Executive Summary

Effects of the Variation of Rhetorical Ambiguity on Advertising Persuasion: Mediating Role of the Mental Imagery and Moderating Role of the Tolerance to Ambiguity

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Rhetoric transforms a simple proposal into a more elaborate structure. There is a controversy about the impact of rhetorical figures’ complexity and about the effect of mental imagery on persuasion. There is no previous research on the impact of different levels of ambiguity on the mental-imagery process. The main objective of this study is to examine the effect of different levels of rhetorical ambiguity on persuasion.

Mental imagery is integrated as a mediating variable, and tolerance to ambiguity as a moderating one. Structural equation modeling and analysis of variance were applied. The population is heterogeneous, mainly composed of students, but also of individuals of different ages and socio-professional status (n = 574). The sampling procedure considered is the convenience sample, in which we aimed to diversify the respondents in terms of age, educational level and gender.

The results show that the variation of the effect of ambiguity on emotions is a function of the level of tolerance to ambiguity. Besides, the more the level of ambiguity increases, the more the impact on the mental imagery decreases. The mediating role of mental imagery between ambiguity and persuasion is established.

The contributions of this work apply mainly to the advertising field interested in consumer behavior towards rhetorical advertisements. It makes recommendations as for the use of rhetoric in advertising, particularly when choosing a given level of complexity. Advertising executives must consider the various mediating and moderating variables before the development of an advertising campaign. This study makes it possible to explain the differences between individuals in terms of tolerance to ambiguity.