An Analysis of Scholarly Articles Related to Visual Rhetoric

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This semester I decided to focus my research on the concept of visual rhetoric which encompasses the principles on how visuals are used within the sphere of communication and media. Visual rhetoric can be used in education, news media, art, politics, etc. making it one of the most versatile tools in human communication. I chose the conversation of visual rhetoric because I practice photography on the side of school, personally I believe it would be interesting to learn and discover exactly what causes a photo to be emotionally stimulating. I was also curious to evaluate the extent of which a photo can impact a discussion or argument, in other words, what weight a photo has in the realm of human communication and if it is truly as effective as spoken words.

The articles I decided to research were mainly to do with how visuals are used in the news either to mislead, misrepresent, or to illicit emotional responses from audiences. I also chose a set of articles dedicated to the formulation of meaningful visuals such as posters as a method of efficiently conveying vast amounts of information. This is how I started my search on the ERIC database; since, I knew my focus was on the use of images or posters to convey meaning or messages, therefore I used the search terms "Visual Rhetoric and Images or Photography or Photographs," and "Visual Rhetoric and Posters or Infographics." Shorter search terms not including or generally excluded results that were viable and could be included in my paper. I also filtered by peer reviewed papers and full text documents to ensure they were both reliable and usable sources

Foss, S. (2004). Theory of Visual Rhetoric. In K. Smith, S. Moriarty, K. Kenney & G. Barbatis (Eds.), *Handbook of Visual Communication: Theory, Methods, and Media (pp. 141-152)*. Routledge.

The beginning of the chapter "Theory of Visual Rhetoric" begins with a brief history surrounding the challenges faced in including Visual rhetoric into the study of rhetoric. The beginning of the article also followed why visuals or "non-discursive symbols" (Foss, 2004, p.143) are important to rhetoric, one of the main arguments was the use of advertisements to sway the minds of consumers. The next section speaks on communicative artifacts which is the broad means of visual rhetoric whether it be art, photography or sculptures the only rules are that the visual must be symbolic and communicative (Foss, 2004, p.144.) Visual rhetoric involves unrelated symbols to portray a certain message or command. The visual must also be created by people that have the desire to use the visual to present a thought, communicate an idea or sway the minds of their peers. Not only can visual rhetoric be the act of using an image or visual to communicate but it can also be the analysis of the specific visual in question. Studying the nature of an image is to study its composition and elements and determining what the elements mean to a viewer (Foss, 2004, p.146-147.) The main idea of the article was the use of Rhetoric in images and the use of images as rhetorical symbols.

I chose this chapter to get a general understanding of the theory behind visual rhetoric since it was mostly unfamiliar to me. It was important that I had my bearings on the overarching principles behind visual rhetoric before I began to read scholarly articles that focused on either: applying said principles to their own work or analyzing others work through the lens of Visual rhetoric. One of the main reasons I chose this chapter was because it accurately described what

exactly visual rhetoric was and vaguely discussed the implications of visual rhetoric in everyday conversation not just scholarly scenarios.

Pedwell, R. K., et al. (2017). Effective visual design and communication practices for research posters: Exemplars based on the theory and practice of multimedia learning and rhetoric. Biochem. Mol. Biol. Educ., *45(*3), 249-261. DOI: 10.1002/bmb.21034

Pedwell, Hardy and Rowland studied the use of posters in the scientific domain and the importance of effective poster design in effective visual rhetoric. The author argues that the use of posters should be reinforced in college and showcases the elements of an effective poster. The first of law of poster design ensures that the message is delivered with as little interference as possible such as filler words and non-relevant statements. The first rule bleeds into the second rule which calls for "signaling" of key information by using certain design elements such as text color and font size. The third rule states that effective poster design avoids repeated elements to maximize the use of space. And the last is to order elements in the way that they should be read to maximize clarity for the audience (Pedwell, Hardy & Rowland, 2017,) The article mentions that good poster design can establish credibility with the audience which tends to be a better idea than outright stating achievements. Pedwell, Hardy and Rowland discusses that using effective poster design can emotionally incite an audience and having the facts be accurate appeals to the audience with logos. Effective and ineffective design elements are scattered in various tables around the document such as Table 1 which showcases the design elements of an excellent poster.

I chose this article because it showed how to use elements of rhetoric to analyze effective and ineffective visual design. The article was clear, concise and easy to understand and allowed me to familiarize myself with some of the terminology used when analyzing design elements of

print advertisements. It showed exactly what counted as good design element and what counted as bad design elements which helps me identify good and bad design elements in my own research.

Mehta, R., & Guzmán, L. D. (2018). Fake or Visual Trickery? Understanding the Quantitative Visual Rhetoric in the News. Journal of Media Literacy Education, *10*(2), 104–122. Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1198646

The article "Fake or Visual Trickery? Understanding the Quantitative Visual Rhetoric in the News" starts by introducing multimodal analysis which is the method of studying news articles that combines text with graphics and layout of information to determine bias. Rohit Mehta and Lynette DeAun Guzmán also cover the straying from the news media outright lying and their overall drift towards manufacturing certain statistics and data to look a certain way that fits the stations agenda. The article focuses on the analysis of the media surrounding the 2016 Hillary vs Donald trump election and introduces the concept of lying by "Spatial manipulation" (Rohit Mehta & Lynette DeAun Guzmán, 2018, p.111.) lying by spatial manipulation is the mode that uses visual rhetoric the most. There is a specific example of a misleading graph by fox news where the starting y value of the graph is not specified, and it massively undersells the percentage of people in Obamacare. The examples presented in the article are talked about in detail and each graphic is taken from a source with a left bias a source with a right bias and a source with a center bias with right-center and left-center being the non-extreme biases.

I chose this source because it highlighted how visual rhetoric is used as a tool to effect public opinion which is integral to argument and debate. This article also goes into depth about how statistics and graphs can be manipulated to misrepresent accurate results. I found this very interesting because the public usually doesn't notice the obvious manipulation of data that occurs

in the media, while not technically lying they misrepresent data to fit their agenda. I also chose this article because it showed the differences between how visual rhetoric can be used to fit different agendas and how the same statistic can be used to defend two sides of an argument.

Massey, C. (2017). The Rhetoric of the Real: Stereotypes of Rural Youth in American Reality Television and Stock Photography. Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, *38*(3), 365–376. DOI: 10.1080/01596306.2017.1306982

In this article Carissa Massey describes the effect of tv in the development of stereotypical views. She discusses how television allows images and visual rhetoric to be flashed in our field of view faster than we can comprehend them. This allows the brain to draw social associations from the depictions without having any time to digest the images or the scenarios presented to it. This erases the human ability to think critically and reason that not everyone in a certain social class acts or behaves the same way and that it's possible that the reality on tv isn't the reality of the world. Its then discussed that the white rural stereotypes have many purposes one being to reduce the social and economic status of the group that's being stereotyped and allow them to be economically starved, Similarly, the other is to paint the people who are being stereotyped as if they were at fault for the disparity between the poor and the rich (Massey 2017). Youth plays a big role in the manifestation of stereotypes through reality TV which is exemplified using the example of "Honey Boo Boo." Another issue discussed is that reality TV relies on oversimplified images to appeal to a broader audience and the characteristics of a whole section of society can't be encapsulated in simple photos.

I chose this article because it's interesting to see how mass media can affect even our most basic views on one another. It was also interesting to understand why reality TV proliferates so many negative stereotypes and how visual rhetoric is manipulated and used to

achieve that proliferation. This article also ties in with the article by Mehta and Guzmán by showing how not only news, but most media will manipulate their environment to portray a reality that fits their narrative or goal using visual rhetoric.