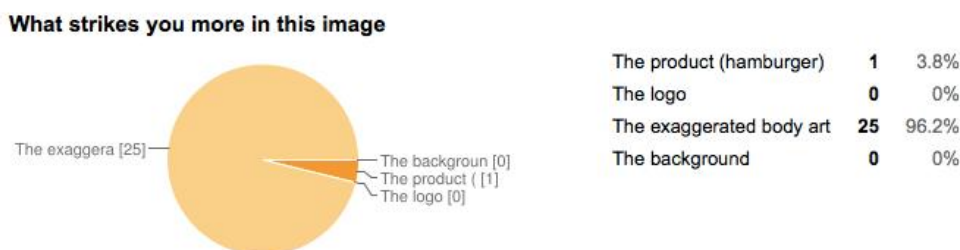


Fig.4 Third question: *What strikes you more in this image?*

A majority of 96,2% recognised the focus point of the image to be the hyperbole used as a rhetorical figure, the oversized body art painted on the ad's character being the striking element of the image. Thus, the effectiveness of this hyperbole in drawing attention towards the ad can be confirmed. On the other hand, the lack of a direct reference to the advertised product is visible, the exaggerated painting putting aside the real purpose of the image.

D. Fourth question: *From your perspective, what does the ad promote?* The fourth question was intentionally left an open answer question as personal interpretation and recorded data were encouraged to be shared, after the group talk. The given answers show that even if the hyperbole fixes the viewer's gaze on a visual exaggeration, it mostly delimits the interpretation to a specific

context where links between concepts like appetite, hunger, the desire to eat, are established due to a visual *representation*. Find below some of the recorded answers:

The fact that the product is so delicious that one would need a bigger mouth to eat it and taste it (male, 25-30)

I think the whole body conception refers to a man who is very hungry and the hamburger is so delicious that you can't control yourself not to eat it. It's like a temptation of the mind towards the food. (female, 19-24)

It represents Hunger. The urge to eat. (male, 31-40)

An extra big product which needs a very large mouth to be eaten (male, 19-24)

From my perspective, this ad shows exactly what is promoting, because this kind of drawing it seems to think that the person is yelling or is very hungry. It's a very good idea of promoting that extra big sandwich. Awesome! (female, 19-24)

In my opinion, the exaggerated mouth size represents the appetite and craving for the hamburger. Also, a big mouth makes you think of a huge hamburger, and size is important, because a bigger size means a fuller stomach, for the same money. (male, 19-24)

We have recorded answers that use as referral a previously known fictional character proving that people interpret images based on associations and visual structures, like all rhetorical figures, are essentially built on the correlation of one thing with another:

Somehow reminds of Pacman or Jaws. It looks like this dude needs a really big meal to satisfy his insatiable hunger. (male, 25-30)

Looks like a hungry anime character ready to eat everything (female, 31-40)

More than this, by exaggerating reality and augmenting the characteristics of a product, hyperboles can also generate a negative impact on their viewers, some participants emphasising the aggressive effect such an image can have. It is interesting to observe that negative impact is not related to age, but rather we believe it is related to participants' experience and preferences:

I see greed in this image. Greed and hunger (male, 31-40)

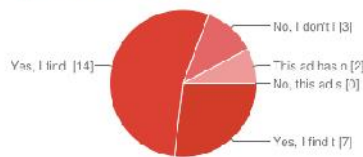
Somehow reminds of Pacman or Jaws. It looks like this dude needs a really big meal to satisfy his insatiable hunger. (male, 25-30)

It scares me, it's too much exaggeration in this image (female, 41-50)

Some of the participants have written "art" as their answer, recognising the visual impact of the image, but not its commercial use. From a total of 24 answers, 10 answers listed "art" recording 41,6% from the total number of answers.

E. Fifth question: *Is this an effective ad?*

Is this an effective ad?



Yes, I find this ad highly effective and I would try the product	7	26.9%
Yes, I find the ad effective but from a design point of view	14	53.8%
No, I don't like this ad. It's exaggerated	3	11.5%
This ad has no effect on me	2	7.7%
No, this ad scares me!	0	0%

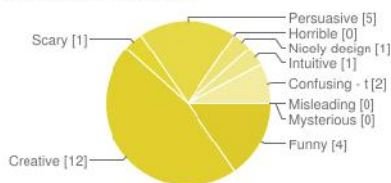
Fig.5 Fifth question: *Is this an effective ad?*

The effectiveness of the ad was recognised by 80,7% from the total answers, 53,8% of them pointing out the striking design used in perceiving the message. Only 26,9% recognised that they would try the product after seeing the advertising

poster, and a number of 11,5% listed this ad as exaggerated. Two participants listed that the ad has no effect on them, although, for the next question, both recognised the ad as being creative.

F. Sixth question: *Do you find this ad to be...*

Do you find this ad to be:



Funny	4	15.4%
Creative	12	46.2%
Scary	1	3.8%
Persuasive	5	19.2%
Horrible	0	0%
Nicely designed	1	3.8%
Intuitive	1	3.8%
Confusing - the message is not clear	2	7.7%
Misleading	0	0%
Mysterious	0	0%

Fig.6 Sixth question: *Do you find this ad to be...*

Personal influence of this hyperbole over its viewers was also targeted, as hyperboles tend to

exaggerate reality or oversize qualities. By giving the participants a list of possible characteristics of

the ad, a majority of 46,2% listed the image as being creative.

Other possible effects of a hyperbole were proposed as options such as humour generator, its persuasive effect, intuitive role, but also possible scary reactions to exaggeration, or hyperboles as confusion generators. Its persuasive effect was

recognised by 19,2%, while 15.4% choose the “funny” effect of the ad. The visual representation was perceived as confusing by only two participants, although both of them answered "hunger" at the second question.

G. Seventh question: *In this ad the rhetorical figure used is...*

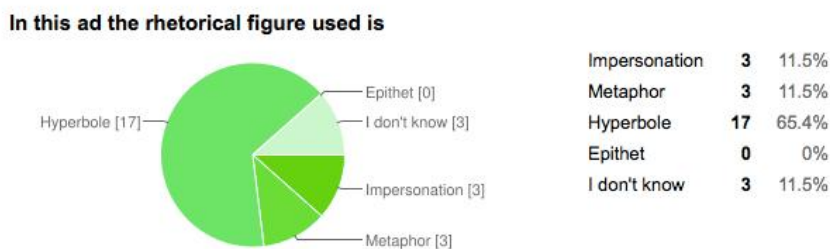


Fig.7 Seventh question: *In this ad the rhetorical figure used is...*

We wanted to know if our participants are aware of the rhetorical figure used in the selected ad in order to see how informed they are in front of this kind of persuasive exposure. Also, this final question is linked to the second one, where recognising a visual representation of an argument was required. With a majority of 65.4%, people recognised this image as being a hyperbole without being bothered by its visual representation (as shown in question no. 2).

6. CONCLUSIONS

This study contributes and extends existing literature by suggesting further research in visual rhetorics and especially in the effect that visual rhetorical figures can have upon its viewers. Nevertheless, this kind of study could give us more hints over the way consumers interpret the visual discourse and informations given in advertising materials.

Our results show that the visual cues and imagery in the selected ad are decoded, under certain conditions (targeted group, personal preferences, lifestyle) to result in product expectations that exceed actual product evaluations, suggesting the existence of visual hyperbole. Visual rhetorical figures are recognised and reinterpreted by their viewers in a specific context by making use of their personal experiences and preferences. The aesthetically form in which a visual discourse is wrapped can have a high impact influence in how a consumer devices its attention and the advertised product is perceived. Creativity is a key factor in creating

visual rhetorical figures that carry a targeted message and can also impact the product choice process.

However, there are certain limitations which must be taken into consideration. First, we used a carefully controlled setting (two focus groups), with one consumer product for four consumer segments, based on a single advertisement poster. Our results cannot be generalised beyond the product’s category nor beyond the consumer segments used in this study in the context of city print advertisements. Future research should investigate other product groups in which advertising hyperboles are used (e.g. high versus low involvement products), possible consumer segments (e.g., male vs. female), gender presence in ads, ads from different countries and in different cultural settings, different visual representations.

All in all, one unanswered question is whether the expectations of viewers influence their purchasing intention after being impacted by visual argumentation and ultimately their choice behaviour and if so, to what extent?

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