

Rhetoric is the study of discourse techniques able to provoke or increase support in people's minds for theses which are presented.

Advertising is based on the employment of rhetoric as a toolbox, a sort of repertoire of persuasion techniques to simulate a situation during which a thesis (this product is good because...) is illustrated a/o exemplified

The three functions of classical rhetoric, “docere” (transmitting information), “movere”, (provoking emotions), and “delectare” (presenting as pleasant), correspond to the premises of good advertising: giving excitement, supplying convincing reasons and raising interest. For an ad to work there must be attention, credibility, interest!

Persuasive discourse is carried forth by means of rhetorical techniques: convincing with factual data (“l'unico SUV compatto con motore 111 cavalli HD”), syllogisms (a form of deductive reasoning consisting of a major premise, a minor premise, and a conclusion; for example: “All humans are mortal”, the major premise, “I am a human”, the minor premise, therefore, “I am mortal”, the conclusion. In an ad: “capelli così visibilmente sani che splendono”: “i capelli che splendono sono sani”, “i miei capelli splendono”, “i miei capelli sono sani”), examples, opinions, citations from famous people (“nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita”; “tanto gentile e tanto onesta...ma non è”), exploiting the ambiguity of words (“fatti una escort”) or wordplay (“Per un risultato extra-freshness più clean. Vividness Active: più chewing-gum”), enthymemes (syllogisms with verisimilar premises that is presented in shortened form, in other words, with one premise omitted: “Le macine del Mulino Bianco. Un mondo buono.”, “Just do it”, “A Paramount picture”).

We know the use of different techniques depends on the mode of persuasion adopted. Let's read a page from Aristotle's *Rhetoric* to consider how persuasion may work.

Aristotle, *Rhetoric*

from Book 1, Ch. 1, 2 (excerpts)

from <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/rhetoric.1.i.html>

Rhetoric is useful (1) because things that are true and things that are just have a natural tendency to prevail over their opposites, so that if the decisions of judges are not what they ought to be, the defeat must be due to the speakers themselves, and they must be

blamed accordingly. Moreover, (2) before some audiences not even the possession of the exactest knowledge will make it easy for what we say to produce conviction.

For argument based on knowledge implies instruction, and there are people whom one cannot instruct. Here, then, we must use, as our modes of persuasion and argument, notions possessed by everybody, as we observed in the Topics when dealing with the way to handle a popular audience. Further, (3) we must be able to employ persuasion, just as strict reasoning can be employed, on opposite sides of a question, not in order that we may in practice employ it in both ways (for we must not make people believe what is wrong), but in order that we may see clearly what the facts are, and that, if another man argues unfairly, we on our part may be able to confute him. No other of the arts draws opposite conclusions: dialectic and rhetoric alone do this. Both these arts draw opposite conclusions impartially. Nevertheless, the underlying facts do not lend themselves equally well to the contrary views. No; things that are true and things that are better are, by their nature, practically always easier to prove and easier to believe in. Again, (4) it is absurd to hold that a man ought to be ashamed of being unable to defend himself with his limbs, but not of being unable to defend himself with speech and reason, when the use of rational speech is more distinctive of a human being than the use of his limbs. And if it be objected that one who uses such power of speech unjustly might do great harm, that is a charge which may be made in common against all good things except virtue, and above all against the things that are most useful, as strength, health, wealth, generalship. A man can confer the greatest of benefits by a right use of these, and inflict the greatest of injuries by using them wrongly.

Rhetoric may be defined as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion. This is not a function of any other art. Every other art can instruct or persuade about its own particular subject-matter; for instance, medicine about what is healthy and unhealthy, geometry about the properties of magnitudes, arithmetic about numbers, and the same is true of the other arts and sciences. But rhetoric we look upon as the power of observing the means of persuasion on almost any subject presented to us; and that is why we say that, in its technical character, it is not concerned with any special or definite class of subjects.

Of the modes of persuasion some belong strictly to the art of rhetoric and some do not. By the latter I mean such things as are not supplied by the speaker but are there at the outset -- witnesses, evidence given under torture, written contracts, and so on. By the former I mean such as we can ourselves construct by means of the principles of rhetoric. The one kind has merely to be used, the other has to be invented.

[1356a] Of the modes of persuasion furnished by the spoken word there are three kinds. The first kind depends on the personal character of the speaker; the second on putting the audience into a certain frame of mind; the third on the proof, or apparent proof, provided by the words of the speech itself. Persuasion is achieved by the speaker's personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible. We believe good men more fully and more readily than others: this is true generally whatever the question is, and absolutely true where exact certainty is impossible and opinions are divided. This kind of persuasion, like the others, should be achieved by what the speaker says, not by what people think of his character before he begins to speak. It is not true, as some writers assume in their treatises on rhetoric, that the personal goodness revealed by the speaker contributes nothing to his power of persuasion; on the contrary, his character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses. Secondly, persuasion may come through the hearers, when the speech stirs their emotions. Our judgements when we are pleased and friendly are not the same as when we are pained and hostile. It is towards producing these effects, as we maintain, that present-day writers on rhetoric direct the whole of their efforts. This subject shall be treated in detail when we come to speak of the emotions. Thirdly, persuasion is effected through the speech itself when we have proved a truth or an apparent truth by means of the persuasive arguments suitable to the case in question.

There are, then, these three means of effecting persuasion. The man who is to be in command of them must, it is clear, be able (1) to reason logically [*logos*], (2) to understand human character and goodness in their various forms [*ethos*], and (3) to understand the emotions-that is, to name them and describe them, to know their causes and the way in which they are excited [*pathos*]. It thus appears that rhetoric is an offshoot of dialectic and also of ethical studies. Ethical studies may fairly be called political; and for this reason rhetoric masquerades as political science, and the professors of it as political experts-sometimes from want of education, sometimes from ostentation, sometimes owing to other human failings. As a matter of fact, it is a branch of dialectic and similar to it, as we said at the outset. Neither rhetoric nor dialectic is the scientific study of any one separate subject: both are faculties for providing arguments. This is perhaps a sufficient account of their scope and of how they are related to each other.

[...]

3 modes of persuasion:

1- Persuasion based on *ethos* is an appeal to the authority or honesty of the speaker. It depends on how well the speaker convinces the audience that he or she is qualified to speak on the particular subject. It can be done in many ways:

- By being a notable figure in the field in question, such as a college professor or an executive of a company whose business is that of the subject.
- By having a vested interest in a matter, such as the person being related to the subject in question.
- By using impressive *logos* that shows to the audience that the speaker is knowledgeable on the topic.
- By appealing to a person's ethics or character.

2- Persuasion based on *pathos* is an appeal to the audience's emotions. It can be in the form of metaphor, simile, a striking image, a passionate delivery, or even a simple claim that a matter is unjust. The speaker may use pathos to appeal to fear, in order to sway the audience. Pathos is most effective when the author connects with an underlying value of the reader.

3- Persuasion based on *logos* is logical appeal or the simulation of it, and the term *logic* is derived from it. It is normally used to describe facts and figures that support the speaker's topic. These data are true or at least have the appearance of being true. Having a logos appeal also enhances *ethos*, because information makes the speaker look knowledgeable and prepared to his or her audience. However, data can be confusing and thus confuse the audience, or even be misleading.