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Connecting Visual Discourse and Consumer Response: a Critical Examination of Mainstream Taxonomy*

Abstract: One of the most exciting areas of current research in advertising rhetoric concerns the patterns which can be identified in the structure of visual discourse according to the different types of consumer response it elicits. In this article I take a critical approach towards a largely accepted taxonomy of visual rhetorical figures and examine the hypotheses derived from it concerning consumer response. I show that this mainstream classification fails to account for the meaning-operations elicited by figurative images in advertising. I suggest a theoretical apparatus which will help future research be more accurate in evaluating advertising effects. I discuss the implications of my contribution for the construal of future hypotheses regarding belief, recall and persuasion of visual figures in pictorial advertising.

Keywords: visual discourse in advertising, visual rhetorical figures, brand meaning, consumer response, persuasive imagery in commercial communication;

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