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Media Rhetoric
12/11/03
Fall Quarter Examination Rewrite

The significance of media communications is a broad and, at times, complicated issue to decipher. From the rhetoric standpoint, there are certain areas that one must take into full account prior to analysis.

First, a clear definition of rhetoric is needed. Aristotle defined it as ‘the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion.’ (3) In comparison, the dictionary defined rhetoric as ‘the art of discourse, both written and spoken.’ (572)

Second, communication should also be defined. Jowett and O’Donnell defined it as ‘a process in which a sender transmits a message to a receiver through a channel.’ They then mention Aristotle, how he was more or less a pioneer of communication, and that he determined the speaker, the speech and the audience as major components of communication. (23)

There is no real need to define media, as the public has a fair grasp of what media are, the platforms by which communication is transmitted, displayed, printed, etc. Many make the association that media equal journalism – or vice versa – while others look for relation, meaning or similarity to their own lives. As McLuhan put it, ‘for the “message” of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs.’ (8) However, those who are media literate have a better grasp on what media are and how not to be totally encompassed by them, but that’s a whole other issue.

When discussing rhetoric, usually much emphasis is placed on the message, what kind of rhetoric it is, and how it is transmitted. However, as much as this point is emphasized, addressing these aspects of rhetoric are important, especially where media are concerned. Rhetoric and

intended messages are often affected by the various types of media and how they are presented to the intended audience. Tufte argued that presenters are relying too heavily on PowerPoint to distribute information, often resulting – whether intentional or not – in altering the content:

‘At a minimum, a presentation format should do no harm to content. Yet again and again we have seen that the PP cognitive style routinely disrupts, dominates, and trivializes content.’ (22)

This cognitive style, coupled with the large commercial bureaucracy metaphor that Tufte described, pushes itself onto and tends to dominate the audience. Speakers disseminate their information into bullet points in these aggressive and stereotypical presentations, versus incorporating or practicing the other “better” metaphor Tufte referred to, good teaching:

‘Teachers seek to explain something with credibility. . . . The core ideas of teaching – explanation, reasoning, finding things out, questioning, content, evidence, credible authority not patronizing authoritarianism – are contrary to the hierarchical market-pitch approach.’ (11)

While both Tufte and McLuan attempt to establish credibility through means of educating, I am reminded of a line from “Annie Hall”: ‘Those who can’t do teach, and those who can’t teach teach gym.’ A bit of irony, since McLuan was featured in the film.

Television has greatly altered not only how rhetoric is transmitted but how those messages are, or should be, perceived. As Jamieson wrote, ‘Today, television’s tendency to reduce the speech to the thirty-five-second clip has accustomed us up to the notion that we should be satisfied with few moving passages; in ancient Greece the discourse was judged as a whole and critiqued by the high standards and with the discerning tastes of a rhetorically literate audience.’ (20, 21)

That suggests that the viewer needs to be rhetorically literate in order to fully ascertain the media messages; this should play hand in hand with media literacy (though rhetoric is not mentioned in media lit courses, unfortunately – at least not at Oregon). Jamieson also noted that those educated in history, literature and law were better trained to choose the best means of persuasion when presenting, as well as the ability to differentiate between that and “inappropriate appeals” when an audience member. According to McLuhan’s hot and cool media theory, television requires greater audience participation for completion of messages than media consider hot media, such as film and radio. (22, 23)

Carey, too, addressed changing technologies and their affect on media as a “bias.” Quoting Innis, Carey wrote that the “bias” of modern technology was to undermine both space and time, history and geography (134) . . . the demands of growth, empire, and technology itself. . . placed primary focus upon the global development of electric power and electronic media as they fostered expansion and administration of distance.’ (135) This refers back to not only Carey’s point – the “mass” and how media are produced – but McLuhan’s “global village” as well. As more and more are becoming dependent on certain media outlets as their sole source of news, news organizations and media conglomerates are now structuring stories for this formatted audience, producing them not only for the American public but for a world audience as well. In a sense, news and journalism are now commodities.

Another important factor with rhetoric is how that message is received, for example, Watzlawick’s left brain and right brain theories. The left hemisphere, he hypothesized, ‘is the dominant one, and its main function appears to be the translation of perceptions into logical, semantic, and phonetic representations of reality, and the communication with the outside world

on the basis of logical-analytical coding of the surrounding world....Consequently, in the literature it is often referred to as the verbal, or major hemisphere.’ (21) For example, media messages that contained mostly text are received through the left side of the brain, while television ads target the right brain. Auditory and most web-based messages are also considered left-brained messages.

In addition to transmitting and receiving messages, attention must be given to similarities in media messages. McLuhan likely addressed this the best when he stated “the medium is the message,” plus his ability to relate common, everyday items to the media and labeling them as extensions of man, etc. as well as finding similar relations between content from various media:

‘The instance of the electric light may prove illuminating....The electric light is pure information. It is a medium without a message, as it were, unless it is used to spell out some verbal ad or name. This fact, characteristic of all media, means that the “content” of any medium is always another medium. The content of writing is speech, just as the written word is the content of print, and print is the content of the telegraph. If it is asked, “What is the content of speech?,” it is necessary to say, “It is an actual process of thought, which is in itself nonverbal.” An abstract painting represents direct manifestation of creative thought processes as they might appear in computer designs. What we are considering here, however, are the psychic and social consequences of the designs or patterns as they amplify or accelerate existing processes.’ (8)

While one may find all this information as well as the course material quite overwhelming, it cannot be denied that media communications are very important, not only to society but the individual. True, media messages are dependent upon each other, and rhetoric as well as audience

response, but the evolutions in technology have enabled the world to receive information at an accelerated rate, compared to 20 years ago, connected people in ways that once seemed humanly impossible. The significance of media communication lies in the continuing circle of media messages, audience response and rhetoric – never-ending, always connected.

Works Cited:

Funk & Wagnalls. Standard Encyclopedic Dictionary. 1975: 572

After analyzing the two editorials – “The Right War for the Right Reasons” by John McCain and “Just War - or a Just War” by Jimmy Carter – from the perspective of Aristotle and Watzlawick, I feel that Carter’s editorial is the stronger of the two – rhetorically.

The main difference between the two lay within their credibility or ethos. While both are well-known political figures, their use of political (deliberative) rhetoric – defined by Aristotle as persuasion enhanced by knowledge of government and its characteristics (4) – varied as did their audiences’ predispositions and/or presumptions.

McCain wrote with the assumptions that Saddam Hussein is responsible for 9/11 and has (or had) weapons of mass destruction, calling him “a tyrant.” He did address the opposite point of view, that the strategy of war would be ‘to damage and demoralize the Iraqi people,’ when the government’s intent is (or was) ‘to damage and demoralize the Iraqi military’ and prevent the use of weapons of mass destruction.

Those statements of persuasion were enthymemes, which are formed by either conjunction of compatible propositions (demonstrative) or incompatible propositions (refutative). Maxims, another form of persuasion and part of enthymemes, are generally used by elderly men or for controvert popular sayings; they can simply be defined as general statements about questions of practical conduct and are used to express universal truth and invest moral character into speech. (Aristotle 10, 11)

Carter, like McCain, did write with some bias. However, he took the initiative to address both sides of the issue while presenting his opinions. While he didn’t play on the audience’s emotions as strongly as McCain, his ethos was stronger because he presented more evidence from a less-biased tone. Like McCain, Carter utilized enthymemes, but he also made use

of maxims, as he attempted to interject morals into his rhetoric: ‘The war can be waged only as a last resort, with all nonviolent options exhausted.’

In relation to Watzlawick, both McCain and Carter relied upon language as a means to form their rhetoric, using specific technology to play upon the audiences’ preconceived notions of the Iraq war and related issues. McCain stated, ‘The force our military uses will be less than proportional to the threat of injury we can expect to face should Saddam Hussein continue to build an arsenal of the world’s most destructive weapons.’ This, an enthymeme, is an example of refutation. It is a statement not made from fact; it’s only assumed that Saddam Hussein has (had) weapons of mass destruction. Plus, this type of statement also played upon the fears of the public, as they themselves had no idea whether Saddam Hussein has weapons of mass destruction and were likely harboring conflicting feelings of whether to trust the government’s assurances of yes, they do exist. As Watzlawick wrote, ‘. . .the impossibility of conceptually assigning rhetoric to a specific, subordinate discipline. . .had the result of making the art of persuasion even more suspect and contemptible.’ (6, 7)

While Socrates, as Watzlawick noted, was against rhetoric, Aristotle favored it and considered it ‘a form of communication between a man of high standing, prestige, and trustworthiness and the recipient of his message, whose mind and outlooks are thereby changed.’ (7)

Though this was the intent of both editorials, success is not always defined by an audience’s well reception; it can be defined by its rhetoric and/or its message, clear and concise, as well as the language used to communicate to the intended recipients.

The Regulation of Mud Flaps – Outline

I. Focus

- A. Should a regulation requiring all trucks to use mud flaps that would reduce splash/spray by 75% be repealed?

II. Case Problem

A. Five-cents per gallon gas tax bill requires DOT to issue mud flap regulations

1. Originally a National Highway Traffic Safety Administration tax bill to decrease federal deficit
2. Amended by Senator John Danforth
 - a. written so only one manufacturer's mud flaps qualify under law – “fuzzy” mud flaps
 - b. Danforth fully aware only one manufacturer would qualify
 - i. Qualifying manufacturer had never previously produced mud flaps
 - ii. “Fuzzy” mud flaps derived from manufacturer's astroturf doormats
 - c. no one questioned merits
3. Potential additional costs for trade associations and members
 - a. improvements on equipment to meet requirement standards

B. Monsanto – “fuzzy” mud flap manufacturer

1. Political strategy vs. marketing strategy
 - a. had invested millions into failed advertising campaign
 - b. proposed mud flap manufacturers push bill through Congress requiring flaps on trucks
 - i. Others refused to cooperate, felt Monsanto was using supports to gain strength
2. Backed by Danforth

3. Made \$4,000 contribution to Danforth's reelection campaign

III. Key Issues

A. Effects on Industry

1. Nine small firms left in dust
 - a. focused on personal selling vs. marketing/advertising their products
 - i. Based upon nature of these businesses
2. Monsanto owns only patent for "fuzzy" mud flaps
 - a. only ones that qualify for DOT's new regulations
 - b. estimated up to 73,000 lives could be saved
 - c. may help Missouri's economy
 - i. New jobs

B. Senator Danforth

1. Background
 - a. chairman of subcommittee for the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
 - b. concern for highway safety issues
2. Relationship with Monsanto
 - a. backed company's product and position
 - b. received \$4,000 campaign contribution
 - c. rejected critics' arguments that regulation would give Monsanto a monopoly advantage

December 11, 2003

Honorable U.S. Senator
United States Senate
Washington, D.C.

Dear Senator:

I write to you today on behalf of the Effective Spray Control Organization (ESCO).

Recently, Senator John Danforth attached an amendment requiring the Department of Transportation to regulate the use of mud flaps on trucks, which would supposedly reduce the water spray amount by 75 percent.

As a politician who has campaigned for environmental issues, you are likely aware that this new regulation makes provisions for only one type of mud flap, which is manufactured by one firm and undermines the already struggling rubber manufacturing industry. In addition, the amendment requires that trade organization update their equipment, including long and heavy haul trucks and railroad cars, to meet the new standards with no financial assistance from the government, forcing these organizations to increase their membership fees.

While our primary focus here at ESCO usually rests on spray control, we cannot ignore the job loss that has arisen out of this issue. While we feel Danforth's amendment not only is detrimental to the mud flap industry but it also deviates from the bill's original intent, which was a gas tax to help decrease the federal deficit. Measures need to be taken now before more are affected.

ESCO feels that further legislation is needed to repeal Danforth's unnecessary and unconstitutional amendment. Your assistance is greatly appreciated in this matter.

Thank you for your attention.

Yours very truly,

[sent without signature to avoid delay]

Talia M. Wilson
Effective Spray Control Organization (ESCO)