

Chapter 2

Visual Literacy and Visual Rhetoric: Images of Ideology Between the Seen and the Unseen in Advertising

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ABSTRACT

Advertising imposes ways of seeing, thinking, feeling and acting; it leads consumers to act without them noticing; it creates an ideal social imaginary of a “perfect world” or “happy ending” for the daily needs and problems of consumers. Advertising does this by formulating a proposal for a collective and ideal good. Following a theoretical strategy and a critical analysis, it is an approach intended to relate rhetoric, ideology, and literacy of advertising image, exploring the implied ways of the seen and the unseen (i.e. what visual messages say and show). Advertising is a public and massive myth-poetic and logo-poetic device and an increasingly multiform, omnipresent, seductive and visually persuasive. It is important to understand the elements of (explicit or implicit) meaning and the corresponding processes and mechanisms through which the meanings produce effects. This chapter assumes itself as a contribution to a desideratum that may be called visual advertising literacy.

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INTRODUCTION

Modern and Western cultures are increasingly visual and rhetorical. In these cultures, ubiquitous images convey messages appealing everything all the time. These messages are not innocent. On the contrary, they follow planned strategies of seduction and persuasion, imparting ideas, ideals, values and imposed ways of seeing, thinking, feeling and acting (ideologies) mixed with seemingly simple and understandable information.

The most common, inevitable and influential messages are those of advertising. Advertising is everywhere, showing images as command words, such as “buy it now”, “try”, “drink”, or “enjoy”. “Advertising has become an accepted part of everyday life” and “the symbolic attributes of goods, as well as the characters, situations, imagery, and jokes of advertising discourse, are now fully integrated into our cultural repertoire”, argues W. Leiss et al. (2005, p. 3). Using an imperative form and a seductive image, the effectiveness of advertising messages is mostly due to the visual impact. The images are simply to understand and to follow their commands.

For example, advertising is strategically designed to highlight the characteristics of the product, using images of certain elements (sun, heat, summer) and colors (red, yellow, blue), so that these characteristics, thus evidenced, raise the audience’s desire of consumption. Therefore, beer advertisements use visuals to suggest the taste and texture of the product, i.e. to call to mind the heat (the consumer’s need or problem) and the refreshing sensation (the consumer’s satisfaction or solution) drinking the beer.

In this chapter, the visual literacy applied in advertising is focused in the potentialities of the image, on what the image shows without showing (the implicit). The advertising’s visual literacy is an ability to read / understand the rhetorical strategies of advertising messages. It is necessary to identify the practices of meaning production that makes up the advertisements and dismantle its engine to see how advertising works, i.e. to break down the advertising strategy itself and to understand the forms of advertising in the societies in which they are inserted, as well as the effects of meaning.

However, the application of this strategy of understanding and observing advertisements requires (such as advertising literacy) the ability to critically analyze and interpret content or statements, inter-relating psychological, social, symbolic and ideological processes.

The main objective of this chapter is to understand and critically analyze the strategies and mechanisms of the meaning of visual representation as a socio-cultural construct. To understand visual literacy as a cultural and practical competence is also to recognize the importance of these skills of cultural understanding and visual hermeneutics against the visual rhetoric used by advertising strategies.

This chapter aims to analyze the advertising rhetoric, i.e. the strategic exploration and creation of myths or mythical meanings expressed publicly in advertising images. It is argued the increasingly secular, tautological and paradoxical semiocracy and iconocracy in the public space, because of a screen-society based on public and massive (advertising) speeches, which are myth-poetic and logo-poetic devices, i.e. paradoxical public discourses (namely screen images) with argumentative fallacies and a sophisticated visual rhetoric. This public space becomes both a social and mythological imaginary and a mode to express ideologies.

Meanings are constantly produced and influence us everywhere. Every day we receive and make use of a large variety of advertising signs. Thus, literacy is relevant to let us know or find a way of understanding how these signs and meanings are as expressive as influential. The power of signs (to create representations) increases the persuasive force of advertising and the pertinence of literacy approach lies in its awareness about the wider field of meaning-making. For this reason, the primary focus of

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this chapter is on how literacy can be used in the study of the advertising, considering that meaning in the advertising messages are conveyed by signs and literacy is concerned with the ways of how signs work and may be read and understood. If “language is the most fundamental and pervasive medium for human communication”, as Jonathan Bignell (2002, p. 6) says, rhetorical advertising language is even more pervasive and inflowing. Thus, literacy is a useful skill to our perception and understanding of such pervasiveness and influence, since our perception and understanding of reality is constructed by signs (words and images) which we use every day.

However, our relationship with reality and signs that name real or unreal things is not so simple. Our relationship with reality and signs depends on our perception and understanding of reality, which is constructed by the signs. A sign is a medium and a medium is conventionally something which acts as a channel, passing something from one place to another. Any sign has the function *sine qua non* of representing something, i.e. “to be instead of” or “to be in the place of”. This is the replacement function or the semantic transitivity *aliquid stat pro aliquo* (Eco, 1984, p. 213), i.e. “something is in the place of something else” (Barroso, 2017, p. 343). There must be enough literacy to perceive this semantic transitivity; otherwise, communicative interaction does not result in mutual understanding. The use, perception and understanding of signs requires literacy, because a sign always disclosure anything latent by its representation. In the advertising language, signs belong to sign systems and require the consumer’s literacy for the perception and understanding of the respective semiosis process, the recognition or grasp of something that functions as a sign in the message advertised. This semiosis process is like a mental construction of the reality through the signs of our language. As Jonathan Bignell (2002, p. 7) says, “signs and media are the only means of access to thought or reality which we have”.

We live surrounded by signs (particularly advertising signs) and sign systems, like advertising. These signs shape us, they are sometimes ideological and shape our ways of seeing, thinking, feeling and acting. We use and consume them constantly and everywhere. Our consciousness and experience “are built out of language and the other sign systems circulating in society that have existed before we take them up and use them.” (Bignell, 2002, p. 7).

Advertising is one of the most powerful sign systems we have. Accordingly, for Saussure (1959, p. 14), language “is the social side of speech, outside the individual who can never create nor modify it by himself; it exists only by virtue of a sort of contract signed by the members of a community”. As per Saussure (1959, p. 130), “in reality the idea evokes not a form but a whole latent system that makes possible the oppositions necessary for the formation of the sign”, because “by itself the sign would have no signification”. Therefore, Saussure’s perspective admits that our thought, our sense of social identity, our collective and individual experiences, our perception and understanding depend on the systems of signs, like the sign system of advertising, which codify our social life and give shape and meaning to our consciousness and interpretation of reality.

Considering that “there is no perfect analytical method for studying the media”, according to Jonathan Bignell (2002, p. 3), “different theoretical approaches define their tasks, the objects they study, or the questions they ask in different ways”. Therefore, following a theoretical and reflexive strategy and a critical analysis of the role of rhetoric and literacy in advertising, an approach to relate rhetoric, ideology and literacy of advertising image is intended, exploring the implied ways of seeing and not seeing (i.e. what advertising visual messages are saying / not-saying and showing / not showing).

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If rhetoric plays a key role in the production of effective messages, literacy shows its usefulness, allowing to receive these messages in a more comprehensive way from the public perspective. This methodology serves to conceptualize and problematize rhetoric and literacy in advertising and, more specifically, in the realm of the image. The theoretical approach is supported by the bibliographical resource of authors and reference works. After understanding the specific and delimited fields of visual rhetoric and literacy, the strategy focuses on the recognition, identification and characterization of the meaningful elements usually present in advertising messages, since they influence both the production and the reception of the meanings. Then, the approach is more practical, using examples to demonstrate the opposite (but also complementary) fields of rhetoric and literacy, i.e., the production (coding) and the reception (decoding) of the meanings. There is an inevitable dialectic between the visible and the invisible in the images, a language-game regarding the seen and the unseen, based on what is shown and what is not shown. Visual literacy and visual rhetoric are both recognized as belonging to a visual culture, where images convey ideology between the seen and the unseen in advertising.

The concept of literacy has changed with the new visual, global and digital cultures. Therefore, it is important to reflect on the appropriateness of media literacy, starting with the curricula (Burn & Durran, 2007, p. 95). Given the influence of the media in today's information societies, it is surprising how little research and attention has been paid to advertising literacy. On this point, we must agree with Malmelin (2010, p. 130). As advertising is omnipresent and multiform in today's societies and it is also an important component of media literacy (Silverblatt et al., 2014; Potter, 1998), advertising literacy is a training or a tool for a cognitive ability; it is useful for everyone, because we are all consumers in act or, at least, in potency.

BACKGROUND

Advertising's principal task is to increase sales, but it also communicates, explicitly or implicitly, social values, ideas and ideals. Advertising is a rhetorical device to shape and disseminate cultural standards. Advertising uses persuasion (*Pheitos*, as the name of the Greek goddess that personifies seduction and persuasion) to promote an idea or motive to the audience. Advertising attempts to persuade the audience changing behaviors and attitudes.

According to Silverblatt et al. (2014, p. 32), persuasion is a function in which the communicator's objective is to promote an idea or motivate the audience to change specific behaviors and attitudes. "The ultimate purpose of persuasion is control. Advertising attempts to persuade you to think positively about a product and, ultimately, to purchase the advertiser's brand." (Silverblatt et al., 2014, p. 32).

The audience is "suggested" to think positively about a product and to purchase the advertiser's brand. Using visual (but also textual) rhetorical figures, advertising influences as far as the literacy or illiteracy of the audience allows.

Advertising imposes ways of seeing, thinking, feeling and acting; it leads their targets to act without them noticing; it creates an ideal social imaginary of a "perfect world" or "happy ending" for the needs and everyday problems of consumers. It does this by formulating a proposal for a collective and ideal good. It is this proposal that unites the rhetorical image of advertising, ideology and (il)literacy. Considering that advertising is multiform, omnipresent, seductive and persuasive (i.e. socially influential), it is important to understand the visual elements of meaning (explicit or implicit meanings) and the corresponding processes and mechanisms of producing meaning effects.

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In advertisements, the visual elements must be capable of representing concepts, abstractions, actions, metaphors, etc. (Scott, 1994, p. 253). Public discourses must follow Aristotle's recommendation to elaborate an effective discourse in four phases: *inventio* (πίστις, *pisteis*), to grasp what needs to be proved; *dispositio* (τάξις, *taxis*), to arrange the arguments; *elocutio* (λέξις, *lexis*), deciding how to express; and *actio* or *pronuntiatio* (ὑπόκρισις, *hypocrisis*), to deliver the speech with appropriate gestures and expressions (Connolly, 2007, p. 148). All these four phases are needed to arrange the visual elements that must carry meanings in different manners and styles. "The rhetorical intention behind a visual message would be communicated by the implicit selection of one view over another, a certain style of illustration versus another style, this layout but not that layout." (Scott, 1994, p. 253).

Remembering Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*, "the spectacle's function in society is the concrete manufacture of alienation" (1995, p. 23). The screens are all over the public space; their images impose socio-cultural values and representations. There is a sort of cultural imperialism on public images. Notably, in the capitalist societies, the dominant classes (the political, religious, economical and media agents) create useful cultural systems to transmit core values and perpetuate the domination. According to Armand Mattelart (quoted by Espinar et. al., 2006, p. 106; Mattelart & Siegelau, 1979, p. 57), cultural imperialism is a set of processes by which a society is introduced within the modern world system and forms its management by the induction of fascination, pressure, force or corruption, shaping social institutions to match the values and structures of the dominant system. The mediated imperialism promoting the consumerism using public images is alike, it is the media action as an extension process of cultural imperialism.

According to a reflective and critical approach, starting from Deleuze's "civilization of the image" as a civilization of the cliché (Deleuze, 1997, p. 21), it is possible to understand the iconocracy of the public space (the proliferation of advertising screens) and test the hypothesis of a tautological-society transformed by the epidictic and apodictic visual and public speeches of advertising, i.e. speeches re-meaning and secularizing the public space, the social imaginaries and the strategic ways to express the collective thought.

Visuality is dominant in modern cultures. This is one of the main theses of Giovanni Sartori, in his book *Homo Videns: Teledirected Society*. According to Sartori (1998, p. 45), there is a hegemony of the seen, a primacy of the image, a prevalence of the visible over the intelligible, which leads to a seeing without understanding. We live in a culture of the image (Sartori, 1998, p. 115) and the image is not seen in Chinese, Arabic or English, because it is simply seen. Sartori (1998, p. 45) refers to the impoverishment of the capacity to understand reality on the part of the human being when it is exposed to the images and the effects of the media. Modern visual cultures reverse the progress of the intelligible and change it for the sensible, for the return to seeing pure and simple. This perspective of Sartori is relevant to understand how the seeing overlaps the reading, how the image overlaps the word.

However, literacy is not exclusive of the verbal reading. The seeing also has to do with learning and knowledge than just with the simple transfer of images to the brain. According to Gillian Dyer (1982, p. 75), when we see things or images, we know what is there partly because of knowledge gained from previous experience; we read the image "rather than just absorb it, and it is therefore accurate to talk of visual literacy". The modern, visual, global and digital cultures are reproduced in the increasingly visual and rhetorical advertising, a global phenomenon as a "visual turn", but for W. J. T. Mitchell, this might be called "the fallacy of the pictorial turn". Such development of the pictorial would be "viewed with horror by iconophobes and opponents of mass culture, who see it as the cause of a decline in literacy, and with delight by iconophiles, who see new and higher forms of consciousness emerging from the plethora

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of visual images and media” (Mitchell, 2005, p. 346). Because “many of us are being influenced and manipulated, far more than we realize, in the patterns of our everyday lives” by media messages (and by advertising in particular), as Vance Packard (2007, p. 31) underlines in his well-known *The Hidden Persuaders*, the need and importance of advertising literacy is notoriously justified. Packard’s negative perspective about the manipulative and hidden impacts of advertising is also supported by Wilson Bryan Key (cf. 1973 and 1976). Both authors disassemble and criticize the misleading and unnoticed techniques of subliminal perception in advertising.

Anyway, in the present approach on visual literacy and visual rhetoric, advertising literacy focuses particularly on the image and its potentialities, on what advertising visual messages say without saying or shows without showing. That is the implicit. Advertising literacy is taken as an ability to read / understand the rhetorical strategies of advertisements and what do images really want. Visual literacy and visual rhetoric of advertising invite us to ask:

- What does the advertising image say/show?
- What does the image intend and how does it manifest its pretension?
- How to read/understand the image?
- What is the idea that the image conveys and how it conveys?
- How the qualities of the product are enhanced?
- What feelings, sensations, and manifest values are aroused in the advertising visual message?
- What are the latent values that seem most valued in the advertisement?
- What is the connotation of the product with these values?
- What influences and affects the emotions of the audience?
- Who fits the profile of the consumer according to the advertisement?
- What is the promise that the advertisement makes about the product?
- What can the product effectively guarantee?

The identification of the meaning structure and its significant elements that make up the advertisements allows to dismantle the advertising engine to see how it works, i.e. to break down the advertising strategy itself and understand the forms by which advertising manifests intentions, suggestions, affections, effects of meaning.

However, the application of this strategy of understanding and observing advertisements requires the ability to analyze and interpret information, interrelating psychological, social, symbolic and ideological processes. “Understanding advertising’s role requires attention to the context of the production of its messages, to the technology utilized, and to the changing habits of mind and techniques employed by its practitioners”, states W. Leiss et al. (2005, p. 19). Advertising offers cultural patterns and proposals for a good life and shows how to achieve personal pleasure and social success, since it is based on fables, fairy tales, and troupes. Therefore, it must be understood as representing a cultural discourse (Leiss et al., 2005, p. 19).

The meaning of advertisements is carried out jointly between who “writes” and who “reads and perceives” the signs in the advertising message. These signs are polysemous and belong to the cultural sign system. They produce meanings of everyday experience, inviting audiences to participate in their ideological ways of seeing, thinking, feeling and acting. That’s why many advertisements do not directly invite consumers to buy the products, insisting more on an ideological rather than a commercial approach.

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ADVERTISING AND LITERACY

Advertising is as effective as profuse. The effectiveness and the profusion are two characteristics of advertising and both are evident in the daily life of modern societies (Malmelin, 2010, p. 130). Advertising manifests itself in many ways and everywhere; it is omnipresent, in an irrefragable way, in all possible and imaginable spaces. For example: “The United States has arrived at the stage of *ubiquitous advertising*, in which all conceivable public space is dedicated to advertising, including checkout lines, gas pumps, ATM machines, and urinals.” (Silverblatt et al., 2014, p. 273). Consequently, “*place-based video screens* show advertisements in public spaces, such as gas stations and doctor’s offices. Advertisers also reach consumers in nontraditional ways, including podcasts, blogs, video games, e-mail messages, cell phones, and video on demand.” (Silverblatt et al., 2014, p. 273). Advertising is intrusive, seductive and persuasive, mainly in the so-called visual cultures, consumer societies or mass markets, where the levels of production and consumption of material goods are high.

Advertising messages change according to the time and space (culture), in terms of content and form. The subject (what they say) and the approaches (how they say) are now more irreverent, implicit and visual. To interpret these messages, consumers (who also change) need literacy, basic skills of understanding advertising messages (e.g. to be able to recognize, evaluate and understand the manifest intentions in the advertisements and what these say or the actions they propose or persuade to consumers (Malmelin, 2010, p. 130).

Advertising literacy is a kind of cognitive filter, a rational competence against the influences triggered by the stimuli (signs) that advertising uses to elicit responses (favorable and unconscious attitudes and behaviors) in the consumers. Advertising literacy is the ability to analyze and evaluate the seductive and persuasive messages that advertising creates using emotional, rational, or ethical arguments.

Advertising literacy presupposes skills to recognize and identify messages, perceiving their commercial and persuasive goals, or their argumentative strategy. It is a kind of personal mechanism of defense and control of the emotional responses to the advertising messages. According to R. Heath (2012, p. 123), “if emotion in communication increases level of attention, then advertisements that incorporate a lot of emotive content are likely to be paid a lot more attention”. Consequently, emotion can work subconsciously. That’s why McLuhan argues that advertisements are not meant for conscious consumption. For McLuhan (1994, p. 228), “they are intended as subliminal pills for the subconscious in order to exercise a hypnotic spell, especially on sociologists” and “that is one of the most edifying aspects of the huge educational enterprise that we call advertising.”

Advertisers may not let us think about the message nor directly persuade us to buy their products, but they may also transform us and compel us to buy a product without even we knowing why we’re buying it, “as a visceral response to a stimulus, not as a conscious decision”, states C. A. Hill (2008, p. 39), and “this is best done through images”.

Advertising messages are essentially aimed to influence their target for consumption and to increase sales of products or services. However, they also have the function of transmitting social values, in a direct or indirect, conscious or unconscious way. Thus, advertising resorts to rhetorical communication strategies and shapes the patterns of culture (Wicke quoted by Galician & Merskin, 2007, p. 37).

More than texts, images are stimuli that reach us on a more affective or emotional level in advertising techniques. The impact of the image is effective in this circumstance as well as for acting on a more unconscious level. The power of visual impressions to awaken our emotions has been observed

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and harnessed since classical antiquity (Gombrich, 1974, p. 244). The knowledge and use of images for affective strategies (ways in which the image can affect, whether we want it or not, through emotional appeals / arguments), is a powerful force to create emotions and to arouse attention, interest and desire.

Advertising messages influence public attitudes and behavior by appealing to emotions. For example, subliminal appeals to primary emotions such as guilt or the need for social acceptance through color, light, shape, size of visual signs with meanings and connotations that are intended to produce. Advertising messages capitalize irrational feelings (e.g. fear or guilt) to promote products and brands. Whoever conceives advertising messages is concerned with covering up or triggering meanings using rhetorical figures, that modify the perceptions of the consumers about the product, service or brand.

The persuasive power of advertising messages is not unlimited; it's relative. Despite the use of sophisticated techniques of rhetoric and the placement of visual impulses, advertising cannot persuade people to buy something they don't want or dislike (Silverblatt et al., 2014, p. 274): if someone does not like beer, no advertisement will be able to change the consumer and make him drink beer. However, more than convincing that we want the product, advertisers try to convince that we really need the product, creating false needs. That's why they use the imperative (e.g. "Drink X" or "Try Y now!").

In this perspective, rhetoric, ideology and literacy in advertising are adjacent and complementary. Rhetoric is the art of enunciating and visual rhetoric is the same art, but of showing; ideology is a hidden content (ideas, ideals, values) that affects consumers collective conscience and thought; literacy is the ability to understand or not (illiteracy) the advertisements as commodities, ideological goods that go beyond the promotion of the brand or product, based on certain ways of seeing and thinking social values.

Advertising images obviously don't come to us with an instruction manual to be read / interpreted. Besides that, advertising images have different coding levels and the higher coding levels make it difficult to recognize the various meanings and connotations (e.g. metaphorical meanings, connecting an immediate consumer product, such a soda, with an intangible feeling like happiness), insinuations (seductive or sexual) and intertextualities (e.g. with television programs).

Thus, it is important to understand the rhetorical processes of advertising statements and the explicit or implicit elements of signification, as well as the corresponding processes of unveiling the mechanisms that produce meanings and their effects regarding advertising ideals and values. Advertising literacy is the ability to recognize these hidden meanings, the sign system and the meaning production and their effects. Rhetoric, ideology and literacy are related in the advertising image, exploring the implied modes of showing pleasant signs (colors and forms) that are also psychological, social, cultural and ideological ways of seeing and thought.

ADVERTISING'S RHETORIC, IDEOLOGY AND LITERACY

If the concept of ideology, according to Giddens (2006, p. 605), was only first used in the eighteenth century (by Destutt de Tracy), this term gained greater notoriety through Marx. However, if the first use had the sense of "science of ideas", Marx's use had an essentially critical and pejorative meaning, because it means "false consciousness". Marx refers to influential groups in society. These groups are capable of instilling and controlling the dominant ideas that circulate in society in order to justify their position.

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In this conception of Marx, a relation between ideology and power is observed, insofar as ideological systems serve to legitimize the power held by certain groups. According to Giddens (2006, p. 605), ideology is about the exercise of symbolic power, it is about how ideas are used to hide, justify or legitimate the interests of dominant groups in the social order. Ideology is, therefore, a set of ideas or beliefs shared to justify the interests of certain dominant groups. An ideology is a shared way of perceiving reality, which assumes that some false (or inaccurate) and imposed ideas or ways of perceiving and understanding the reality are true. As Barthes (1991, p. 137) points out, such ideas serve the ideological interests of a particular group in society and these ideas may be transmitted by advertisements.

Eco argues that “ideology is a message which starts with a factual description, and then tries to justify it theoretically, gradually being accepted by society through a process of overcoding” (Eco, 1976, p. 290). In Eco’s semiotic perspective of codes, “there is no need to establish how the message comes into existence nor for what political or economic reasons”; instead, to establish in what sense this new coding can be called ideological (Eco, 1976, p. 290).

Therefore, there are ideologies in all societies and cultures with inequalities between individuals (Giddens, 2006). The meanings of advertisements are designed to move out of the page (in poster advertisements in magazines) or the screen (in TV commercials) and to shape our perception and understanding. Advertising has the traditional function to sell things to us and ask us to participate in ideological ways of seeing (Williamson, 1978, p. 11). But advertising also creates structures of meaning in which literacy is required for their perception and understanding. The need for an advertising literacy is to unchain the way how advertisements are proposed to be read. Consumers need to notice the indirect, subtle or implied ways of seeing.

According to Bignell (2002, p. 31), “ads often seem more concerned with amusing us, setting a puzzle for us to work out”. “The aim of ads is to engage us in their structure of meaning, to encourage us to participate by decoding their linguistic and visual signs to enjoy this decoding activity.” (Bignell, 2002, p. 31). Since advertisements belong to a meaning structure and a sign system, they make use of signs, codes, cultural and historical meanings, social myths and ideologies and worldviews. Consequently, consumers must be literally prepared to recognize and decode them.

The relationship between the media and ideology, the one that is interesting to analyze in this chapter, arises with the question about the possible ideological weight of the content transmitted in an imperceptible and influential way. If public discourses, such as advertising, favor or promote one ideal over another, the media diffuse ideology and broaden its scope in society as the messages reach large audiences. In this case, the media diffuse values and beliefs that contribute to securing the domination of more powerful groups over the less powerful (Giddens, 2006).

For Slavoj Žižek, ideology can designate anything, an attitude or belief; it impels to action and it arises inadvertently, even when we avoid it. Ideology is not simply a “false consciousness” or an illusory representation of reality; the fundamental dimension of ideology is rather the reality itself which is already to be conceived as ideological. Ideology is rather the same reality that is already prepared to be conceived as ideological (Žižek, 2008, p. 16). According to Žižek (2008, p. 24), the most elementary definition of ideology is probably the well-known phrase from Marx’s *Capital*: “they do not know it, but they are doing it”. The concept of ideology implies a kind of basic, constitutive naivete. Ideology seems to arise exactly when we try to avoid it, failing to appear where it is clearly expected to exist: “It seems to pop up precisely when we attempt to avoid it, while it fails to appear where one would clearly expect it to dwell.” (Žižek, 1994, p. 4). This is precisely an essential, but paradoxical, characteristic of ideology: its capacity not to be perceived as such.

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The concept of ideology implies a constitutive unconsciousness or a collective illiteracy about ideology itself. Ideology and its presuppositions are not recognized. There is a distance or divergence between reality and distorted representation, i.e., a false consciousness of reality. This is because the concept of ideology implies either a naivety, which is collective, for the non-recognition of assumptions and mechanisms of influence, or distance.

The media, particularly advertising, are diffusers of ideology. As a strategic communication technique, advertising fits into an ideological scenario of collective conceptual or mental construction of reality. It is a system of representations, images, myths, values, ideas or concepts with the practical implications of a given culture. Advertising messages impose ways of persuading their audiences to act and behaving in certain ways.

For example, the image of the model Gisele Bündchen projected at the Empire State Building in 2017 in a promotional action of the 150th anniversary celebration of the *Harper's Bazaar* American magazine. The Empire State Building symbolizes the technological prowess and economic strength of the United States and, in general, of the contemporary capitalist world. In this promotional strategy, the building is a means to project the values and content of *Harper's Bazaar* magazine: fashion, beauty, celebrity, lifestyle. This strategy had already been followed in 1999 with the projection of the image of a woman in lingerie on the facade of the London Parliament, a strategy of the men's magazine FHM.

The strategies go even when the president of the United States is used on a billboard in Times Square. In this case, the outdoor of the brand Weatherproof use the image of Barak Obama while he wore one of his coats, adding the slogan "A Leader in Style". The image was a photograph taken during the visit of the United States president to the Great Wall of China and aimed the promotion of the called "The Obama Jacket", according to *The New York Times* (Jan. 7, 2010).

In advertising, a myth should be explored as a form of a sophisticated discourse aimed at meeting the psychological needs of the consumers. The myth is explored in the advertisements that invite consumers to participate in ideological ways of seeing the world and of seeing themselves. These advertisements come with ideological commitments, because they present and propose a given way of seeing the world.

Myths are used in advertising messages to easily convey the main idea: to sale and consume the product, service and brand. Myths create an optimal atmosphere for the product, service and brand and influence consumers that they should be like the situation presented in the advertisement. A myth in an advertisement may simply promise that the product will bring happiness or success, eternal youth and infinite beauty. Connotative images help to construct the myth in the advertisement. Certain images of beautiful, young and attractive women are most prevalent in modern advertising in order to make the consumers (both men and women) fascinated by pictures of "perfect people" in the present global world. Therefore, the study, understanding, identification and recognition of myths in advertising are useful to critique advertisements and to be aware about what influence do social values have on the success of advertising (Galician & Merskin, 2007, p. 45).

Advertising is a different media from other mass media and, therefore, the effects of advertising messages are also different in its use of stereotypes. Advertising use stereotypes to sell the product (Galician & Merskin, 2007, p. 45). The myth plays an important role in the advertising message. The myth is easily confused with a fabulous narrative popularly built. It is, therefore, an imaginative elaboration of the collective spirit; an allegory or metaphorical representation of a situation taken as exemplary and accepted by all who sustain and share it. Through the myth, something is exposed in a representative and unrealistic way. For Barthes, the myth is "speech stolen and restored" (Barthes, 1991, p. 124). In

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Mythologies, Barthes says that the myth has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal. “Now this process is exactly that of bourgeois ideology. If our society is objectively the privileged field of mythical significations, it is because formally myth is the most appropriate instrument for the ideological inversion which defines this society” (Barthes, 1991, p. 142). For Barthes, at all the levels of human communication, “myth operates the inversion of *anti-physis* into *pseudo-physis*”.

The concept of literacy has changed and advanced in recent years. The emergence of new media forces this evolution of the concept, which now becomes more adapted to the evolution of societies and the diversity of new communication devices and technologies. From the traditional and limited concept of literacy as the ability to read and understand the meanings of written words the evolution has now reached to a more embracing literacy. Thus, it is more appropriate to speak in different types of literacy.

Advertising literacy is a pedagogical and an educational skill for emotional responses against the appeals and arguments used in advertising messages and the influences triggered by the stimuli (conceptual, rhetorical and aesthetic signs, whether textual or visual) that advertising uses to provoke responses (reinforcement, change or creation of favorable, often unconscious attitudes and behaviors) of consumers. For example, in a subliminal, hidden or covert advertising messages, whose designation refers to the degree of camouflage of meanings, but not of signs (cf. Key, 1973 and 1976).

As an ability, advertising literacy analyze and evaluate the seductive and persuasive messages that advertising creates through the recourse of emotional arguments (e.g. “Because you feel X and desire the product Y or the brand Z”), rational arguments (e.g. “Because X is reasonable” or “Y is the best – cheapest - choice”) or ethical arguments (“Because X helps you to save and it is the convenient choice”). Advertising literacy essentially requires recognition and identification skills of advertising messages, as well as the perception of the message and its commercial and persuasive goals or the followed an argumentative strategy.

Advertising is persuasive, it is a technique of effective use of language, in which the most important is not so much what is said; it is the way it is said. This rhetorical mode regarding the way of saying is not generally perceivable by the consumer. The cultural and linguistic structure of current and complex societies is based dichotomies, such as ancient versus modern (or tradition versus contemporary). As Barthes (1994, p. 12-14) recognizes in his book *The Semiotic Challenge*, the world is incredibly full of ancient rhetoric. If the contemporary world is full of ancient rhetoric, according to Barthes, there is a common point to which all connotative systems refer: ideology. All meanings and connotations lead to ideology. Ideology is the form of meanings of connotation and rhetoric are the way to express ideology.

When a commercial says “Lose 30 pounds in one week, eating what you like, when you like”, it is a sophism. There is a conscious intention about what is said and what is said is not true. When a commercial says “We have been producing cars for over 100 years”, it is a paralogism, because there is no intention to deceive, but a fallacy is used (that of antiquity or *ad antiquitatem*) to give credibility to what is said.

Among the languages used by the media, advertising discourse is characterized primarily by its connotative, suggestive and persuasive domain. Whether focused on the product or the brand (to show that the product or brand are superior to other products and brands through a “unique selling proposition”), or focused on the public / consumer (in a segmentation strategy to accentuate the benefits of consump-

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tion, calling the consumer public to a certain attractive consumer community), or focused in the context (showing the product involved in a pleasant and attractive environment), advertising explores connotations and creates specific meaning structures. Therefore, “advertising often relies on connotative words to sell their products” (Silverblatt et al., 2014, p. 187). In other occasions, advertisers often employ euphemisms to change the public perceptions of products (Silverblatt et al., 2014, p. 188).

Advertising languages (especially visual rhetoric, as art or technique of using effectively the visible to persuade, influence, please, or provoke desire) are strategically exploited in advertisements using resources and rhetorical arguments conceived to be not aware and rationally understood by consumers.

CODING LEVELS AND LITERACY

If Confucius’s maxim “a picture is worth a thousand words” recognizes the polysemous richness of the image, the deliberate formation of coding levels (Eco, 2001, p. 162) further enriches what the images say and show implicitly without saying and showing it, while at the same time hindering their readings / understandings of their meanings, that is, they make it difficult to recognize the various connotations. The more elaborate, complex and high the coding level is, the smaller and more difficult the reading / understanding level is.

For the analysis of an advertisement composed of text (slogan and argument) and image, for example, Eco distinguishes five coding levels. According to Eco, there are coding levels of the image (the first three, below) and coding levels of the text (the last two on the following scale), all five in order of increasing complexity:

1. Iconic level, the place of visual recognition codes. This level groups the concrete, objective, explicit and denotative information about the image (the minimum units assigned to the visual representation). For example, a smiling woman holding a baby or a silhouette representing a woman, which has the function of stimulating people’s desire for the product. In this case, the iconic level would just be the image of the woman meaning “woman” (the general idea of “woman”), which everyone clearly and immediately sees in the advertising image.
2. Iconographic level, the place of visual statements contextualized in a given culture; the iconic cultural knowledge (a kind of visual education of a certain culture where the images belong). This level groups the connotations manifested in the image according to two coding types: a) historical coding, a coding based on conventional meanings (e.g. the aureole to signify holiness); b) modern coding, created by the advertising itself (e.g. the dressing style or being fashionable). In the advertisement example of the previous level, the coding would be “mother’s love” based on the same image of the woman.
3. Tropological level, the place where the visual rhetoric appears in a trope form, for example, metaphors, considering that images acquire a representative value (the specimen represents the genre, type or species), based on a culturally acquired competence. This level is confined to the figures of rhetoric, the tropes. In the example of a woman holding a baby, it would be “Be like this mother”.

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4. Topic level, the place of stereotyped cultural connotations. This level comprises all the socially accepted general ideas and stereotypes used in advertising communication, in order to allow rapid and automatic decoding of the message. In this case, it would be “All mothers are like this one”.
5. Enthymeme level, where the arguments are unfolded and are presented in an abbreviated way. This level uses the conventional arguments. It pays attention to the polysemy of words. In the example, it would be: “If all mothers are like that and so are you, you are a good mother”.

Considering any current advertisement, we may verify if these coding levels correspond to the complexity of the levels of reading and understanding the messages conveyed. Taking the given example of an advertisement with a smiling woman holding a baby, like the advertisement of Johnson & Johnson with a slogan saying “Skin so gentle, as gentle as a mother’s love”, which has apparently a coding level of low complexity, the coding levels depend on the literacy of the target.

In the advertisement of Johnson & Johnson, the coding levels are identified and recognizable as:

1. **Iconic Level:** (A close-up image of) a woman holding a baby and smiling at him;
2. **Iconographic Level:** Maternity and mother’s love (the meaning of “woman” leads to the meaning of “mother” and “baby”, that is “mother’s love”);
3. **Tropological Level:** Comparing the softness of the skin provided by Johnson & Johnson with a mother’s love), the slogan is “Skin so gentle, as gentle as a mother’s love”; thus, be like this mother (which is an example for all mothers);
4. **Topic Level:** Mother’s love (all mothers are so gentle like this);
5. **Enthymeme Level:** If you are also a mother, you are a good (gentle and lovely) mother to Johnson & Johnson.

When the product is unique, objectively distinct and superior to competitors, or when the product offers a clear benefit to the consumers, the task of advertisers is easy, and the structure of advertising messages is simple. But when the product has no distinct benefit nor a different feature from the other products of competitors brands on the market, advertising messages must be based on rhetorical strategies that make the product seem more seductive and distinctive (Silverblatt et al., 2014, p. 317).

In this case, the coding of the message is more careful and strategic. The understanding level is correlative to the coding level and it is hardly literal (for example, the simple recognition of the placement of the product in a television program) and even more rarely comes to appreciative level, according to the following typology of reading / understanding (literacy) levels.

1. **Literal Literacy Level:** Recognition and memory of the facts established in the text / image (main ideas, details and sequence of events).
2. **Interpretative Literacy Level:** Reconstruction of the meaning of the text / image (obtaining inferential meanings from the act of reading), derivation of generalizations, distinction of the essential, abstraction of the message as a sign system, differentiation of justified conclusions from unjustified conclusions, interconnection of contradictory data, etc.

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3. **Evaluative or Critical Literacy Level:** Formation of judgments, expression of own opinions, analysis of the intentions of the text / image, elaborated cognitive processing.
4. **Appreciative Literacy Level:** Affection by the content of the text / image and style of expression, influencing attitudes, behaviors, thoughts, knowledge, ways of seeing and interpreting the reported reality.

The reading / understanding levels are literacy levels, i.e. degree of regarding the capacity of decoding the messages (text and image) and, therefore, these levels are connected to the previous coding levels.

MEANING AND LITERACY OF COLORS IN ADVERTISING

In advertising, the meanings of colors, for example, are important for the construction of meaning in the message: red to connote passion and feelings of desire in messages about perfumes; yellow to establish references to the warm and sunny environment conducive to the suggestion of a refreshing drink; blue (of the sea and the sky) associated with freedom, infinite or lack of limits in the proposals that are based on these approaches. The study of the general effects of color as a persuasive communication tool reveal the color as a significant element (Garber & Hyatt, 2008, p. 314), especially in advertising, considering that the world of advertisements is peopled by fantastic images (Scott, 1994, p. 252). According to L. L. Garber & E. M. Hyatt (2008, p. 314), “as much as color is a powerful and salient persuasive communications tool, it is as well a complex, multidimensional phenomenon, poorly understood yet difficult to examine, making individual response to color exposure notoriously hard to explain or predict”.

Colors are signs (signifiers with meanings), elements that produce meaning. Colors are “the product of the brain’s interpretation of the visual sensory information that it receives” (Garber & Hyatt, 2008, p. 315; Scott, 1994). The study of advertising images is related to the development of a theory of visual rhetoric, argues L. Scott, for whom “pictures are not merely analogues to visual perception, but symbolic artifacts constructed from the conventions of a particular culture” (Scott, 1994, p. 252).

Colors have natural and conventional, denotative and connotative meanings that go unnoticed to the public and consumer literacy. Colors are used intentionally in advertising to express sensations, feelings, ideas, values, etc., because they seduce, they call our attention and arouse interest, exert psychological influence, stimulate desire for the product, service or brand. Colors are stimuli, because they are signs; they are one of the most decisive factors in the consumer choice process. Consumers are sensitive to the visual appearance and the impact of the products during the decision and purchase moments. Colors increase brand recognition and they are also responsible for the acceptance or rejection of products. The judgment of colors is, as a rule, subconscious. Advertisements with more colors are more appealing than those with less colors, because colors facilitate the perception and the reading of the advertising message and predisposes favorably the consumers.

The meaning of advertisements is not only developed by those who conceive the sign in the advertising message. The meaning is also carried out by the consumers and based on their advertising literacy. If the signs that advertising uses are polysemous and belong to the cultural system, these signs create / form myths. For example, the myth of whiteness, that motivates consumers to demand for clothing white-

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ness. It is like a Manichean combat against two opposite forces, the good against the evil. In this case, it is the whiteness against dirtiness in advertisements for laundry detergents. The meanings are suggested or induced by the signs present in the advertisements and, then, they are understood by the consumers, who complete them mentally. Consumers have a sort of minimum of literacy; if not advertising literacy, it would be general cultural literacy, which are public vehicles of cultural and ideological meaning.

The meanings of the advertisements are designed in such a way as to overflow the commercial statement or consumerist appeal, as well as the medium of communication where they arise. The meanings also produce and reproduce everyday experiences, inviting consumers to participate in their ideological and collective ways of seeing, thinking, feeling, and acting. That's why many advertisements do not directly invite consumers to buy the products, insisting on a humorous approach rather than a commercial approach. Words and images, signs and symbols, shapes and colors, gestures and odors, everything that surrounds us or everything we say or do may become a sign, a language, whether we want it or not. When this happens, all these signs carry connotative meaning, i.e. manifest an ordinary reality, objects or an abstract or concrete, absent or invisible idea.

The meanings of colors are important for the message coding process. Colors are significant elements; they contribute to the meaning structure built by the advertisements. Colors are used strategically in advertising. They have always been used in other forms of life in the history of humankind, in all cultures and social and communicative interactions, such as body paintings in primitive tribes representing virtues or symbolic powers to express sensations, feelings, states of mind, ideas.

Colors always represent something, but sometimes the influence and meaning of colors go unnoticed. In advertising, colors are used to stimulate desire for the product, service or brand, for example, leading to the choice, purchase and consumption of products.

Colors are sensitive and transmit implied information beyond what is expressly stated, as in the case of a slogan with a black formal color that gives rise to tranquility and reason (the *logos* of the message), a green color of the logo (the *ethos* of the brand and its values of credibility) or a red color that exacerbates and excites the *pathos* of consumers.

CONCLUSION

According to Bill Bernbach (quoted by Yilmaz, 2017, p. 47 and Tungate, 2007, p. 51), advertising is not a science, it is a persuasion and persuasion is an art. Persuasion is a rhetorical art or technique of language use and advertising makes use of this rhetorical art, in which the most important is not so much what is said; it is also important the way it is said. In advertising, what is said is not stated explicitly; it is implicit, connoted. What is said is not expressed in a direct, objective way, but even so the message fulfills its persuasive effect and influences consumer behavior.

Given this strategical and rhetorical nature of advertising, messages require a certain level of codification and consequent understanding. Thus, disciplining the way of seeing images is learning to see structures of meaning. Mainly the most hidden, the syntactic forms and semantic models that participate in advertising, according to an innovative or effective and consistent way.

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The connotations that the message establishes are triggered from certain stimuli present in advertisements, but they exist in the form of meaning in the public mind, which completes or forms them based on what is advertised. It is part of advertising literacy, considering that the images are strategically chosen and sometimes are mischievous and misleading, not corresponding to the words of the advertisement or to the properties and benefits of the products.

When the advertisement says “this car flies” or “with this perfume you conquer all women”, everyone knows it is false, but understand the idea, because the exaggerations of self-promotion, the poetic falsity and the lack of logic and reasonableness do not usually have great evil, especially in the advertising messages (Neves, 2014, p. 384).

Advertising messages dramatize how products satisfy the needs and solve personal problems (Silverblatt et al., 2014, p. 321). The advertisements show smiling and satisfied people who benefit from the purchase and consumption of the product. Even if they do not say it explicitly and only show pictures of smiling and happy people (preferably attractive, beautiful and young women) enjoying the product, as if it were a cause-and-effect relationship, the advertisements suggest that the product will bring happiness and success to who does the same. It's the happy ending advertising.

Women representing the ideal of feminine beauty, celebrities (e.g. Zsa Zsa Gabor or Orson Welles), animals or children are appealing elements for advertising messages to persuade without public awareness of the strategy. However, a responsible ethics in advertising would make it an ideal communicative action based on four fundamental principles that would guide the messages: comprehensibility, sincerity, legitimacy and truthfulness.

As Jean Baudrillard points out in *Simulacra and Simulation*, the most interesting aspect of advertising is its disappearance, its dilution as a specific form, as a medium, since “advertising is no longer (was it ever?) a means of communication or of information” (Baudrillard, 1997, p. 92). “If at a given moment, the commodity was its own publicity (there was no other)”, continues Baudrillard (1997, p. 92), “today publicity has become its own commodity”.

In this perspective, considering a) that the world changes permanently and cultures become more visual, global and digital, with more instantaneous and ephemeral collective experiences, and b) that rhetorical advertising strategies are increasingly multiform and effective in the capacity for persuasion and distinction between what is true and lie, media literacy (in general) and advertising literacy (in particular) will have a positive impact by training and empowering consumers with valences that protect them from purely consumerist attacks.

In the curricula, advertising literacy prepares students (while future consumers) for a visual, global and digital culture in their habits and customs, as well as sharpening their approaches to consumption, imposing ideal modes of seeing, thinking, feeling and acting, leading consumers to act unconsciously; creating ideal social imagery. It is therefore necessary to extend literacy studies and practices to all areas of life, especially the new media, which are constantly changing and expanding their power of influence over people.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Advertising: From the Latin *advertere*, “to direct the attention of someone to”, the action of making public, promoting a product, service or brand.

Communication: From the Latin *communicationis*, which means “to make common” (the information), communication is a global and social phenomenon based on the transmission of information through verbal or non-verbal messages from an emitter to one or more receivers.

Culture: The set of material or immaterial aspects that define a way of life (values, customs, history, traditions, rituals, beliefs, symbols and languages, instruments and consumer goods, laws, codes and norms, social activities and practices, and institutions).

Ideology: A set of ideas, ideals, beliefs and social values disseminated and shared to hide, justify or legitimate the interests of certain dominant group in the social order.

Literacy: The ability to perceive, read and understand common information, statement or content about everyday life.

Persuasion: The communicative practice, activity, technique of exerting influence over other people.

Visual Culture: A form of life based on the visible; a cultural pattern emphasis toward images and screens, with predominance of visual forms of communication and information.

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Visual Literacy: The cultural and practical skill to read / understand what images show according to their rhetorical strategy. Visual literacy is focused on the potentialities of the image, on the suggestive and evocative power of images, on what images shows and suggests (the implicit, the unseen).

Visual Rhetoric: The art and technique of using and exploring effectively the communicative and suggestive power of images to provoke effects and shape people's consciousness and thought, such as persuasion, please, desire.