Eristic argumentation in commercial advertising: the case of Lithuanian ads

Skirmantė Biržietienė, Assoc. prof. dr.
Vilnius University, Kaunas Faculty of Humanities, Lithuania
Research interests: classical rhetoric, rhetoric of advertising, classical philology, ancient literature.
Eglė Gabrėnaitė, Lecturer dr.
Vilnius University, Kaunas Faculty of Humanities, Lithuania
Research interests: linguistics, rhetoric of advertising.

Introduction remarks

Advertising may be examined as a particular form of rhetoric that aims at the same goals as rhetoric, namely to affect mind, will, feelings, and to achieve a persuasion. The theory of rhetoric, which main object is discourse not only in narrow meaning as verbal expression of ideas (that is to say text), but also in broad meaning – as communicative act between the addresser and the addressee because of its interdisciplinary nature provides the right tools to explore the advertising discourse. The theory of rhetoric is successfully applied in creation of advertising discourse, because it helps to foresee the communicative act between the addresser and the addressee. Advertising and rhetoric are combined by many common elements, but most important – the same goal: both rhetoric and advertising seek persuasion through verbal and non-verbal measures.

The goal of rhetoric science is persuasion, therefore argumentation cover important place in the theory of rhetoric. Argumentation – is an activity, which functions in specific social context (Bubelis, Jakimenko, 82), where the aim is not to provide knowledge or objectively prove specific thing, but to persuade the audience about the acceptability of particular statements and to change the opinion of addressee. In the earliest remained tractate of rhetoric – „Rhetoric" by Aristotle – the question about the argument is fundamental. It can be said, that Aristotle in whole tractate seeks the answer to the question: „What is the argument?". He emphasized, that rhetoric – ability to find possible patterns of persuasion and arguments in each specific case (Arist. *Rhet*. I 1355 b), so, it is universal system of persuasion. Philosopher singled out non-technical and technical arguments. The latter are connected with the art of rhetoric ($\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\nu\eta$), their invokement can be taught by rhetoric. Non-technical arguments exist objectively and technical arguments, according to Aristotle, highly depend on the speaker's personality, character ($\mathring{\eta}\theta o\varsigma$), audience and their opinion, mood ($\pi\acute{\alpha}\theta o\varsigma$) and subject ($\lambda\acute{o}\gamma o\varsigma$) (Arist. *Rhet*. II). The combination of these three elements makes the discourse persuasive. Invoked practice of technical arguments created specific type of argumentation – eristic argumentation.

Eristic – (gr. ’εριστική τέχνη – the art of dispute, iš gr. ’έρις– dispute) the art to defend your own statements during dispute and to achieve their recognition by others. Eristic argumentation is invoked during dispute in order to achieve victory. The participants of dispute should seek the truth, but if the aim is just to defeat others and objective truth is lost from view, the victory is sleeked without taking into account justice of reasoning it can be spoken about eristic argumentation. (Gabrėnaitė,105). Eristic reasoning – reasoning when for potentially incorrect statement appearance of justice is given: the parameter of truth does not exist, only the opinion and assumption occur. (Korolko,120). Therefore it is very important to be able express opinion and manage to prove and impress it.

Although eristic often is identified as negatively evaluated sophistic, classical rhetoric justifies ethic use of sophistic and eristic measures in persuasive discourses, but reprobate non-ethic patterns of impact – falsification, defamation, insolence, threats. Eristic argumentation is ethic until addressee can freely accept or reject the arguments. These patterns and measures of argumentation were particularly discussed by A.Schopenhauer: the classification and examples introduced in the study „Eristic Dialectics or Art of Being Right" (*Die eristische Dialektik*) (1830) are also followed and today. A.Schopenhauer indicated 38 (37 marked in numbers and one is called *the last*) patterns and measures of eristic argumentation. Some of them have names: generalization, homonymy, diversion and etc. According to A.Schopenhauer, „eristic dialectic is the art to argue"(for more look Schopenhauer, 13–35).

Eristic argumentation is the most common in advertising (Lewiński, 170). This persuasion method is a way to create truth visibility although it is just superficial. The most typical schemes of *eristic argumentation* used in advertising are as follows: *argumentum ad vanitatem* (appeal to the vanity of the addressee), *argumentum ad verecundiam* (appeal to the authority), *argumentum baculinum* (method of "whip" argument), *argumentum ad novitatem* (appeal to novelty). Although advertising as a elaborated phenomenon is rather new, but it is rapidly developing, so all the scope of eristic arguments can be found in Lithuanian advertising. The paper is analysing three examples involving three ersitic argumentation schemes: *argumentum ad novitatem, argumentum ad verecundiam, argumentum ad vanitatem.*

Argumentum ad novitatem means appeal to novelty, newiness. *Argumentum ad novitatem* was not singled out by Schopnehauer, although it becomes eristic argument, when the newiness of the product, inovation of the technology is stated as a main necessity and guarantee of the supreme quality. The appeal to novelty is based on the reasoning that in general people will tend to try to improve the outputs resulting from their efforts. (Ryborz, 187). Thus the newer is the better. In this type of reasoning the idea or proposal is superior exclusively because it is new. The novelty is assumed as a definite

advantage. Undoubtedly this is the most common pattern of reasoning in advertising discourse. The word "new"(Lithuanian *naujas*) is the most frequent in the verbal mode of advertising. In the advertising not only the newness, the new qualities of the object are highlighted, the new circumstances are important as well, the boundary between what was before and now, when one can have the advertised object is emphasised too.

Argumentum ad novitatem is in opposition with *argumentum ad antiquitatem*. Despite it in advertising discourse they can be used together in harmony to win the persuasion of addressee. It is seen in the presented example, advert of Lithuanian brandy *Alita* (picture No. 1 in appendices), which main text proclaimes *Elegantiška klasika* (*Elegant classic*), but the aim of the advert is to inform about new form of the bottle. The marks of time generally are very important in this scheme of reasoning.

Argumentum ad verecundiam – the appeal to modesty, respect – is linked with *argumentum ad auctoritatem* – appeal to authority, arguments from authority. These cases are correct when the authority is legitimate expert of the field, although in advertising discourse few types of this kind of reasoning can be found: a) real expert of the field and having no personal concern; b) real expert though advertising subject is a part of his own activities or own business; c) celebrity becoming expert because his is presented as satisfied user (U. Eco points with irony: "Everyone needs to follow the celebrity as an example"[1]). Usually successful and famous people are supporting advertised product with their success. In Lithuania among the others the most prominent are commercials with famous basketball players. This tendency is especially apparent during various championships. This year during EuroBasket our athletes were recommending to buy some smartphone, LCD TV, to taste some sausages, or "get mineralized" (to drink famous Lithuanian mineral water *Vytautas*, picture No. 2 in *Appendices*). It must be pointed out, that Lithuanian basketball players often are showed in humoristic discourse, which in general is rare advertising pattern.

It should be noted, that the majority of authorities promoted in the ads do not meet the requirements of real moral authority; their authority depends on recognition: *circulus vitiosus*: he is an authority, he is an expert, because he is recognisable. Thus the analysis of the functioning of the authority in the advertising discours should be talking about the alleged authority, the projection of the authority.

---

[1] Quoted from Lewiński, 77.

Argumentum ad verecundiam could be not eristic pattern, if the authority is acknowlegded expert of the field, but it becomes again, when the personal concern appears (as it seen in the advert of famous Lithuanian plastic surgeon K. Vitkus and his private clinic, picture No. 5 in *Appendices*,).

Argumentum ad vanitatem – appeal to vanity – commonly is very used in advertising discourse, where the audience, addressee personally is the most important. It is connected with *captatio benevolentiae*, the rhetoric thechnique of trying to capture the goodwill of the audience. I want to concern the attention on the advertising of Lithuanian telecommunication company BITE, partner of Vadofone, which proclaimes: *We are lucky to have demanding clients. Demanding clients make us to improve, to become perfect*. It started very successfully few years ago and is continued until now with some insignificant changes (some visualisation of this advertising company can be seen in the *Appendices*, pictures No.3 – 4).

Concluding Remarks

One of the most important requirements for advertising argumentation – it must seem logical, consistent and to create illusion of reliable evidence. However, when the object of advertising is one of many in certain type it is difficult to distinguish its singularity. Therefore eristic arguments, connected not with the object itself but with external factors or background circumstances, are invoked.

Eristic argumentation in the advertising is orientated in acceptance of audience earning and persuading. One of the most important its features – attention to addressee: with the help of emotional arguments the impression of generality is created, addressee is transformed to congenial, confederate of ideas and actions.

Lithuanian commercial advertising is successfully adapting the patterns of eristic argumentation.

References

1. Aristotele, *Rhetoric*: online source http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/rhetoric.html
2. Bubelis R., Jakimenko V. , 2003: *Logika.* Vilnius.
3. Gabrėnaitė, E., 2010: *Reklamos topika: persvazijos instrumentai*, Phd. thesis, Vilnius University, Vilnius.
4. Korolko M., 1998: *Sztuka retoryki*. Przewodnik encyklopedyczny. Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna.
5. Lewiński, P. H., 1999: *Retoryka reklamy*, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego.
6. Ryborz H. , 1999: *Menas įtikinti.* Vilnius.
7. Schopenhauer A., 2007: *Erystyka. Sztuka prowadzenia sporów*. Gliwice: Helion.

Appendices

No.1. Brandy *Alita*

No.2. Mineral water *Vytautas*

No. 3 – 4. *Bitė* adverts *Demanding clients* (*Reiklieji*)

No. 5. *Vitkus clinic* advert