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Rhetoric in advertising: Attitudes towards verbo-pictorial rhetorical figures

Keywords: rhetoric, rhetorical figures, multimodality, advertising, attitude towards the advertisement

A rhetorical figure (for instance the antithesis in “Come in and find out” in a Dutch perfume ad) communicates an advertising message in an artfully divergent way. Two types of rhetorical figures are frequently distinguished, namely schemes (superficial decorations such as rhyme and alliteration) and tropes (meaningful deviations such as metaphors and puns). However, until now little attention has been paid to rhetorical figures that can be found in combinations of text and image (i.e., verbo-pictorial rhetorical figures). In this article, an experiment and interviews are presented on the effects of non-rhetorical figures, verbo-pictorial schemes and verbo-pictorial tropes on attitudes towards advertisements. In the experiment, twelve real-life advertisements (4 per category: non-rhetorical figure, scheme, and trope) were presented to 92 participants. The results show that attitudes towards ads with verbo-pictorial tropes (and advertisements without rhetorical figures) are less favourable than those towards advertisements with verbo-pictorial schemes. This could be explained by the fact that relatively more participants failed to come up with successful interpretations of the ads with these tropes and that attitudes were less favourable towards advertisements that were unsuccessfully interpreted than towards advertisements that were successfully interpreted.

1. Introduction¹

Instead of communicating straightforwardly, as in Figure 1, advertisers often choose an aesthetically appealing, more oblique way of presenting their message. In these cases, they may use a rhetorical figure, an artful deviation from a straightforward way of communicating the advertising message. Rhetorical figures in magazine advertisements can be effective instruments in the persuasion process. According to Meyers-Levy and Malaviya (1999), an individual’s attitude towards a product or brand can be determined by the feelings experienced while processing an ad. If it is nice, pleasant, or fun to process the advertisement, this positive feeling can lead to a positive attitude towards the ad and subsequently to a positive attitude towards the brand or product (cf. Brown and Stayman, 1992). Rhetorical figures can evoke these pleasurable feelings during processing.

Rhetorical figures are frequently subdivided into schemes and tropes (for example, Corbett and Connors, 1999; McQuarrie and Mick, 1996). Schemes are superficial deviations, which are explicit and perceptible to everyone. Traditional examples of schemes are rhyme, alliteration, antithesis, and so on. Tropes are meaningful deviations, which can be noticed and interpreted only on the basis of already existing knowledge or other elements in the advertisement. Interpreting tropes contributes to

the identification of the advertising message. Traditional examples of tropes are metaphors, puns, and so forth. (such as “Always travel light”, for light cigarettes).

Rhetorical figures find their origin in the verbal mode (Corbett and Connors, 1999), and they are also recognized in the visual mode (for example, Forceville, 1996; McQuarrie and Mick, 1999, 2003b). In advertisements for the Dutch airline company KLM, for instance, a swan is depicted instead of the KLM airplane, by means of which the elegance of the swan is transferred to the airline company.

A content analysis of a set of advertisements (Van Enschoot, Hoeken and Van Mulken, 2004) shows that rhetorical figures can be found in the combination of text and image as well, as has been acknowledged by other researchers (Forceville, 1996; McQuarrie and Mick, 1992; Tanaka 1992). Examples of these verbo-pictorial rhetorical figures can be found, for example, in the advertisements of Labello (Figure 2) and Nescafé (Figure 3). Text and image are literally interwoven in the Labello ad:

the “o” of “gloss” is replaced by the girl’s pursed lips. The deviance in the Nescafé ad lies in the seeming mismatch between the headline and the picture: a teaspoon does not equal an espresso machine.

One can distinguish verbo-pictorial rhetorical figures from verbal and visual rhetorical figures by determining whether the rhetorical figure remains intact when either text or image is removed. For verbo-pictorial rhetorical figures, the presence of both the verbal and the visual component is needed for the rhetorical figure to arise. If one of them is absent, the verbo-pictorial rhetorical figure disappears. If the rhetorical figure does remain intact when text or image is removed, then there is either a visual or a verbal rhetorical figure (cf. Forceville, 1996, p.159). An ad for toothpaste, for example, shows a picture of a pearl necklace resembling smiling teeth, and the text “Pearly white”. Obviously, a relationship between text and image exists here. This text makes clear how the picture can be interpreted. However, the rhetorical figure is still a visual one. If the text is removed, the comparison



Figure 1. HAK. “Extra taste with the new vegetables of HAK”



Figure 2. Labello “Gl[o]ss & Care”



Figure 3. Nescafé “Espresso machine”

between the teeth and the pearls would still apply. It would just become more difficult to grasp the comparison. Therefore we do not consider this rhetorical figure as a verbo-pictorial one.

Verbo-pictorial rhetorical figures can also be categorized into schemes and tropes. For example, the advertisement for Labelle CareGloss & Shine (Figure 2) is an example of a verbo-pictorial scheme. This rhetorical figure is schematic; the deviance is superficial and not (or barely) meaningful: the only deviation lies in the literal interwovenness of text and image. An ad for the Dutch supermarket Albert Heijn (Figure 4) also contains a verbo-pictorial scheme, in the replacement of the symbol “=” by the two ginger cakes. Just as in the previous ad, this deviation needs little interpretation. The receiver only needs to infer that the two ginger cakes in the shape of an “=” stand for “equals”.

In this study, a verbo-pictorial trope is defined as a seeming mismatch between the headline and the picture in an ad. An example of a verbo-pictorial trope is found in the advertisement for Nescafé instant espresso (Figure 3). At first sight, the spoon does not equal the

accompanying text (“espresso machine”) because what we see is not an espresso machine. Compared with the Labello ad, this deviance is more meaningful and requires a deeper level of processing. One can figure out that the spoon may not literally be an espresso machine but can serve as one with this new Nescafé product.

Verbo-pictorial tropes only contain a mismatch at first sight. The headline and picture do end up corresponding with each other after successful interpretation of the ad, as the example of the Nescafé ad shows. Another example of a verbo-pictorial trope can be found in the mismatch between the banana and “Thirsty?” (“Dorst?”) in the Chiquita ad (Figure 5). This mismatch can be resolved by noticing the pack of Chiquita fruit juice at the bottom right corner of the ad. The Chiquita banana cannot quench one’s thirst, but the Chiquita fruit juice can.²

Rhetorical figures are assumed to yield pleasure of processing and, with that, a more positive attitude towards the ad (cf. Tanaka, 1992, p.95, based on Sperber and Wilson 1995 [1986], see also Yus, 2003). It can be pleasurable to experience the artful deviation or to “solve the puzzle” (cf. Berlyne, 1971, p.136).



Figure 4. Albert Heijn
“Our ginger cake =
available in five
flavours”



Figure 5. Chiquita
“Thirsty?”

The expectations about differences between schemes and tropes are less clear. Attitudes towards ads with tropes may be more favorable than towards ads with schemes (cf. McQuarrie and Mick, 1999, 2003b) because of the difference in perceived complexity. Tropes are assumed to be perceived as more complex than schemes, and this increment in perceived complexity may result in a more favorable attitude towards ads with tropes than towards ads with schemes (and ads without rhetorical figures). The more effort it costs to interpret a rhetorical figure, the more pleasure the processing of the rhetorical figure may yield (cf. Sperber and Wilson, 1995 [1986]; Van Driel, 2002).

This line of reasoning may only apply when the ads with tropes are processed successfully. To be processed successfully, tropes demand the active participation and knowledge of the receiver, whereas schemes and non-rhetorical figures are processed more or less automatically (McQuarrie and Mick, 1999, 2003a). The higher perceived complexity of an ad with a trope may result in a more favorable attitude towards the ad only if the trope is understood.

It could also be the case that attitudes towards ads with non-rhetorical figures, schemes and tropes resemble an inverted U-curve (cf. McQuarrie and Mick, 2003a, p.207-208; Phillips, 2000; Van Mulken, Van Enschoot and Hoeken, 2005). The attitudes towards ads with tropes, like ads without rhetorical figures, may be lower than towards ads with schemes because ads with tropes are understood less often than ads with schemes and non-rhetorical figures. With tropes, receivers might feel frustrated because they have not succeeded in interpreting the ad (cf. Meyers-Levy and Malaviya, 1999). This frustration may lead to a relatively unfavorable attitude towards the ad (cf. Ketelaar and Van Gisbergen, 2006; Van Mulken et al., 2005).

The properties and effects of non-rhetorical figures, schemes and tropes are expected to be independent of

the place where rhetorical figures occur (text, image, or the combination of text and image) (cf. McQuarrie and Mick, 1999, p. 39).

Until now, no studies have been conducted to compare the effects of verbo-pictorial schemes and tropes on perceived complexity and attitude towards advertisements. This study fills this gap. It extends knowledge on the functioning of schemes and tropes that has been built up by studies on verbal and visual rhetoric, by researching whether advertisements with verbo-pictorial tropes are perceived as more complex than advertisements with verbo-pictorial schemes and advertisements without rhetorical figures. It considers viewer attitudes towards advertisements without verbo-pictorial figures, advertisements with verbo-pictorial schemes and advertisements with verbo-pictorial tropes. It also, by registering whether people attempt to (or succeed in) interpreting text-image combinations, measures whether people try to interpret verbo-pictorial schemes less often than verbo-pictorial tropes, whether interpretive failure rates vary between tropes and schemes, and whether attitudes towards an advertisement are less favourable when interpretation is unsuccessful than when interpretation is not attempted.

2. Experiment

Method

Material. Twelve advertisements were selected from a large corpus of magazine advertisements appearing between 2001 and 2004. To optimize external validity, all advertisements were chosen from general public magazines. All were ads for low-involvement products targeted at a broad audience (for example, butter, cake mix, coffee, hot chocolate, toothpaste, vegetables). Four advertisements were selected per category (no rhetorical figure, scheme, trope) to prevent any specific advertisement or

rhetorical figure being held responsible for the results (cf. Jackson et al., 1988). The body copy was removed from the advertisements. To ensure that the advertisements did indeed represent their category, 24 students of Business Communication Studies, familiar with rhetorical figures, classified the advertisements independently. An ad was only used in the experiment if more than two third of the students concurred with the original classification.

Design. A within-participants design was used: each participant saw all 12 advertisements. A Latin square design was used to prevent sequence effects.

Participants. 92 participants, aged 20-68 (average 39), 50% male, 50% female, filled in the questionnaire individually. Educational backgrounds varied from lower vocational education to higher education.

Instrumentation. In the first part of the questionnaire, participants gave their judgments on complexity and attitude towards the ad. Complexity was operationalized by means of three seven point scales: "I think that the advertising message is very obvious" versus "hidden in the advertisement", "I think that the advertisement is easy to understand" versus "difficult to understand", and "I think that the advertisement is simple" versus "complex". In the instructions, examples were given of the concept "message". Attitude towards the advertisement was operationalized by means of two seven point scales: "I think that the advertisement is bad" versus "good", and "I think that the advertisement is unattractive" versus "attractive".

To check whether rhetorical figures were perceived as more divergent than non-rhetorical figures, the extent of deviation was measured in the second part of the questionnaire by means of three seven point Likert scales (the second and third being derived from McQuarrie and Mick, 1996, p. 434): "I think that the advertisement

is surprising", "artful" and "clever". It was determined that the reliability of the judgments on complexity, attitude towards the ad and extent of deviation was at least adequate for almost all advertisements ($\alpha > .70$). In this second part, participants were also asked whether they had tried to interpret the text-image combination and, if so, whether they had succeeded in interpreting this combination: "Did you try to interpret the text in combination with the picture? In other words, did you try to understand why it is this picture together with this text that was chosen?". The participants could choose one of three options: 1) "No, I did not try to interpret it", 2) "Yes, but I did not succeed" or 3) "Yes, and I can understand why it is this combination of this picture and this text that was selected. The picture together with the text make clear that... [open answer]"³

In the third part of the questionnaire, the attitude towards the product ("Chiquita juice", "Albert Heijn ginger cake", and so on) was registered, to be able to check whether the attitude towards the product influenced the attitude towards the ad. One seven point semantic differential was used: "very negative attitude towards the product" – "very positive attitude towards the product". The fourth part checked whether the participants had seen the advertisement before participating in the experiment (yes, no, don't know).⁴ Sex, age and education level were also registered.

Pretest questionnaire. The questionnaire was pretested with 19 participants who did not join in the experiment: ten male and seven female (the background data of two participants is unknown), aged 21 to 67 (average 30), education level from intermediate vocational education to higher education. Based on this pretest, unclarities were detected and removed. The pretest also showed that filling in the questionnaire did not take too much time (approximately half an hour).

Results

One-way ANOVAs over participants (F_1 , repeated measures) and stimuli (F_2) were performed, with verbo-pictorial rhetorical figure as factor (no rhetorical figure, scheme and trope). The Bonferroni test was used to make posthoc comparisons. One-tailed tests were used when differences between categories were expected. Two-tailed tests were used when expectations were absent or when no differences were expected. The F_1 analysis was used to interpret the results. Absence of significant differences in an F_2 analysis may well be caused by the small number of stimuli in the analysis. An effect in the F_2 analysis would point towards a clear difference between categories, perceptible even with this small number of stimuli. The results can be found in Table 1.

Perceived extent of deviation. Verbo-pictorial rhetorical figures had an effect on the experienced extent of deviation ($F_1(2, 90) = 89.97, p < .001, \eta^2 = .67; F_2(2, 9) = 10.99, p < .01, \eta^2 = .71$). Advertisements with verbo-pictorial tropes and schemes were considered more divergent than advertisements without rhetorical figures. No difference was found between advertisements with a trope and with a scheme.

Perceived complexity. Verbo-pictorial rhetorical figures affected the experienced complexity of the advertisement ($F_1(2, 90) = 91.52, p < .001, \eta^2 = .67; F_2(2, 9) = 33.91, p < .001, \eta^2 = .88$). Advertisements with a verbo-pictorial trope were considered more complex than advertisements with a verbo-pictorial scheme and advertisements with no rhetorical figure. No difference was found between advertisements with a scheme and those without a rhetorical figure.

Attitude towards the ad. Verbo-pictorial rhetorical figures affected attitudes toward the advertisement, but only in the participant analysis ($F_1(2, 90) = 9.99, p < .001, \eta^2 = .18$, but $F_2(2, 9) < 1$). Pairwise comparisons show that the attitudes towards advertisements with a verbo-pictorial scheme were highest. No difference was found between advertisements with a trope and without rhetorical figure.

The attitude towards the ad was also analyzed when people succeeded in interpreting the text-image combination. No difference was found between ads without rhetorical figures ($M: 4.51$), ads with verbo-pictorial schemes ($M: 4.73$) and verbo-pictorial tropes ($M: 4.47$) ($F_2(2, 9) < 1$).⁵ However, this finding is hard to interpret due to the low power.

Table 1. Average judgments (with SDs) on perceived extent of deviation (1 = not divergent, 7 = divergent), perceived complexity (1 = simple, 7 = complex) and attitude towards the advertisement (1 = low attitude, 7 = high attitude), as a function of verbo-pictorial rhetorical figure.

	Non-rhetorical figure	Verbo-pictorial scheme	Verbo-pictorial trope
Extent of deviation	2.49 (1.06) ¹	3.90 (1.01) ²	3.82 (1.13) ²
Complexity	2.12 (0.80) ¹	2.30 (0.74) ¹	3.92 (1.17) ²
Attitude towards advertisement	4.03 (1.14) ¹	4.46 (1.07) ²	3.96 (1.11) ¹

Note: Different superscripts indicate that means differs significantly from one another; equal superscripts indicate that means do not differ significantly from one another.

Table 2. Average judgments (with SDs) on perceived complexity (1 = simple, 7 = complex), attitude towards the ad (1 = unfavourable, 7 = favourable), as a function of the interpretation process of the text-image combination (did not try to interpret text-image combination, interpreted unsuccessfully, interpreted successfully).

	Did not try	Unsuccessful	Successful
Complexity	2.72 (0.72) ¹	3.61 (1.08) ²	2.45 (0.81) ¹
Attitude towards advertisement	3.99 (0.56) ²	3.34 (0.58) ¹	4.57 (0.43) ³

Note: Different superscripts indicate that means differs significantly from one another; equal superscripts indicate that means do not differ significantly from one another.

Interpretation process. One-way ANOVAs with repeated measures were performed with rhetorical figure as factor, and the Bonferroni test was used to make posthoc comparisons. A one-tailed test was used. The rhetorical figure had an effect on the extent to which people did not try to interpret the text-image combination ($F_1(2, 90) = 33.83$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .43$; $F_2(2, 9) = 36.90$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .89$). Schemes (33.4%) were more often not interpreted than tropes (16.0%). Non-rhetorical figures were not interpreted by 51.6%. The rhetorical figure also had an effect on the extent to which respondents unsuccessfully interpreted the text-image combination ($F_1(2, 90) = 25.89$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .37$; $F_2(2, 9) = 15.69$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .78$). Tropes (32.9%) were more often unsuccessfully interpreted than schemes (11.1%) and non-rhetorical figures (11.2%).

Effect interpretation process. One-way ANOVAs for repeated measures were performed. The results can be found in Table 2.

The (un)successful interpretation of the advertisement affected the experienced complexity of the advertisement ($F_2(2, 10) = 32.98$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .87$). An advertisement was judged to be more complex when the text-image combination was unsuccessfully interpreted than when it was either successfully interpreted or interpretation was unattempted.

(Un)successfully interpreting the ad also affected attitudes towards the ad ($F_2(2, 10) = 73.43$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .94$). Attitude towards an advertisement was more favourable when the text-image combination was successfully interpreted than when it was either unsuccessfully interpreted or interpretation was unattempted. Furthermore, the attitude towards an advertisement was more positive when the text-image combination was not interpreted than when it was unsuccessfully interpreted.

Conclusion

As expected, the advertisements with verbo-pictorial tropes were perceived as more complex than the ads with verbo-pictorial schemes and the ads without a rhetorical figure. Attitudes towards ads with verbo-pictorial schemes were more positive than towards ads with verbo-pictorial tropes or ads without a rhetorical figure. Interpretation was attempted less often for ads with schemes than for ads with tropes. The ads with tropes were less likely to be successfully interpreted than the ads with schemes or the ads without rhetorical figure. Subjects were more positive about an ad when they either interpreted the text-image combination correctly or did not attempt to interpret it, than when interpretation

failed. The less favourable attitudes towards ads with verbo-pictorial tropes may be caused by the high (perceived) complexity of the tropes combined with the high percentage of respondents who failed to come up with a successful interpretation of these tropes.

Real-life ads were used in the experiment, to optimize external validity. However, these ads differed more from each other than just with respect to the rhetorical figure used. Semi-structured interviews were held to determine whether other factors than the rhetorical figure may have influenced the attitude towards the ad. In these interviews, a group of respondents who had not taken part in the experiment were asked to explain their attitude towards the ad.

3. Interviews

All advertisements with verbo-pictorial schemes and tropes from the experiment were presented in the interviews. For comparison, one ad with no rhetorical figure was included. Respondents were public library visitors. They had not participated in the experiment, were native speakers Dutch and were either employed or looking for employment. Ten respondents were interviewed: five male, five female, age 22-57 (average 44), education levels ranged from higher general secondary education to higher education. Respondents were found a week in advance and received € 20 for their participation.

Procedure. The interviews were held in a quiet room in Nijmegen public library. The advertisements were presented in two different orders, to counter sequence effects. The ad with no rhetorical figure was always presented first. An interview took 30 to 60 minutes and was recorded.

An interview scheme was used, which included the following questions: “Is there something that attracts your attention? If yes, why?”, “What do you think of the ad? Why?”, “Have you seen the ad before?”. The respondent

was asked to express personal reactions towards each ad by means of a scale from 1 to 10 or terms like positive, negative, good, bad, neutral, and so on. The interviewer did not ask about the rhetorical figures, except in the cases in which the respondent did not mention them (for example, “You also see two ginger cakes in the middle of the text...”). The respondent was asked to give first intuitions, not to rush, and to think aloud.

The ranking in attitude towards the ads in the interviews matched the ranking in the experiment (inverted U-curve: non-rhetorical figures < schemes > tropes) in almost all cases. From the interviews, it can be concluded that the relatively positive attitude towards the ads with verbo-pictorial schemes as opposed to the ads with verbo-pictorial tropes can (at least partially) be explained by the rhetorical figures in these ads. The rhetorical figure was noticed in almost all ads. Furthermore, the rhetorical figure influenced attitudes towards almost all ads.

Attitudes towards verbo-pictorial schemes were mostly positive. The scheme in the Labello ad (the “o” of “gloss” replaced by the pursed lips), for example, was seen by everyone and was mentioned by almost everyone as a factor that positively influenced their attitude towards the ad: “nicely created with that mouth [...] I even think that it would be less if you would leave this out” [the text around the mouth].

The influence of verbo-pictorial tropes was not always positive. With some respondents, the tropes had a negative effect on attitude. Reactions to the Nescafé ad, for example, were lower when respondents were unable to interpret the mismatch. Respondents said, for example: “Insufficient [...] Because I do not really understand it”, “You have an espresso machine and you’ll need to stir. You need a spoon to stir the coffee from the espresso machine [...] I’d give it a five, or a four [...] it is unclear to me”. One respondent understood the mismatch at a later stage: “I do not understand this at all [...] Oh, I get it now! The spoon...it is a joke [...] the spoon is the espresso

machine. You just need to stir. Understanding that makes it very funny to me”.

Attitude towards the product or brand did not seem to influence the relatively positive attitude towards the ads with schemes. Products or brands were not consistently more appreciated in ads with schemes than in ads with tropes.⁶ It is remarkable that, with all ads with schemes, the clarity of the ads was mentioned as a factor that influenced the attitude towards the ad positively: “the message of the ad is clear”. This factor was mentioned for only two of the four ads with tropes. This difference may be caused by the explicitness of the schemes.

4. General conclusion

The concepts “scheme” and “trope” have been applied to verbal and visual rhetorical figures (for example, Leigh, 1994; McQuarrie and Mick, 1996, 1999, 2003b; Mothersbaugh, Huhmann and Franke, 2002). Rhetorical figures also occur in the combination of text and image (cf. Van Enschoot, Hoeken and Van Mulken, 2004). In this study, the effects of these verbo-pictorial rhetorical figures, subdivided into schemes and tropes, were investigated. The results reflect an inverted U-curve (cf. McQuarrie and Mick, 2003a, p.207–208; Van Mulken, Van Enschoot and Hoeken, 2005; Phillips, 2000). Attitudes towards ads without rhetorical figures are less favourable than towards ads with verbo-pictorial schemes. However, attitudes towards ads with verbo-pictorial tropes (which are perceived as the most complex category in this research) are less favourable than towards the ads with schemes as well. The optimum can be found with ads with verbo-pictorial schemes (for example the “o” that is replaced by the girl’s pursed lips in the Labello ad or the “=” that is replaced by two ginger cakes in the Albert Heijn ad).

Schemes are artful deviations that are perceived as relatively simple (as simple as non-rhetorical figures) and

that just need to be experienced to be processed successfully (cf. McQuarrie and Mick, 2003a). To process tropes successfully, the receiver needs to fall back on personal knowledge or other elements in the ad. When personal knowledge is inadequate, or when a reader misses elements in the ad, and thus does not understand the trope, the ad will be judged less favourably. The results thus indeed show that people are less likely to successfully interpret ads with verbo-pictorial tropes than those with verbo-pictorial schemes or non-rhetorical figures, and that an unsuccessful interpretation brings about a less favourable attitude towards the ad than does a successful interpretation or no interpretation at all (see Table 2). The interviews also show that verbo-pictorial schemes almost always positively influence attitudes towards an ad, while verbo-pictorial tropes have a negative influence on attitude towards an ad (even in this setting, in which the respondents spent considerably more time looking at the ads than they would in a natural setting). The negative impact of verbo-pictorial tropes on the attitude towards the ad was particularly striking for the Nescafé ad. Almost all respondents who failed to interpret the spoon as an alternative to the “espresso machine” appreciated the ad less.

The explanation for the relatively negative attitude towards ads with tropes in this study probably can be found in the fact that these ads were unsuccessfully interpreted more often. However, it is not clear whether attitudes towards ads with tropes would be higher if they had been successfully interpreted. It is possible that the cognitively challenging tropes would bring about more processing pleasure than do barely challenging schemes. It is also possible that people might not be motivated to put energy into processing cognitively challenging ads at all, given that attitudes towards advertising tends to be relatively negative (Van den Berg, Duijnisveld and Smit, 2004, p. 9-11). In this study, an analysis of attitudes towards successfully interpreted ads brought

about insufficient insights into this issue because of the small number of ads in the analysis. However, another experiment (Van Enschoot et al., 2006) did show that the attitudes towards successfully interpreted ads was equally high when comparing high and low (perceived) complexity. Studies by Ketelaar and Van Gisbergen (2006) and Van Mulken et al. (2005) show that attitudes towards more complex ads are less favourable than towards less complex ads, even when the ads are successfully interpreted. Attitudes towards ads with tropes, even when the tropes are successfully interpreted, may be comparable to (or even less favourable than) attitudes towards ads with schemes. Furthermore, more and less complex tropes can be distinguished (see for example McQuarrie and Mick, 1996; Phillips and McQuarrie, 2004). It may be that not all tropes are appreciated less than schemes, but that the optimum can be found somewhere within the trope category.

Many interesting issues are waiting to be explored, if only because tropes are frequently used in advertisements (Van Enschoot, Hoeken and Van Mulken, 2004; Van Mulken, 2003) and awards are granted relatively frequently to ads with tropes but almost never to ads with schemes. In any case, advertisers may want to consider using less complex forms of rhetoric.

Notes

1. This study formed part of the Ph.D. thesis of the first author, which is published in a more extensive version elsewhere.
2. Forceville's test is most helpful and best applicable when determining whether a trope is a verbo-pictorial, a visual or a verbal one. This test is less necessary when determining whether a scheme is verbo-pictorial, visual or verbal. It is most likely that the interweaving of text and image is enough to ascertain that a scheme is verbo-pictorial.
3. An extensive discussion of this measurement of comprehension can be found in Van Enschoot (2006, p.147-149).

4. It was also analyzed whether the fact that respondents had or had not seen the advertisements influenced the differences in attitude towards the ad. This turned out not to be the case (Van Enschoot, 2006, p.134-135).
5. An F_1 analysis could not be done, given the many empty cells in the F_1 data file.
6. These findings were supported by additional analyses comparing attitude towards an ad to attitude towards the product (Van Enschoot, 2006, p.124-125). It is unlikely that attitudes towards a product caused attitudes towards an ad.

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