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Intention and Effect in Advertising. An Analysis of Rituals' Advertising Discourse

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Abstract: *This article highlights the specific persuasion methods and tools used in Rituals' advertising approach (written and visual), adapted to the specificity of the Facebook communication channel. In addition, the article also illustrates the effects of advertising discourse on human behaviour. Therefore, the research aims to analyse Rituals' advertising discourse in social media. Based on this initiative, two essential aspects will be pursued, namely, the identification of techniques and ways of rendering the written message through the appropriate formulation and exposition of the concepts of selling and persuasion, on the one hand, and the analysis of the specific visual communication elements within the advertising approach, on the other hand. The qualitative analysis of the advertising discourse focuses on the coherence and cohesion between the message and the image (graphic representation), as displayed by the Rituals brand on social networks, particularly on the Facebook platform. At the same time, the brand's objectives and purpose of the advertising approach launched online*

will be defined, as well as discourse functionality and effectiveness. A questionnaire was used to conduct a quantitative analysis, in order to identify and analyse the effect produced by the advertising discourse on the target audience. The answers to the questionnaire point to the target audience's perception of the advertising discourse (whether this perception is in line with the brand's intention). Finally, a conclusion will be provided on the expected brand intention and the actual impact on the audience.

Keywords: *advertising communication, copywriting, visual communication, influence, persuasion*

1. Introduction

The main objective of this study is to identify the specific communication methods and techniques used in the (written and visual) advertising discourse of Rituals Cosmetics, and the effects of their social media advertising on the target audience. The motivation for conducting such research was based on the hypothesis that nowadays social media advertising has become a novel way to persuade. Moreover, persuasion tools are indispensable to sales-oriented communication.

At the same time, the research aimed to pinpoint Rituals' intention (the techniques and tools used in the development of the advertising discourse) and its impact on the target audience.

2. Research methods

The research methods used to illustrate the intention and effects of Rituals' advertising discourse were the qualitative analysis and the quantitative analysis.

Qualitative analysis: the evaluation of four Rituals Facebook posts from last year. The analysis grid comprised elements specific to advertising communication. The evaluation criteria were the following:

- *Textual level:*
 - marks of subjectivity;
 - marks of discursive approach;
 - attitudinal marks;
 - elements of orality;
 - symbols;
 - persuasion tools.

- *Visual level:*
 - shapes and lines;
 - colours, texture;
 - light;
 - contrast and specific composition;
 - symbols;
 - relationship between visual elements;
 - use of metaphors/symbols and visual language;
 - figurative meaning: representation of intrinsic elements.

Quantitative analysis: a questionnaire was designed as a way of interpreting and understanding the social media effects of the advertising approach undertaken by Rituals Cosmetics.

To collect relevant information, the questionnaire was administered to people aged between 18 and 50, interested in care, health, sustainability, aromatherapy, and luxury products. The following types of questions were used: open-ended, simple, helping, multiple-choice and closed-ended (to which an image was associated, depending on the specifics of each question). The questionnaire comprised 17 questions and allowed to determine whether the persuasion methods used in the advertising message were effective and impactful.

3. Results

The qualitative analysis of Rituals' advertising discourse was undertaken to get a broad and explicit view of the wording and intention of the sender with regard to the use of specific argumentation and persuasion techniques. This analysis resulted in the identification of some specific patterns of advertising settings, at a stylistic, linguistic, and visual level.

The analysis of the written message revealed both the contexts of the dissemination acts and the purpose (to implement in the perception of the receiver the values, product specifications and benefits of the products in relation to the competition). On the other hand, the message was shaped according to the weaknesses and needs of the target audience.

Rituals Cosmetics' advertising approach on Facebook is 100% focused on revealing and disseminating the brand's values and beliefs. The images associated with the message consistently capture the essence of the concept of existence, having the role of impacting the receiver and supporting the discourse. Furthermore, the visual representations reflect the company's identity and visual appearance.

The receiver is involved in most of the speeches analysed. The sender is often on equal terms with the receiver. However, various imperative statements (injunctions) shift the balance in favour of the sender, who becomes superior to the receiver (allowing the inoculation of a new behavioural pattern). The relationship between sender and receiver is shaped by identifying the needs and satisfying the desires of the receiver.

The marks of subjectivity are present (establishing the nature of the relationship between the two actors, providing dynamics and certifying the degree of involvement of the sender); the identified discursive devices are specific to argumentative and procedural/instructional texts. Moreover, the elements of orality, which support the persuasive approach and textual coherence, are present through pictograms or suspension points.

At the same time, the speaker calls upon the rhetoric of argument to build the message and configure a logical connection to disseminate complex meanings. Often, the use of the marks of subjectivity, such as flexibility in the use of verb tenses, appreciative language, and the position of the sender, was strong and involvement was evident. The register used was the injunctive one. At the same time, the message was cohesive, concise and clearly formulated, including elements of informal language.

The adaptability of the message was determined through the use of assertive communication, integrated in the reality and specificity of the audience. The tone of the message was adapted to match the values and assertions disseminated.

The AIDA model was used in most communication situations. The call to action gives the message rhythm, coherence and dynamism to the efforts in the area of influencing techniques. Furthermore, the various persuasion techniques used were the appeal to emotions, bandwagon, the appeal to humour, politeness, the appeal to the senses, exemplification of an alternative, exposition of guarantees, coherence and the sympathy technique. At the same time, it is noteworthy that figures of speech, symbols or peculiarities of sensory language convey a systematic identification of the receiver with the message and disseminate the company's participatory actions in the community.

In terms of visual communication, the presenter appeals to the use of iconic rhetoric, such as involving the observer in compositional dynamics and valances. The connotative dimension is mainly used to make the message polysemantic. One technique used was that of visual storytelling to introduce the receiver to new reality configurations, perception being shaped according to the receiver's needs and desires.

On the other hand, the speaker is persuaded by the compositional elements used, such as balance, rhythmicity, contrast and colours, and the symbolism associated with them. Figurative meaning was at the centre of this observation, as it marked new and broad connotations that aimed to persuade: involving the receiver in the visual universe,

composing frames of effect and sharing emotions from the spectrum of universality, the divine and the symbiosis between man and nature.

The quantitative analysis revealed that the target audience interested in the company's products consists of women aged 26-34, mostly students or women working in hospitality or commerce.

Therefore, although Rituals products are known for being luxury products, this seems not to be an impediment in the purchasing process. The analysis also revealed that the company's social media profile was followed frequently.

The images used in the advertising approach contain (and are consistent with) the visual identity elements and brand values. Similarly, the target audience considers that the images have a decisive influence on their perception and behaviour, as they faithfully reproduce the aesthetics and experience of the products.

The common feelings and experiences perceived by the respondents are in line with the brand values and discourse. Most of the respondents stated that love, romance, nature, luxury and respect for oneself and for the loved one were the values conveyed to them through the advertising content.

The images integrated into the measurement tool were carefully chosen to accurately anticipate relevant results. For example, the image depicting products in a lush and elegant setting under a warm light was interpreted positively, reinforcing trust in the brand. The respondents were equally impressed by the illustrated colours, floral arrangement and meticulously prepared setting.

Furthermore, the questionnaire findings show that the target audience believes that the advertising discourse is aimed at propagating Rituals' mission and values rather than the idea of making a profit. Conversely, it seems that both both message and text are important to the respondents and have the potential to change attitudes and behaviours.

Finally, when asked if they had any suggestions or recommendations to improve the written and visual message, the

respondents said no. Some of them mentioned that they were satisfied with the brand's products and enjoyed using them.

The impact of Rituals' advertising discourse is therefore positive. The company uses advertising discourse successfully, as a tool to interact with the target audience and to convey company values, thus strengthening its reputation and convincing the audience to use Rituals products.

Expert sources consulted

Both hardcopy and electronic sources have been consulted to conduct this study, and, in particular, to design the analysis grid used to investigate the advertising discourse. The sources consulted allowed me to identify theoretical aspects specific to advertising communication and to visual communication.

Suciu and Kilyeni (2015) address the composition and transmission of discourse, adapted to the communication situation. They set up a typology of texts and textuality standards that shape advertising discourse (Suciu & Kilyeni, 2015, pp. 28-65). Accordingly, argumentative texts use marks of subjectivity, logical connectors, evaluative vocabulary, cause-effect relationships and expression of opinions, relying on a logical sentence/conclusion system. They also stress the importance of register and varied argumentative approaches (Suciu & Kilyeni, 2015, pp. 35-36).

Instructional/procedural texts are characterized by impersonal injunctions and marks used in advertising to appeal to the receiver's reason and affect (Suciu & Kilyeni, 2015, pp. 37). Furthermore, the authors highlight orality and narrative strategies in advertising to create an eloquent reality in the wording and linguistic stylization of the message (Suciu & Kilyeni, 2015, pp. 54-60).

The structure of a persuasive text, according to Bly (2005), includes three essential elements: the title, the body of the text, and the call to action. The headline is crucial, as it is designed to attract attention, provide useful information and stimulate the reader's interest. There are

various headline formulas, such as direct, indirect, news or in the form of questions. The body of the text should follow copywriting models such as AIDA (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action), ACCA (Awareness, Comprehension, Conviction, Action) or the 'Four Ps' (portray, promise, prove, impel) to ensure effective delivery of the persuasive message. The call to action is the final component, being a firm invitation to the reader to take some action, with the aim of turning interest into actual commitment.

According to Abrighton (2010), there are twelve psychological techniques by which receivers are influenced in their purchase decision, namely: reactance, neglect of probabilities, bandwagon effect, illusion of control, storytelling, appeal to the senses, politeness, pleasure principle, social proof, coherence principle, authority principle and deficit principle. These techniques exploit various aspects of human behaviour and perception to stimulate buying.

Moriarty and Rohe (2005) explain that visual communication uses images and symbols to convey messages, influenced by the cultural context and audience specificity. It comprises elements of rhetoric and integration with text for coherence (Foss, 2005; Crețu, n.d.). In advertising, images depict, transform and comprise messages (Farcaș, 2022). Visual design principles, such as balance and contrast, and colour semiotics are key to emotional impact (Samara, 2007; Resnick, 2003). On social media, visual storytelling and audience interaction are crucial (Walter & Gioglio, 2014; Jewitt & Adami, 2016).

The electronic sources consulted consisted of Rituals' social media pages, namely LinkedIn and Facebook.

4. Conclusions

The analysis of Rituals' advertising discourse was conducted using two approaches: qualitative and quantitative. The persuasive techniques, figures of speech and symbols used highlight the coherence and effects of the advertising materials.

The AIDA model was predominant, and the visual message was evaluated based on criteria such as plastic meaning and figurative meaning, highlighting humans' connection with nature and promoting values such as balance and beauty. The questionnaire results point to the target audience's increased interest in and positive reception of the company's messages, which were found to be persuasive and in line with the company's identity and values.

In conclusion, Rituals' advertising discourse had a strong impact and succeeded in influencing attitudes and behaviours, eliciting a natural reception of the message.

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