

A Literature Review of Scholarly Articles Surrounding Visual Rhetoric

Benjamin Carmenate

Department of Writing and Rhetoric, University of Central Florida

ENC 1102: Composition II

Professor Arban

February 7, 2020

Literature Review

My research surrounded visual rhetoric both in theory and application, according to Foss (2004), “Visual rhetoric is the term used to describe the study of visual imagery within the discipline of rhetoric.” Rhetoric itself is a culmination of the laws and nuances that surround human communication, everything from body language to visual artifacts included. Rhetoric is studied in many different realms of human communication not just reading and writing, it can be visual rhetoric, digital rhetoric, queer rhetoric, etc. More specifically, Visual rhetoric is the analysis and use of visuals in conversations, it is the study of how images affect the way we communicate with one another. Visual rhetoric deals with the ways visual artifacts change the way we comprehend and disseminate information.

One heavily studied topic in the field of visual rhetoric is the use of visual rhetoric in news media, this encapsulates the study of infographics and the emotional appeal held in images. The first example of this in my research is Rohit Mehta and Lynette DeAun Guzmán’s article “*Fake or Visual Trickery? Understanding the Quantitative Visual Rhetoric in the News.*” This article discusses the use of “Spatial manipulation” or selectively choosing included events to fit an agenda. The article studied many media outlets with different biases circa the 2016 election to see if their biases were prevalent in their images, they concluded that the biases were in fact prevalent in news media by showing examples of election infographics that showed high percentages for democrats winning the 2016 election with manipulated statistics. Another example is Lisa Skow and George Dionisopoulo’s (1997) article “*A Struggle to Contextualize Photographic Images: American Print Media and the ‘Burning Monk.’*” This article deals with images monk that poured gasoline on himself and lit himself on fire in the Vietnam war. The article takes 6 news sources and compares how each used visual rhetoric to further their own

political and religious agendas. The articles are looked at through the lens of both religion and anti-communism and show how an image can be used to support multiple different arguments.

These two articles both deal with the impact that visuals and images have on public opinion of geopolitical events, in the first article it is a war on communism and in the second article it was a contentious election. In Lisa Skow and George Dionisopoulo's it was shown how the same image can be used to support two completely different argument, this is like Rohit Mehta and Lynette DeAun Guzmán's article in that the news media created visual media to represent the same statistic in two very different likenesses. These articles showed a strong continuity in the importance of visual rhetoric from the 1970's to 2016. It also showcases how news media will reinterpret or manipulate any image to fit their agenda.

Another commonly studied topic in visual rhetoric is the use of visual media to proliferate stereotypes of certain groupings of people. In the article *"Representations in the Illustrations of the 6th Grade Language Textbook Used in Greek Elementary School. Advances in Language and Literary Studies"* by Karintzaidis, Christodoulou, Kyridis and Vamvakidou (2016), there is a discussion of the use of visual rhetoric in the proliferation of gender stereotypes in childhood textbooks. The study shows that Men are shown more typically in stereotypically male dominated careers while women are typically shown in more diverse fields. Now when it comes to location boys and men are typically shown to be more outdoorsy, versus women and girls being shown to spend more time indoors. Following, the article by Carissa Massey (2017), *"The Rhetoric of the Real: Stereotypes of Rural Youth in American Reality Television and Stock Photography,"* describes the implication of white rural stereotypes in America; to specify, this article analyzes the portrayal of white rural stereotypes in realty tv and in stock photography. Not only does Massey (2017) discuss the portrayal of white rural stereotypes but also the implication

that these stereotypes have on modern society. There's also a discussion of how rapidly delivered images don't allow you to digest the actual content being thrown your way. These two articles both discuss how stereotypes are delivered and proliferated using visual rhetoric such as "Not educated and vulgar" white rural Americans and women staying inside of their houses cemented in children's minds in educational institutions. They differ in what groupings are being stereotyped, one article looks at these stereotypes through the lens of the race and another is looked at through the lens of gender. They both discuss the form in which stereotypes are portrayed but using a different medium one being in education and the other in televised media.

One of the main research fields is the analysis of what makes up a good visual and how certain elements affect visual rhetoric. Pedwell, Hardy and Rowland (2017) studied this exact topic in their article *"Effective visual design and communication practices for research posters: Exemplars based on the theory and practice of multimedia learning and rhetoric."* this article shows the different elements of effective poster design and how graphics are used in rhetorical appeals. Pedwell (2017) studies different posters surrounding the topic that use effective ineffective and moderately effective poster design tips. This article pairs very well with the aforementioned Rohit Mehta and Lynette DeAun Guzmán's *"Fake or Visual Trickery? Understanding the Quantitative Visual Rhetoric in the News."* These two articles work interestingly with each other because one analyzes effective design of visual rhetoric and the other discusses using those same tactics to manipulate perception of a topic. While both deal with good use of visual rhetoric their goals are divergent, Pedwell, Hardy and Rowland aim to inform in a scientific sphere and the news aims to influence in a sociopolitical setting.

Though all this research effectively summarized the impact of visual rhetoric in their respective areas, there has not been nearly enough research done in analysis of what makes

visual artifacts alone effective communicators. While all the sources explain the impact that each visual artifact had they rarely venture into the blend of lighting and composition that communicate certain emotions and ideas.

Research Objective

Since research in visual rhetoric is mostly centered around the use of visuals to represent data or stereotypes in news and print media, I like to focus on what exactly affects the communicative power of a photo. I will be researching the subsequent question to narrow down the many aspects that make a photo effective as a visual artifact.

- How does lighting and composition of a photo affect the rhetorical appeal of the visual artifact regardless of paired text?

The research will mainly be focused on photographers to achieve the best results with experts in the particular field.

Methodology

For my first six pieces of evidence, I plan to gather 6 separate professional photographers post from Instagram and identify what photos generate the most engagement (likes, positive comments, etc.), engagement will be referenced among their other photos. Three photographers were chosen for landscape photography Chris Burkard, Alex Strohl and Oliver Wong. Three more photographers were chosen for portrait photography Alex Stemplewski, Pye Jirsa, and Chris Burkard. Each photographer will be studied and then the best performing photos of each photographer will be compared against each other for major design elements such as lighting, composition, and color. All chosen photographers also have a following of over 50 thousand making them respected photographers in their fields. Another metric will be taken exclusively

from Chris Burkard's account to compare whether landscape or portrait focused photography garners more engagement.

My Seventh piece of evidence will be conducted through a survey sent out to the UCF photography discord server in which subjects will be asked to rate and chose which photo incites certain emotions and feelings. The variables altered in these photos will be temperature of lighting, centering of the subject, portrait vs landscape, framing or the gap from the top of the subject to the top of the picture and vibrance. This survey will show what experts think of how certain composition styles and lighting affect the rhetorical appeals of viewers specifically pathos. I will also be conducting this survey on the general public to provide diversity in sample size in order to verify whether the difference is only noticed in people with eyes trained for photography.

Timeline

- Collect specific photographers' photos 10/15, 10/16
- Compare photos engagement and audience reception 10/16
- Synthesize all three portrait photographers including comparison versus each other 10/17
- Synthesize all three Landscape photographers including comparison versus each other 10/18
- Take and edit photos for survey 10/18-10/21
- Make survey 10/22
- Send Out survey to photography club and general public 10/23
- Analyze survey 10/26
- Work on coding matrix 10/27-10/28

- Write paper from 10/28-11/7

References

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Appendix A

1. Choose which photo feels more welcoming
 - a. Image: Vibrant
 - b. Image: Flat
2. Choose which photo looks more aggravating
 - a. Image: Red tint
 - b. Image: Blue tint
3. Choose which photo looks more professional
 - a. Image: Natural editing
 - b. Image: Stylistic editing 1
 - c. Image: Stylistic Editing 2
4. Choose the photo that looks more intense
 - a. Image: Warm tone
 - b. Image: cool tone
5. Choose the photo that looks more dramatic
 - a. Image Soft light
 - b. Image Hard light
6. Choose the photo that looks more off putting
 - a. Image left skewed
 - b. Image right skewed
 - c. Image bottom skewed
 - d. Image top skewed
 - e. Image centered