

**MEPDEV 2<sup>nd</sup>: 2016**  
**Central & Eastern European LUMEN International**  
**Conference - Multidimensional Education & Professional**  
**Development. Ethical Values**

**ONLINE MEDIA BETWEEN SEMIOTICS AND RHETORIC**

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*Abstract*

The study aims to address the media existing in the cyberspace from a dual perspective, that of the persuasive and argumentative rhetoric and that of the concise and full of meaning semiotics. It is precisely the increasing diversity of the online media that allows us such an approach. Thus, the ideas may be concentrated in signs or may be developed into argumentative speeches. We believe that the two characteristics of communication are intertwined in viable constructions from the perspective of transmitters and receivers subjects' intentionality. In this context, metalanguage, the concrete situation of communication, interpretation, perception, etc. play a key role in achieving the goal beforehand targeted. Since the number of those using online media is constantly growing, we consider it necessary to make reference as well to the implicit psychological aspects of such a communicational interaction. At the same time, the problem of the message is one that requires a reinterpretation due to reality's dynamic and language's evolution (among which, sometimes, one can notice discrepancies). The question is what is the direction towards which is rhetoric heading in such a media. If the presence of semiotics in the online media leads to the development and especially the increase of communication, the rhetoric (adapted to the new realities) should lead to the clarity of the message sent. Thus the indissoluble relationship between semiotics and rhetoric in the online media is justified.

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**Keywords:** Semiotics, online message, persuasion



## **1. Introduction**

We believe that the analysis of the semiotic-rhetoric report (report that is located in the border area of the communication, philosophy, philology disciplines) can lead us to a correct understanding of the need to achieve and maintain a relatively stable balance between the quantitative determinations and the qualitative ones within communication. The construction of the communication for the online environment requires the consolidation of a well weighed balance between persuasion and message, even if this construction demands us sustained and systematic efforts. We can also notice the fact that the two aspects of the media language are not in a confrontational opposition report, but they complement each other in achieving the desired objective.

When we talk about the online media we have in mind not only the individual intercommunication, but also to the communication at the level of the collective average which is booming. At the same time, we must bear in mind the fact that we cannot conduct a systemic and profoundly scientific approach of the problem of the online communication's future without realizing a concrete analysis on the semiotic and rhetoric aspects manifested by the language used in the virtual environment. Aspects relating to the interpretation of signs, abundantly existing in the online communication, as well as some aspects related to persuasion, cogency, the beauty of such an interaction require a careful analysis needed to qualitatively assess the online communication. A particularly important role in the online communication is held by its rhetoric itself. Thus, rhetoric returns strongly to the attention of specialists. If in its beginnings the rhetoric was meant for the verbal language, today we can talk about a rhetoric of the virtual language. In the communication between individuals from the online environment images and signs have a strong rhetorical effect. Rhetoric itself undergoes substantial change within the online communication.

## **2. Problem Statement**

We believe that the types of online communication and their implications in the social and economic life (Popescu, 2015) from the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century require an analysis from the perspective of their reference to the semiotical and rhetorical dimensions. Researching the problem of the signification used during the online communication, as well as the attempt to configure the specifics of such a communication rhetoric, requires an approach from the perspective of the ratio between the two fundamental characteristics of communication.

### **2.1. The question of the relationship between semiotics and the rhetoric of language**

We could say that semiotics enhances the rhetorical character of communication in the online environment. The online text semiotics presents the particularity of the usage of some specific signs. This is why, numerous semiosis actions (semiosis is a transmission of meaning by means of some symbols) occur within the language used by the media transmitted via the Internet. During the process of semiosis occurs the establishment of a meaning of a sign, accompanied by the certainty that the respective meaning corresponds to the socio-cultural context in which it occurs (Rieffel, 2008a). Internet's media communication has developed new signs to facilitate communication. Between signifying and the

rhetorical nature of the sign an indissoluble link is established. We can equally talk about mediatic semiotics and about mediatic rhetoric. The media from the cyberspace has a diversified typology compared to the classical media.

The media language operates with significances produced by itself during its evolution, the media being influenced by the social, economic, political, cultural, religious changes of the beginning of the third millennium. The need for creativity in this field manifests continuously. Some expressions acquire commercial meanings that complement the established meaning, especially in the advertising field. At the same time we refer to dichotomies precisely to highlight the concerned aspect. Thus, the media produces and reproduces thinking schemes that dominate for a period, longer or shorter, the public space (Beciu, 2011). We notice that the advertisement existing in the online environment enjoys a studied rhetoric, this being a consistent part of the effort to achieve the desired objective. All the elements that lead to the success of such an undertaking are managed with utmost responsibility. Communication benefits from an increased attention and knowledge, because it must adapt to a number of (economic, cultural, etc.) factors related to the management of the advertising product, precisely to achieve the intended purpose (Lăzăroiu, 2015a).

We can say that semiotics specifies a meaning of the word, expression, image, etc.; more specifically, it explains the meaning understood as the result of a social construction and rhetoric perfects this meaning and convinces us of its veracity, in a certain context. Semiotics has an extremely complicated task when it comes to ideas, attitudes, motivations. If in the case of material, concrete things, the signifying action is relatively simple, in the case of subjective ideas, semiotics encounters difficulties in interpreting the meaning. Rhetoric is the one leading the communicational construction towards a relevant objectification for the target audience. The semiotic approach and the research of the rhetorical dimension of the media's language are necessary in order to identify and fathom the knowledge of its specificity. Today, they are no longer regarded as merely figures or rules that, independently, coagulate the text. The media language is modelled accurately as it addresses some quantitatively, but especially qualitatively diversified crowds. That is why, the rhetorical exercise is one aimed at maintaining a logical and rational balance, as well as maintaining a socio-cultural (Palacios & Díaz, 2007). The explanation of the meaning aimed by semiotic extends to the entire material under investigation. Here comes the rhetoric that demonstrates the similarity or differentiation between materials, in terms of form. Between semiotics and rhetoric there is no absolutely rigid delineation. They are intertwined up to a point. Therefore, we cannot put the sign of identity between them.

The current challenge of semiotics is represented by changing the conditions of production and reflection on the resulted meaning. Today, the task of semiotics is double: studying the new signs used in online communication; and the establishment of some of their relevant meanings, taking into account a number of perturbing factors. As pointed out by Umberto Eco, we can talk about two actions and two theoretizations within semiotics: codes theory and signs production theory. Thus, we distinguish between signification semiotics and communication semiotics. They are not reducible one to the other. Signification semiotics may be established independently of a communication semiotics, but the reverse path is impossible (Eco, 1988).

We consider that the act of communication is subjected to many semiotics, but as well as rhetoric's operations, both giving meaning, namely, a meaning consistent with the psychosocial context in which it

occurs. We mention that these operations have a precise order, and the processing process for communication is carried out in several stages. The numerous communication theorists have agreed on the components of communication: the issuer, the message, the media of communication, the recipient. Currently is being discussed, within a profound analysis, the context in which communication occurs, the condition of the issuer, the recipient's preparation for receiving the message, the intended purpose within the act of communication.

Researches in the field of communication are becoming more and more complex and comprehensive. Professionals from several fields collaborate to discover new laws governing communication developed in different contexts. Researchers are striving to find unity in the diversity of the communication forms. The scientific research results in this field are used to drawing up some effective communication models, adapted to the context in which they are used. We find out that in many areas of the social life the efforts can be harnessed through carefully developed communication strategies. The responsibility for managing the communication problems (i.e., of the online communication) falls, in our view, to a team of specialists who come from related disciplines. For example, it becomes obvious the social psychology's contribution in identifying the meanings arising from interpersonal and intergroup interactions.

## **2.2. Communication and contemporaneousness challenges**

The emergence of the new information and communication technologies has changed both the conduct of the information beneficiary and the behaviour of the information provider. They raise issues of interaction (Rieffel, 2008b). However, the Internet usage tends to generalize and include all age groups. The means of mass information are increasingly more sophisticated and through the largely adapted language are fulfilling their role of informing. The Internet, as a means of mass communication, has the advantage of the rapid communication at great distances (Popescu, 2015). This feature does not alter the clarity, persuasion and even the emotional content of the transmitted messages. The emotional manifested in the online media has the advantage of the expression amplified via suggestive images.

Specialists are making the distinction between interpersonal communication media and collective communication media. Within the interpersonal communication media we come across synchronous communication, through chat (conversation on the Internet), but also asynchronous communication (e.g. communication via e-mail). At the same time, within the collective communication media we identify those sites with journalistic content (content that must meet the criteria of the journalistic profession), economic, social, cultural etc. content. On the Internet we can read newspapers, we can watch television programs etc. This is the conventional media transmitted via the Internet. However, we identify also journalistic content created and developed for the Internet (López García, 2005). Online journalism has seen a consistent growth in recent years. This is confirmed also by the fact that it benefits from a good practices guide in the online media. As well as in the classical media, the journalist must fit into a professional deontology specific to this type of interaction with the target audience.

Internet usage (for information, watching movies etc.) and communication via the Internet offers inclusively the opportunity to develop oneself professionally. Increased competitiveness requires Internet use. The Internet is the one that has increased competitiveness in the professional plan, but it is also a component of the viable solution in order to cope with competition in the professional activity. This is

precisely why texts are extremely rigorous drafted. The attitude adopted by an organization in its interaction with other organizations is characterized by a particular care for the benefits of some effective communication. Every action is carefully prepared, in the smallest details. Any omitted detail can lead to compromising the entire project (Hurd, 2016). We notice that the online space is used more and more intensively by public figures as well: celebrities, politicians, etc. The target audience consists of more and more increasingly numerous groups. Strongly persuasive, even manipulative, messages are launched via social media (Karantzeni, 2015). At the same time, social media can be a source of information for the person who decides to buy a product. Online commerce with various products knows today an unprecedented development. Specialized sites giving advice on purchasing a product based on consumer's needs. Reviews to various products are also useful to buyers. Quite often, the interaction with friends on Facebook contributes to choosing a product (Cheung & Wing-Fai, 2016). Important areas of social life such as education, health depend, to a large extent, on this new way of interaction, online communication (Nica, 2015). The functionality of some important socio-economic areas depends on this type of communication. We cannot bring into discussion mainstream media that plays an important role in informing, but mostly in influencing the formation of some opinions and attitudes (Lăzăroiu, 2015b). Entrepreneurial culture as well makes its way into the online environment. Given the extension of the market economy in the former socialist countries one notices the need for education in order to discover entrepreneurial opportunities.

Moral philosophy has introduced into its problematic the ethical aspects of the online communication. The exigencies of truth and morality must be taken into account (Machan, 2016).

### **3. Research Questions**

We wonder if in the semiotics-rhetoric relationship the level of development of the two scientific disciplines is approximately equal. The question is whether the current level of semiotics can sustain the high level rhetoric aspires to. It's important to find out whether the level of signification keeps pace with the accelerated changes of the reality of the recent years. Rhetoric's effectiveness depends largely on this upgrade of meanings. We wonder if not, at the same time, a reset of these disciplines' functionalities is required in the context of rapid and significant changes. Rhetorical constructions, irreducible to linguistic signs, are founded on semiotic interpretations. We wonder, however, to what extent the rhetoric used in social media contributes to the reconfiguration of the areas of interest of those using the social networks (Reveley, 2015).

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

Therefore, the purpose of the research is to highlight the current links between semiotics and rhetoric in explaining the functionalities of the language used by the new communication technologies, namely the Internet. Specifically, the analysis of the correspondence between the level of semiotic interpretation and the persuasion ability of the communicated material is the intended objective of this study. Its purpose is to relaunch issues of the reflection on the complexity of communication, all the more we today communicate more at large distances and in real time. For example, the science of negotiation (on which depends largely the success in many areas of the social practice) determines, at the same time,

research on profound aspects of communication. We believe that the psychology of communication plays an important role in explaining the attitudes, the behaviours, the reactions, the motivations, etc. generated in the communication process. The present study aims to arouse the interest in two perennial and, at the same time, actual aspects of communication: semiotics and rhetoric, but regarded in the context of the main aspects of communication.

## **5. Research Methods**

Research's organization requires a clear methodology and adequate methods of covering the distance towards objective conclusions. Thus, a systematic and selective analysis of the online social communication channels, as well as of some materials posted on various news / mass media sites constitutes the documentation work for drafting this material. It is the main research method, accompanied by systematic observation (occurred after some lengthy unorganized observations). The observations and analyses were conducted over a period of two months (September and October 2016) on materials published by the online newspaper "DC News". We have chosen this publication as it is a generalist site and provides news from many areas. On the other hand, the online news is quickly visualized on smartphones. We have analysed daily the main news from politics and the main news from society. Thus, we were able to compare the language used in news from different sectors and to identify common elements of rhetoric designed to attract the reader. We have analysed semiotically some expressions used in a concrete context. From semiotic and rhetoric perspective we have constantly analysed as well the comments to some posts from our personal Facebook account. We believe that the results are objective because the communicational sample analysed is relevant.

## **6. Findings**

We find that the two aspects of language, semiotics and rhetoric, are intentional, meaning that they are oriented towards a goal. If semiotics is loaded with intentionality (i.e. oriented towards an entity), rhetoric is the one leading actually towards the respective entity, in that it is performing its duty of targeting (proper orientation) an entity. Rhetoric demonstrates its active principle potential in articulation and communication.

We find that while semiotics is just a science that analyzes and explains the meaning of signs, taking into account a number of factors determining this meaning, rhetoric is an action that influences the meaning of some signs, words, expressions, images; in other words, rhetoric can contribute to the configuration of the desired meaning. Thus, the intentionality of rhetoric, which consists of the orientation towards potentiating the ability to persuade the interlocutor, is revealed permanently. That is why, rhetoric has been studied and is studied in schools. We notice that rhetoric plays an important role in online communication, but we also notice the fact that the online environment highlights the virtues of rhetoric. The techniques of rhetoric are used with their more thorough knowledge. We believe that the questions raised naturally in this study require intensified research in these areas. This, all the more so as distortions between the semiotics and rhetoric of some texts are found, especially in the social media. That is why, enhancing research in these areas is fully justified. It is necessary, but not sufficient, a

repositioning towards distortions in communication. A greater openness for research in the communication field would solve a number of issues requiring urgent solutions.

## 7. Conclusion

We believe that in the near future rhetoric will benefit from an increased attention from specialists because its potential is discovered and rediscovered all the time. In the context of the continuous development of the online communication, rhetoric is forced to continually reinvent itself. On the other hand, we find that the issue of rhetoric has been enriched. We reiterate the idea that we cannot discuss about the future of online communication with a continuous analysis of the relationship between semiotic and rhetorical within this type of communication. At the same time, we believe that the education needed for the use of social media must be systematized and intensified (Peters, 2015). Communication forms into the interrelation bridge between philosophy and science in solving some cognitive problems of the human that barely stepped into the third millennium after Christ.

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