Classical Rhetoric and Storytelling in Advertising Praxis

Jorge Veríssimo
Escola Superior de Comunicação Social, Instituto Politécnico de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal

Abstract

Based on the observation that storytelling has acquired a new centrality in the advertising strategies, which success can be explained by the growing importance on the brand communication in prejudice of the product's unidirectional advertisement (Baynast & Lendrevie, 2014; Baynast et al., 2018; Kotler & Keller, 2015; Rossiter et al. 2018); by the effect of the technological evolution, which allowed that the advertisement videos stop having the television exclusivity and started to be available in internet video channels, such as YouTube (Cardoso et al., 2017; Laurence, 2018; Zamudio, 2016); and for living in a hedonic society, which privileges the emotions and sensory gratifications, and, simultaneous, elect the ordinary citizen as leading figure (Escalada, 2016; Laurence, 2018; Rossiteret al., 2018); this text pretends to point the communicational wealth of storytelling in advertising, that has in the classical rhetoric some of the scientific bias on which it is based, can be established via: (a) the history verisimilitude, that comes for being sustained in the quotidian narrative, with content of "human value" and with resource to real "people" (Ballester & Sabiote, 2016; Escalada, 2016; Laurence, 2018; Panarese & Villegas, 2018); (b) evidence of the pathos, which comes mainly from the emotions that the history generates in the audience (Ballester & Sabiote, 2016; Laurence, 2018; Panarese & Villegas, 2018; Salmon, 2016); (c) the relevance of the ethos, which comes from the reliability of the author/credibility of the brand (Laurence, 2018; Panarese & Villegas, 2018).

Keywords
communication, advertising, rhetoric, storytelling

Retórica Clássica e *Storytelling* na Práxis Publicitária

Resumo

Partindo da constatação de que o *storytelling* adquiriu uma nova centralidade nas estratégias publicitárias, cujo sucesso pode ser explicado pela crescente importância da comunicação de marca em detrimento da publicidade unidirecional do produto (Baynast & Lendrevie, 2014; Baynast et al., 2018; Kotler & Keller, 2015; Rossiter et al., 2018); pelo efeito da evolução tecnológica que permitiu que os vídeos publicitários deixassem a exclusividade da televisão e passassem a estar disponíveis nos canais de vídeo da internet, como o YouTube (Cardoso et al., 2017; Laurence, 2018; Zamudio, 2016); e por vivermos numa sociedade hedónica que privilegia as emoções e as gratificações sensoriais e que, simultaneamente, elege o cidadão comum como protagonista (Escalada, 2016; Laurence, 2018; Rossiter et al. 2018), este texto pretende evidenciar que a riqueza comunicacional do *storytelling* em publicidade tem na retórica clássica alguns dos vieses científicos em que assenta, nomeadamente: (a) na verossimilhança da história, que surge por estar sustentada numa narrativa do quotidiano, com conteúdos de "valor humano" e com o recurso a "pessoas" reais (Ballester & Sabiote, 2016; Escalada, 2016; Laurence, 2018; Panarese & Villegas,

2018); (b) na evidência do *pathos*, que advém, principalmente das emoções que a história gera nas audiências (Ballester & Sabiote, 2016; Laurence, 2018; Panarese & Villegas, 2018; Salmon, 2016); (c) na relevância do *ethos*, que surge da confiabilidade do autor/credibilidade da marca (Laurence, 2018; Panarese & Villegas, 2018).

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Palavras-chave

comunicação, publicidade, retórica, *storytelling*

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1. Advertising and Society

> A powerful weapon of the industrial production system, advertising has long since ceased to be a simple commercial instrument for publicising products. The advertising communication system is a deep and complex generator of norms, values, lifestyles, and social behaviours that shape public life and human sociability. (Oliveira, 2004, p. 9)

This statement by Paquete de Oliveira remains perfectly current. It states that advertising is no longer a simple technique for mediating communication between supply and demand, having instead become a powerful and influential instrument of persuasion. Its performance has, for one, exceeded the founding nature of its mission — a particular type of discourse aimed at launching and promoting products and services that, within the boundaries of defined legal constraints, pops up in media — and now embodies an economic and commercial function. As a crucial pillar in brand building, advertising has asserted itself in creating innovation, developing new products and services, and fostering competition. At the same time, it has played a founding role in the development and sustainability of media and its market.

The persuasive power and ubiquity achieved by advertising have earned it something akin to an ideological charge; by portraying social and cultural concrete situations, advertising indirectly imposes upon its receivers discourse and signification structures that, in turn, reproduce and amplify themselves due to its persuasive power and mass dissemination (Caro, 2017; Lipovetsky, 2006/2007; Veríssimo, 2008). Fidalgo claims that (2010): "in the same way that propaganda became a powerful warfare tool in the first half of the 20th century, so have the industries of persuasion, particularly advertising, become key vectors of economic, social, cultural and political activity" (p. 22).

Despite such alleged power, advertising is undergoing some changes and facing enormous challenges, partially fuelled by ongoing transformations in its model, functions and breadth. The current situation harks back to the 1990s and brings to mind "The Death of Advertising", a paper by Roland Rust and Richard Oliver, published in 1994, in the *Journal of Advertising*. The authors anticipated that the advent of the technologies of that time would bring about the swift destruction of the advertising sector.

However, the advertising market did not collapse; by virtue of its natural flexibility (a trait shared by market and professionals alike), it keeps adapting. The advertising history testifies the advertising market's ability to adapt to technological, social, and cultural changes constantly. Moreover, it shows us that, at every mutation, advertising has always kept its purpose of working on behalf of brands, advertisers, media and consumers (Baynast & Lendrevie, 2014; Caro, 2017; Dahlen & Rosengren, 2016; Rossiter et al., 2018).

The internet and digital media have set a new order in the organisation and dissemination of content when it comes to technological changes. Web technology, 3D, animation, and digital graphics, as well as digital marketing itself, have afforded the development of new and coexisting formats of online advertising that open the door to multiple strategic opportunities (Auladell, 2015). Those formats range from traditional banners to pop-up windows and video ads. Videos ads have, in fact, left the exclusivity of television to start being produced for internet video channels (e.g., YouTube).

Video ads, which can also be accessed via smartphone, now play a crucial role in advertising, not only under their highly creative content but also because they can be shared among consumers, most notably through social media (Dahlen & Rosengren, 2016). In "If Advertising Won't Die, What Will It Be?", Micael Dahlen and Sara Rosengren (2016), professors at the University of Stockholm, note, in addition, that "consumers now control not only whether to receive but also whether to actively seek out and partake in advertising" (Dahlen & Rosengren 2016, p. 336). Since the emergence of social media, we have been watching a change in the relationships among consumers, advertising and advertisers: we have shifted from a unidirectional vision to a multidirectional vision, one of interaction and dialogue, between consumers and advertisers, where the latter are relying more and more on the suggestions of the former (Dahlen & Rosengren 2016, p. 336), even inviting them to be co-creators of several aspects of advertising production and to take part in it (Lawrence et al., 2013).

It was the era of "advertising as entertainment" — a concept suggested at the turn of the last century by Jesus Requena and Amaya Zárate (1999), who proposed advertising design where the ad itself and its whole setting be converted into a consumer object. Spurred on by sharing video ads on social media — and the resulting viral effect – that notion is nowadays a reality.

We are witnessing changes in society and the behaviour of the individual/consumer. Lipovetsky (2007, p. 41) had called our attention to our living in an era of "emotional consumption", which translates into a new relation with products and sets the primacy of sensations and emotions[1], where each individual engages in the free expression of their pleasures and personal tastes (2007, p. 41). In his *Crise no Castelo da Cultura. Das*

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[1] Igartua Perosanz (2007) clarifies the confusion between "mood" and emotion that is often present in the literature on media effects. He defines the former as a general positive or negative feeling, of moderate intensity, that bears no relation to a concrete social object —that is not caused by a particular event. An emotion is, in contrast, a response of a more intense and complex kind, and it relates to a particular object. Emotions are manifest through expressions, behaviours, and physiological reactions — a characterisation in line with Damásio (2000). An emotion can disrupt or redirect behaviours or cognitive processes. An example of emotion given by Igartua Perosanz is the fear brought about in the viewer by a film scene where a character is in a dangerous situation.

Estrelas Para os Ecrãs (Crisis in the Castle of Culture. From Stars to Screens), Moisés de Lemos Martins (2011, p. 189) follows the same line of thought, taking us on reflection on the human condition in a technological society where fears, risks and threats rule (Martins, 2011, p. 189). Martins tells us of a technological society that "has a dominant *pathos*, where sensations, emotions and passions deactivate the centrality of *logos* and *ethos*" (Martins, 2011, p. 189), and conveys to us the notion of a society dominated by individualism allied to hedonism. We have dropped the "Aristotelian idea of harmony" to become a *pathos*-dominated society, characterised by the supremacy of sensations, emotions and passions (Martins, 2011, pp. 188–190).

We live, in fact, in an individual-centred society, where media content that satisfies hedonistic needs coexists with media content in which the ordinary citizen is the protagonist. The successful *Big Brother*, and other shows like ilk, springs to mind as an example of content where the ordinary citizen is featured in the leading role. As an element of the media system and as a sociological amplifier that portrays a culture (Caro, 2017; D. A. Garcia et al., 2013, Veríssimo 2008), the advertising industry is currently reflecting those contents.

When it comes to video advertising (first on television, and increasingly on internet video channels), creatives have been experimenting with developing content that conveys "relevant relationships, or relationships that enable strong connections with their audiences" (Escalada, 2016, p. 48); storytelling should be highlighted as an example of such content[2]. Storytelling is an advertising communication technique that has acquired a new centrality in advertising strategies (D'Amato & Panarese, 2016, as cited in Panarese & Villegas, 2018, p. 65). That is because it involves staging representations of real-life contexts, experiences, everyday life situations, and even complex social issues where the line between reality and traditional advertising content is blurred. Its emotional content, with "human value" and use of real "people", imparts higher realism and veracity to the ad and induce closer proximity to its audience[3] (Escalas, 2004).

Among the various actions that make up a brand's transmedia strategy[4], storytelling is currently an advertising communication approach that can create an attractive "experience", consistent with people's life experiences and sentiments and in tune with their inclinations. This technique can alleviate spectators' tensions and provide a path to

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[2] This much is corroborated by Catarina Duff Burnay's and Nelson Ribeiro's study *As Novas Dinâmicas do Consumo Audiovisual em Portugal* (New Dynamics of Audiovisual Consumption in Portugal), commissioned by the Entidade Reguladora para a Comunicação Social in 2016. Their study has found that, "although advertising investment on digital platforms has increased, TV remains the market leader in advertising and, in this medium, classical ads are relying more and more on *storytelling* to promote engagement" (Entidade Reguladora para a Comunicação Social, 2016, p. 11).

[3] This is how creatives counter "discourse redundancy" — the use of everyday, trivial settings, utterly devoid of differentiating appeal — that leads to diminished attention. This is how they avoid triggering the feeling of intrusion — and consequent zapping response — when designing ads for television. In the current context of digital information overload, it also gives consumers a reason for not activating adblock technologies on video channels like YouTube, where many of those contents are made available (Cardoso et al., 2017).

[4] Many of these ads are 20- to 30-second commercial spots produced for television. Other videos, usually with a lengthier and more explanatory narrative, are simultaneously launched on internet video channels (e.g., YouTube), where they are strategically displayed immediately before the content the viewer intends to watch. Other times content is also produced in alternative, complementary, formats that are strategically scattered throughout several media. Their visualisation conveys a unified and coordinated vision of the message (Jenkins, 2004/2009), contributing to optimise the consumer's experience.

their action or behaviour (Pallera, 2012, as cited in Panarese & Villegas, 2018, p. 65). In fact, the premise that individuals are better able to recall information when that information is presented to them as a "story" than when it is presented to them as a list of facts is contributing more and more to an increase in the use of this kind of narrative by creatives (Zubiel-Kasprowicz, 2016).

Ching Chang (2012), professor of advertising at the University of Taipei[5], sums up in three points the reasons that, in her opinion, explain the success of narratives (storytelling) in advertising:

- In parallel to promoting products and services, storytelling communicates experiences to consumers at the same time that it conveys more effectively the meaning and symbolic character of the brand (e.g., feeling safe and cherished).

- Storytelling heightens consumers' involvement and entertainment. In addition, consumers express a more favourable attitude towards this kind of ad and show better recall of the message.

- Storytelling encourages consumers to infer experiences from the characters' behaviour. Moreover, narratives about a product work as "generic scripts" (Escalas, 1998, p. 283) that define paths for future consumption, that is, they work as a reference for future consumption experiences.

2. Rhetoric and Advertising

Assuming that the different but complementary approaches can explain the success of storytelling in advertising we have just mentioned, we will now look at a video ad — *Dove Real Beauty Sketches* (Dove US, 2013), launched by the Dove brand[6]. We will endeavour to show that the persuasive power of storytelling lies in the verisimilitude of the story, that is, in how close that story is to everyday life and in the "realism" of the narrative (Bal et al., 2011; Tomás et al., 2018; van Laer et al., 2013). Verisimilitude bolsters the brand's credibility (*ethos*) and generates a strong emotional relationship with the public (*pathos*), which makes storytelling a powerful tool for brands (Ballester & Sabiote, 2016; Laurence, 2018; Salmon, 2016). We will also highlight similarities to the aspects that make up the concept of *narratio*, as put forward in *Retórica a Herénio* (Rhetoric to Herenio; *Retórica a Herénio*, 1998/2005, Book 1.12-17)[7].

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[5] Chang's findings are in line with some of the results published in Nielsen's 2015 *Global Trust in Advertising* report. The Nielsen survey found that the television spot is the advertising format that generates higher trustworthiness (63%). Advertising content that shows plausible situations associated with everyday life are, in turn, already the kind of discourse that appeals most to consumers in developing markets. Humour resonates more strongly in developed markets (51%), particularly in Europe, followed by real-life situations content (41%).

[6] This video was part of the communication campaign "Real Beauty", published on YouTube in 2012. It achieved remarkable success; it was, at that time, the most-watched and most-shared video ad ever on that internet video channel, with over 164,000,000 visualisations during the first month of its launch. This testifies to the public's appetite for this new kind of advertising, and corroborates what we have said regarding sharing these videos on social media. This advertising campaign won the Grand Prix at the 2013 Cannes Festival, and the creative duo responsible for the ad were the Brazilian art director Diego Machado and the Portuguese copywriter Hugo Veiga (Santos, 2020).

[7] Note that advertising, and *storytelling* in advertising, are instances of the shortest form of *narratio – percursio* (Fernández, 2006, pp. 192–193). The information to convey should be rendered as quickly as possible; there is no time for enumeration, only for what it really matters. It is upon "what really matters" that the consumer's attention will fall, and it is within it that one is to include arguments of informational nature (e.g., showing that the product solves or prevents a problem) or of transformational nature (those that focus on sensory and emotional gratification, or on social relations). These arguments become apparent when the product's attributes are promoted, when the social relations among the actors evolve, or when the setting where desires are satisfied is evidenced (Rossiter et al., 2018).

Our analysis draws from the "coincidence" between persuasive and argumentative resources present in advertising praxis and rhetoric. Frequently, there is no clear intention on the creatives' part to use the rules of rhetoric; often, they are not even conversant with rhetoric doctrine. That said, the coincidences are there (Durand, 1970; Fernández, 2006; Rey, 2009). In fact, they may even occur inadvertently. If we go back to the beginnings of advertising, one of the first explanatory models of the message designing process was the elementary AIDA (attention, interest, desire, action), attributed to Elias St. Elmo Lewis and first published in 1925, in "Theories of Selling", by E. K. Strong (as cited in Martín, 1996). It recommended that an ad should, in this order, call people's attention (the moment where we should give the public information about the existence of the product or service) and pick their interest, that is, share a piece of relevant information about the properties, specifications and/or benefits of that product or service. To meet this twofold goal, advertising should use arguments that can elicit desire in the consumer and trigger the action/purchase. Now, this model merely reproduces the functions of *docere, delectare* and *movere* espoused by Latin rhetoricians (Cicero among them), according to which rhetoric should teach (*docere*) through logical arguments; delight, and capture the listener's attention (*delectare*); and serve the *movere* component, that is, persuade an audience through emotions and sentiment, to move it to action (Fernández, 2006).

The video ad *Dove Real Beauty Sketches*, chosen to illustrate the current paper, depicts a group of women who are asked to describe their most salient facial features and some of their personality traits; all in all, a self-perceptive analysis. While each woman is describing herself, Gil Zamora, a former FBI forensic artist, is listening and sketching the features she reports – a process identical to that of obtaining a "facial composite" (a.k.a. "identikit") of a perpetrator of a crime based on eyewitnesses' accounts – without ever establishing visual contact with the woman he is sketching. That ensured that the portraits were made solely based on descriptions, with no visual interference at all. Later, the same artist sketches those same women but based on other people's accounts. These drawings were made on different days so that the artist would not know which woman he was sketching. The differences between how the women described themselves and what other people saw in them were striking, showing that female self-perception is much more negative than the opinion/visual impression others described. This finding is corroborated by the results of several scientific studies carried out on this theme" (Brennan et al., 2010; McCabe & Monteath,1997; Secchi et al., 2009).

We will begin by examining the arrangement (*dispositio*) of the elements of discourse[8] as presented in the work of Aristotle (1998/2005, p. 277), also taking into account Barthes' (1987) insights on this subject. The elements of discourse there stated are *exordium* (or proem), *narratio* (narration, statement of facts/events), *confirmatio*

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[8] Our examination takes for granted that the creative who has developed and organised the message assumed the audience was familiar with the structure and fictional content of the advertising narrative. The creative must have likewise anticipated that the audience had some acquaintance with the brand and its values, and that they would interpret that content as persuasion-oriented — not as, say, journalistic content.

(confirmation or proof), and *epilogue* (peroration)[9]. In the remainder of this paper, however, we will follow the three-part paradigmatic structure of *dispositio* put forward by Fonturbel (2009, p. 139) because the specific nature of advertising discourse creates a spatial (and also temporal, in the case of video ads) structuring with its own idiosyncrasies. The advertising discourse is essentially short and, as such, *narratio* (the statement of the topic and the orator's/brand's stance) and *argumentatio* (the reasons that support the *narratio*) are merged into one. In this tripartite structure, we find:

- the initial segment (*exordium*), consisting of musical background and introduction of the forensic artist. The goal is to get the audience's attention and interest;

- a middle segment, which condenses the *narratio*. Keeping in mind how this concept is defined in *Retórica a Herénio* (1998/2005, Book 1.12-17), we can see that the concern falls onto:

  - the brevity of the narration — this advertising campaign focuses solely on what is essential;

  - the clarity of the narration — the content is unambiguous and evident, containing but relevant and essential information to its target, rendering the message easy to understand; the narrative follows the chronological sequence of events — there is a plotline, and that plotline follows a sequence — to preclude confusion in the presentation, odd content, or reference to extraneous issues;

  - the use of verisimilitude, proximity to everyday life and realism[10]. The unknown author of *Retórica a Herénio* (1998/2005, p. 67) tells us that the narrative will be plausible if it is suitable for:

    - the "context"[11] — well, this campaign was launched at a time and space that fit the trend of a society marked by body appropriation and by the cult of appearance and appearance management (Dittmar, 2008; Feiss, 2012; M. Garcia & Cormelles, 2007; Laurence, 2018);

    - the length of time – the ad has the duration deemed necessary for getting the message across (considering its content and format);

    - people's standing — the situations described intend to show the feelings, emotions and concerns of the ad's target public;

    - the reason behind the decisions — the campaign aims at "portraying" circumstances simulating the real life of each of the members of the public to whom it is addressed;

    - the opportunities provided by the scene of action — the narration style is plausible in light of the topic and the characters. Deep down, the actions and facts are in line with the opinion and feelings of most people, which contributes to the brand's credibility (Bal et al., 2011; Ballester & Sabiote, 2016; Laurence, 2018). In other words, the discourse is all the more believable, the greater the realism of the topic, characters and set featured.

- lastly, by way of conclusion, the *epilogue*: the video ad appeals to the audience/public: "you are more beautiful than you think", which sums up the content of the discourse in a pleasant and concise sentence.

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[9] Aristotle himself states that "a speech has two parts. It is necessary to state the subject, and then to prove it" (Aristotle, II.1414a38-40). In his "Preface and Introduction" to the 2005 Portuguese edition of Aristotle's *Rethoric*, Júnior confirms: "the two truly essential parts of speech are narration and proof" (Aristóteles, 1998/2005, p. 49). The unknown author of *Retórica a Herénio* (2005, Book 1.4), on the other hand, states that speech is composed of six parts: exordium, narration, division, confirmation, refutation and conclusion/peroration.

[10] Note that the concept of verisimilitude is not only linked to that of "reality", but also to the universal narrative concepts of action, characters, space, time, and form – which is to say, the circumstances that surround the event (Fernández, 2006).

[11] The author states that *narratio* "will have plausibility if it answers the requirements of the usual, the expected, and the natural" (*Retórica a Herénio*, 1998/2005, Book 1.16). Considering the definition given, we have rendered this notion as "context".

The author of *Retórica a Herénio* (1998/2005, pp. 65–70) deepens the analysis of the particular aspects of *narratio* that we have just mentioned, stating that there are three types of narration:

- the first type, where one states the events (harnessing every detail to one's own advantage, here including one's own cause and the basis or grounds for the controversy);

- the second type, where the purpose is levelling an accusation (and establishing a comparison with the topic under discussion and consistently entertaining the audience);

- the third type, not used when dealing with civil causes (nevertheless useful as practice for public speaking and writing), is used when the intention is to please the audience.

This last type of *narratio* is, according to the author, divided into two classes:

- the first one directs our attention towards the *actions* and is, in turn, further divided into:

  - *fabulam* (legendary), where actions are narrated that are neither true nor plausible;

  - *historiam* (historical), an account of actions that did occur, but in the remote past;

  - *argumentum* (realistic), where the actions told are false, albeit plausible;

- the second one focuses on the *people/characters*. According to the author, this class of *narratio* should present "a lively style and diverse traits of character, such as austerity and gentleness, hope and fear, distrust and desire, hypocrisy and compassion, and the vicissitudes of life, such as reversal of fortune, unexpected disaster, sudden joy, and a happy outcome." (*Retórica a Herénio,* 1998/2005, p. 65).

We can thus say that the power of the Dove campaign lies, precisely, in the story's verisimilitude and in the fact that it focuses on the characters. It is a story that addresses issues that affect the public's everyday life. Its characters display relatable physical attributes and express fears, anguishes, suspicions or desires shared by the target public of the message.

At the same time, the narrative departs from traditional advertising canons that communicate notions of youth, wealth or lavishness — "made up" topics, in short, closer to those that characterise cinematic fiction and are somewhat akin to the notion of *argumentum*, as defined in *Retórica a Herénio*. Likewise, it departs from the typical discourse about the fantastic (fantasy) and the unreal, which share some traits with the *fabulam* type mentioned in that text.

In the campaign in question, the message does not stem from an ideal imaginary, as is the case in most traditional advertising, but from the public's actual values and concerns; it shows real life through arguments that "move" that same public and narrates the feelings and emotions experienced by the characters, which are shared by the public to whom the message is addressed. That shows a "human" facet of advertising, thus contributing to its credibility.

Designing this narrative required plenty of preliminary work (*inventio*) in which the sender "attempted to find out and design the most suitable arguments for the thesis they intended to advocate for" (Nunes, 2015, p. 10). In other words, there was a stage in the process where ideas were assessed, and arguments were chosen in light of the intended marketing goals and the target public, with a particular emphasis on which characters to choose.

Another crucial element of the persuasive process in advertising is the impact that certain characters have on audiences. What is their persuasion role? Throughout the history of advertising, no one has ever disputed that a lot of care and thought goes into character definition. In an advertising plotline, characters work as virtual receivers, "interpreting" a "self" that is real to the target of the ad. In the methodology he developed to create brand identity, Kapferer (1994/2000) cautioned that special care should be taken when selecting the leading character for a campaign because their presence aims at "creating a reflection, an ideal image of the consumer/user to whom the ad is addressed, (…) therefore working as an aspirational model" (p. 40). The purpose of such presence is that of "convincing" the consumer that that could be his/her image, the image of his/her self that would show before others, should he/she consume the advertised product. Judith Williamson (1994) was stating the same point when she noted that advertising seemed to be drawing on the cognitive phenomenon of identity building, described by Lacan as the mirror stage (p. 60) — something that occurs when the child takes the image of the adult as a reference and embodies it. It seems to us that, in examining how audiences identify with characters — a subject which study began in the field of art and literature reception and interpretation and later extended to the cinema (Metz, 1980) — psychoanalysis has also helped advertising scholars understand this phenomenon.

There are also models in the field of psychology that help us understand this process. The elaboration likelihood model (ELM), developed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986), is one of the landmarks in explaining persuasive processes, or the narrative transportation model, developed by Melanie Greene and Timothy Brock (2000), emerged within a multi-disciplinary structure that integrates cognitive psychology and theory of communication, culture and consumption.

Juan Igartua Perosanz (2007, p. 41) says that "identification with characters" is a multi-dimensional construct comprising several psychological processes. He sees empathy as one of the essential dimensions of identification, which allows us to understand the process of entertainment content reception and explain the enjoyment derived from being exposed to that content (Igartua Perosanz, 2007, p. 13). The premise here is that through their empathy towards the story's characters and the imagination they apply to interpret the story's plot, receivers/consumers experience a feeling of mentally "entering" the world evoked by the narrative, of embarking on a "symbolic journey to other worlds".

In this perspective, the process by which the consumer identifies with the characters and the narrative includes three properties:

- Firstly, it requires the receiver to process stories — the acts of receiving and interpreting.

- Secondly, spectators are transported due to two main components:

    - empathy. Receivers try and understand the character's experience (i.e., to put themselves in the character's shoes and know and feel the world from that point of view). That may explain the receiver's resulting state of "detachment from the world of origin", and it justifies the notion of "narrative transportation";

    - mental images. Receivers conjure up vivid images of the story's plot line, so much so that they feel as if they were experiencing those very events (Green & Brock, 2002).

- Finally, when transported, receivers lose touch with reality in the physiological sense.

In this perspective, narratives derive from a process of interpreting and attributing meaning to a story. Following in the footsteps of Igartua Perosanz (2007), van Laer et al. (2013), in their "The Extended Transportation-Imagery Model", put forward a broader and revised understanding of the narrative transportation model, which now includes the notion of empathy. Here is, in a nutshell, why narrative transportation occurs, according to van Laer et al. (2013):

- the individual takes a liking to the story's characters;
- the plot activates the individual's imagination, leading them to experience "suspension" of reality while receiving the story.

The authors find that narrative transportation appears to be more of an emotional than an intentionally cognitive process and that it leads to potentially increased and long-lasting persuasive effects (van Laer et al., 2013, p. 800).

Going back to the video ad, we can say that we are before a campaign where identification between audience and narrative emerges via empathy towards the characters. In performing a role that brings them closer to the ideals of the target public, the characters "lead" the audience to process and interpret the story as if it were theirs. In other words, because they assimilate the characters' experience as if they were the ones experiencing it, the audience is "transported", which puts them in a (transitory) state of detachment relative to the reality they inhabit, while at the same time feeling as if they were experiencing the story's events themselves.

So, the audience takes a liking to the story's characters, and the plot activates the audience's imagination, triggering the "suspension" of "their" reality while the story is being received so they can assimilate the experience that the characters have enjoyed with the advertised brand as theirs.

Let us now focus on the argument aspect. What persuasive forces were mobilised into the ad? What were the arguments used?

Aristotle (1998/2005) says that the orator "persuades through his hearers when they are roused to emotion by his speech; for the judgements we deliver are not the same when we are influenced by joy or sorrow, love or hate" (p. 97).

While it is true that, at its inception, advertising had an informational function, it is no less true that, for years now, we have been watching a trend: increasing use of symbolic arguments, aimed at triggering the public's emotions, imaginaries, desires and ambitions (Solomon, 2018); in other words, a predominance of *pathos*.

The Dove campaign is emotional, so persuasion occurs deeper than that found in traditional advertising (Escalas, 2004). The public's absolute adherence to the cause advocated in the ad has most likely resulted from their being exposed to an unexpected type of discourse, in which arguments focus on feelings and emotions, rather than on products' features, increasingly indistinguishable from one another.

This campaign has caused an emotional reaction in millions of people and has inspired them to share it with others. In addition to millions of visualisations (bear in mind that the video ad was translated into 25 languages and seen in 110 countries), it was the outpouring of testimonies worldwide that singled it out. Such a level of dissemination

was only reached because the advertising narrative was based on a story consistent with the public's values (Panarese & Villegas, 2018).

The fact that the source/sender — the Dove brand — is perceived as reliable and trustworthy must indeed have played a role in that massive adherence to the ad. Paulo Serra (2015) tells us that "the credibility of the orator was readily pointed out by Aristotle as one of the main – perhaps the most important – means of persuasion" (p. 127). The reason seems obvious: a person cannot be persuaded by someone whose discourse fails to inspire a modicum of confidence. Serra (2015) adds that one element that defines *ethos* is that it "is a necessary proof, particularly when dealing with things about which there is no unequivocal knowledge and which are therefore open to debate" (p. 129). He continues, noting that "the interpretation seems evident: in those things that are uncertain or dubious, where we cannot reach a conclusion on our own, we need to trust someone to overcome the uncertainty and suspicion they arouse" (Serra, 2015, p. 129).

Serra (2015) is referring here to political issues, but what he says in that context, namely on sources of information, can certainly be extended to advertising and brand credibility. One should also note that, since Aristotle, the goal of any argument has always been that of bringing about or increasing the audience's support for the thesis. Such support will be all the more effective, the more significant the intensity it achieves, triggering in the listeners an action, or, at the very least, a willingness to act at a later opportunity.

In Dove's advertising campaign, the public's adherence to the issues and ideals depicted in the ad is abundantly clear in the fact that the video has been shared thousands of times and has generated thousands of comments. This response is the result of a campaign that set a differentiating limit, evidenced personality, and established relations with the public (Baynast & Lendrevie, 2014; Kapferer, 1994/2000; Kotler & Keller, 2015) in a cultural and social universe marked by body and self-image concerns. With this campaign, the Dove brand endeavoured to build its renown from universally recognised values and to mobilise the public around them, thus implying that it understands (a) the needs of consumers and (b) their constraints when it comes to a crucial issue in a woman's life: her self-image. The campaign's persuasion comes from choosing to focus on the fact that women underestimate themselves.

Matching discourse to the public is also one of the fundamental theses in Aristotle and all of the classical rhetoric (Serra, 2008). The practice of rhetoric entails a discourse directed to an audience, where "the orator underpins his discourse on what the audience expects of him, thus respecting their values, believes, cultural habits, experiences, social status or aspirations" (Mateus, 2018, p. 43). In fact, in Book II of *Retórica a Herênio* (1998/2005), Aristotle tells us of the different types of individuals who can make up an audience and of their particular attributes: the young, the elderly, the powerful, the aristocrats, those in the prime of life. They are thus psychological descriptions of different human characters.

The creatives who developed the Dove campaign will have had an accurate and up-to-date picture of the psycho-sociological profiles of their audience[12], as well as knowledge of their needs, motivations and socio-cultural habits. That enabled them to create and deliver a message that exhibits the values, the issues, and a communication register that coincides with their audience's socio-cultural norms.

4. Conclusion

Considering that advertising is a powerful and influential instrument of persuasion, albeit undergoing a process of change and facing significant challenges partially caused by shifts in its own model, functions and breadth, and recognising that brands show, nowadays, an appetite for establishing relations with their public through affection and emotions, this paper has attempted to show that storytelling — which may have a structural underpinning in classical rhetoric — can be one of the "tools" brands can use in pursuing that goal.

We can say that storytelling is grounded on the concepts of "story" and "'arration about people" as defined in *Retórica a Herénio* (1998/2005, Book 1): it attempts to render an account of seemingly actual facts, portraying real-life situations, using characters the public can relate to, displaying feelings, worries, and emotions for purposes of eliciting an emotional response in the audience (evidence of *pathos*).

We have seen that the brand designed the campaign under analysis; was deemed credible (prominence of *ethos*); was launched in a time and space marked by a concern with and appropriation of the body, by individuals increasingly loving themselves, by appearance management and a cult of appearance; and that the actions and facts narrated were suitable to the nature of the participants, public opinion and audience's feelings.

Following in Moisés de Lemos Martins (1998)[13] footsteps, we, too, have found that we are before a kind of advertising that refuses some of the *topoi* (common themes) usually shown in advertising. The advertising we have examined does not feature representations of happy families sharing a meal around a table, married couples having a lovely time, cars travelling along with amazing landscapes where everything is clean and beautiful. It likewise discards sentimental and romantic atmospheres, as well as ideal-like characters in the role of heroes; it does not highlight arguments such as success, a synonym for happiness, or expertise, as an apology for human behaviour — all of the hallmarks of the advertising that is put before our eyes day after day. It is, in sum, a kind

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[12] In advertising, audience is equal to an entity statistically expressed by a set of individuals that, in the sender's estimation, share a set of common traits and features, such as social class, age, or occupation, as well as similar values and personality traits, activities, interests and attitudes.

[13] According to Moisés de Lemos Martins (1998) "the persuasive force of the *topoi* lies in their reflecting a common, acknowledged and accepted wisdom; and it is because they circulate, because they are accepted by many, that they enjoys a presumption of truth and are granted authority" (p. 48). Now, this is the premise where our notion of "common themes" used in advertising lies.

of advertising that rejects some of the *topoi* of modern society, which discourse becomes a mirror of consumers in reflecting social aspirations' "dreams".

Translation: Cristina Carvalho

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Bibliographic Note

Jorge Veríssimo holds a PhD in sociology of communication from University Institute of Lisbon, with aggregation in communication sciences from University Beira Interior. He is a professor in the School of Communications and Media Studies of Politécnico de Lisboa, on which he was president between 2010 and 2018 and vice-president between 2005 and 2010. He was the first director of the Advertising and Marketing's Master, and he is the current director of the Advertising and Marketing's Bachelor. He also teaches in the PhD program of communication sciences in University Institute of Lisbon. He is a researcher in Centre for Research and Studies in Sociology of the University Institute of Lisbon. He was the coordinator of the Advertising Observatory (2001–2010). He is member of the European Advertising Academy and of the Associação Portuguesa de Ciências da Comunicação (Portuguese Association of Communication Sciences).

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8045-4114

Email: jverissimo@escs.ipl.pt

Address: Escola Superior de Comunicação Social, Campus de Benfica do IPL, 1549-014 Lisboa

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