The Rhetoric of the iconic discourse within the *Coca-Cola* brand

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Résumé: Cet article, tel que son nom de *Rhétorique du discours iconique de la marque Coca-Cola* l'annonce, a comme thème la structure de la rhétorique des publicités de la marque Coca-Cola. Ces dernières sont représentées, de manière conventionnelle, par deux annexes auxquelles se réfère cette analyse. Ce que ce débat, à caractère sémio-rhétorique, se propose en particulier, c'est de mettre en évidence les liens qui s'établissent entre l'énoncé iconique des réclames de la marque Coca-Cola et les éléments rhétoriques de celui-ci. Les deux composantes (iconique et rhétorique) sont évaluées de la perspective d'un discours public, d'un message de nature promotionnelle qui caractérise le marché libre. Cette approche se propose de démontrer les particularités de la rhétorique iconique qui, par le phénomène de l'argumentation discursive, poursuit l'acceptation d'une idée en vertu de raisons pragmatiques ou d'intérêts actionnels.

La présente analyse a comme but l'identification des composantes de l'iconicité rhétorique et de la spécificité de celle-ci. L'article trace en ce sens les contours d'une stratégie analytique peu commune; son objectif consiste dans la présentation d'une liaison pouvant être faite entre l'image et les valeurs rhétoriquesde celle-ci. Le thème de l'analyse est basé sur une dimension théorique qui renvoie à la manière dont les publicités Coca-Cola donnent naissance à un discours qui peut être étudié à partir de catégories rhétoriques telles: *ethos*, *my-*

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thos, *pathos* etc. La seconde partie de l'article représente une analyse de la narrativité iconique et met en évidence la caractéristique rhétorique des images de la marque soumise à l'étude. Cette recherche se veut une proposition d'ordre sémio-linguistique et rhétorique, une évaluation iconique des signes dans le cadre des publicités en général et des publicités de la marque Coca-Cola en particulier.

Mots-clés: rhétorique, linguistique, sémiotique, iconicité, publicités de la marque Coca-Cola

1. General evaluative frameworks, premises, objectives, theme

The structure of the *Coca-Cola* brand iconicity, assessed in terms of rhetorical criteria, seems to have been approached rather implicitly, through direct explanations, intended to mirror the organic connection between image, perceived as a discourse generating source, and rhetoric. The approach that we suggest here is intended to prove the rhetorical character of the *Coca-Cola* brand commercials that, through the rhetorical argumentation phenomenon, aims at accepting an idea by virtue of pragmatic considerations or actional interests. The annexes of the article must be considered as illustrative material for a wide range of images that represented, over time, the way of promoting the beverage that became legendary. The goal of the commercials images is that of persuading and demonstrating that the promoted brand holds characteristics that can be accepted following the mediation produced by the advertising. It was assumed that the image contains a discourse and, consequently, a connection can be made between the image discursiveness and its implicitly rhetoric component.

The objectives of the current analysis outlines an analytical strategy that has been untried so far. These objectives aim at presenting a new perspective over the iconic rhetoric of the commercials within the brand subjected to analysis. The theme of the analysis focuses on demonstrating some rhetoric elements of the image, emphasizing the iconic narration, perceived as argument element, that is part of the classical rhetoric.

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Broadly speaking, the rhetoric (ngr. *ritoriki*, lat. *rhetorica*, fr. *rhétorique*) envisages the art of distinguished expression, used in order to persuade an audience. The term got, over time, broad valences, so that one can talk nowadays about a social rhetoric, one of the objects etc. The analysis of the iconicity from the rhetorical point of view is almost absent in the studies referring to the *Coca-Cola* brand. Under these circumstances, we consider that it must be approached from cognitive perspective, combined simultaneously with a semantic one.

The rhetoric, understood as humanistic discipline, lost ground to the semiotics in the XX th century. The visual discourse *versus* the verbal discourse gets increasingly more attention, mainly due to the explosion of images that invaded a modern society marked by technology.

It is not the goal of this article to explain the meanings of the term *rhetoric*, on which there are many opinions, many of them being conflicting ones. Generally, the term in question is used for two types of phenomena. The former refers to the linguistic configuration of the language, perceived as system, the latter refers to the subject that studies this system. Beyond these ambiguities, one can distinguish some meanings of the term rhetoric, which are:

– the literary rhetoric, that deals with the organization of the dis-course and the analysis of the figures of speech;

– the rhetoric that analyses the persuasion and argumentation methods, seen as elements that produce an effect over the communication process;

– the rhetoric that focuses on the aspects of the discourse, seen as symbolical interactions;

– the rhetoric that can be understood as a social construction that focuses on the analysis of the language capacity and of the discourses generated by images to share collective experiences.

These dimensions of the rhetoric hold a conventional-normative character and they will be reflected in the current analysis. On principle, the rhetoric is considering aspects of the discourse that bears intentionality, being organized according to certain

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principles. The structures analyzed within the visual rhetoric follow, largely, those of the rhetoric of any discourse, these, being added elements belonging to the image specificity.

2. Essential aspects of the images rhetoric within the *Coca-Cola* brand

The analysis that we propose here refers to the annexes 1, 2 and, by extrapolation, to any commercial of this brand, that contains images similar to these. The essential aspects assessed here are seen, mainly, under the auspices of the rhetoric functions: inference, demonstration, manipulation and persuasion. During the image perceiving process, all these functions combine based on some psycholinguistic processes which are based on the following criteria:

– *Coherence*

From the rhetorical point of view, the coherence refers to the continuity of the text. If we consider the image that a commercial implies, this coherence takes into account the chaining of the elements contained in the image subjected to analysis. The image must represent an informational unit. In order to achieve such a unit, there is the need of carrying out a series of organizational levels:

a. The *local coherence*: combining some parts of the image, in such a way as to obtain a whole. In annex 1, we can see Santa Claus sitting by the fireside, surrounded by *Coca-Cola* bottles, reading a list regarding the presents that he must give out. One can therefrom draw the conclusion that Santa Claus brings presents during the winter holidays and that beneficiaries of these presents are or may be the children, too. In both situations, the action takes place inside a room.
b. The *thematic coherence*. In the annexes subjected to analysis, the theme is represented by the winter holidays.
c. The *referential coherence*. This, makes reference, first, to the *Coca-Cola* brand. There are here two types of actors:

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one that needs to be promoted (the brand) and another one that is a promoting agent (Santa Claus). This coherence is based on a known social code so that the triptych message – code – receiver can be activated by a common cultural code.

d. The *contextual coherence*. This coherence, in its turn, has more levels. There is a promotional context and one that we call here, using a *sui-generis* term*,* an *anchoring context.* By this we mean that the first context – characterized by a pragmatic dimension – is anchored, in order to fulfill its functions, in a cultural context (the winter holidays). Here we have a *double anchor*: there is a temporal unit (the Christmas days) and a unit based on an actor: Santa Claus. The image, except for those abstract ones, is mainly descriptive. It can use multiple ways to achieve a discourse. Within the commercials subjected to analysis, we have as present elements, the following:

d.1. *The narrative*

This is used to convey an event, to present a chronological order, to offer support for a situation. As one can see from the annexes 1 and 2, the *Coca-Cola* brand advertisement is based on a simple narrative.

d.2. *The description*

This is, generally, based on sensory details that aim at accomplishing some impressions. The role of the description, as far as the commercials used here as examples are concerned, is that of helping the receiver to imagine how the advertised product looks like. The images that are part of the description area are visual, olfactory, tactile. In terms of figures of speech, there are used epithets, comparisons, inversions, metaphors.

d.3. *The exposition*

Its aim is to inform, to explain, to clarify. Within the images, we have characteristics of the literary description (the general atmosphere, shapes, images, colors, etc.) and items that are directly related to the advertising message. This message is one that is indirectly expressed: each to buy *Coca-Cola* during the winter

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holidays. Within the iconicity from the analyzed annexes, one can identify the following determinative items of the description:

– it is presented a concept that defines the theme;

– the descriptive discourse aims at presenting, identifying and explaining something;

– it is presented the need to buy the object;

– it is specified the functionality of the product and the aim it is used for.

d.4. *The argumentation*

The term *argumentation* covers a conceptual sphere of a field where the logic items and the linguistics cross each other. In terms of logic, the argumentation settles a relationship between an argument and a conclusion. The goal of the argumentation is to persuade by means of logic. As discursive way, the argument uses the persuasion. In designing the *Coca-Cola* brand commercials images, there is an obvious intention, that is the presentation of the reasons and evidences necessary to persuade the receiver of the commercials to buy the product. In the argumentation that the *Coca-Cola* brand commercials make, it was taken into account the fact that:

– *The argumentation is open*

On this line, it allows adding new elements besides to the ones already presented. Therefore, mentally, the receiver can include himself in the image, can join, virtually, members of his family, friends, etc.

– *The argumentation is contextual* (anchored in a space and a moment)

Thus, the commercials from the annexes 1 and 2 refer to a certain eventful act, specific to the Christian culture.

– *The argumentation is connected to the pragmatic dimension*

The goal of the commercial is promoting a product in a capitalist society.

– *The argumentation bears a persuasive character*

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The iconic is, within the commercials, an intentional one. The image is meant to persuade and generate an action, namely, that of buying the product.

– *The argumentation holds a deductive through reasoning character*

The image brings with itself a story that wants to prove the fact that anyone, especially the children, can enjoy the *Coca-Cola* beverage. The image involves an explanation that invites the receiver to draw conclusions by himself, following a deductive act.

– *The argumentation has a deductive through analogy character*

By catching the items of the commercials, the buyer will be able to compare with what happens in the image, namely, what we call emotional and virtual transfer in a suggested plan.

If we apply the principles of the argumentations to the images of the *Coca-Cola* brand commercials, we must identify a *logos*, which is an element used in rhetoric in order to gain the audience's sympathy. The *logos* is based on the logic proof and reasoning. In achieving the *logos*, there are used facts, illustrative examples or any other kind of demonstrative evidence. For this purpose, the entire image of the commercials is based on *logos*, because the express mission of the commercials is to present, to demonstrate, to render evident, etc, the importance of the product.

Another element of the argumentation is the *pathos*, which is considered to be a proof based on reasons and emotions. The appeal to emotions is, usually achieved through narrative elements. The promotional iconic appeals, very often, to the receiver's moods. The products, the way they are described by the commercials designers, have the mission to make the buyer happier, to create a sense of belonging to a noble society, to create the feeling that he is younger, etc. Thus, the commercials from the annexes 1 and 2 devise an idyllic image of the winter holidays, on condition that the advertised product is consumed. It is achieved an emotional equation that we call *conditioned emotional equation*: if you want to be happy at Christmas time, the condition is to buy *Coca-Cola*.

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Another item specific to argumentation is the *ethos*, whose goal is to influence the image receiver appealing to elements such as honesty, sincerity, trust. This element is meant to establish the confidence in the idea that the receiver will be allowed to be persuaded by these elements.

The *ethos* suggests a certain image of the speaker as a guarantor of the discourse (*cf.* Maingueneau, 1984). Santa Claus is part of a global system (the way of dressing, of getting into relationship with the others), and the speaker is given a character, a series of psycholinguistic characteristics (generosity, cheerfulness).

Another item of the argumentation is the *mythos*. By means of this element it is proved that the one that delivers a speech retorts to values, beliefs and feelings that belong to a certain culture. Santa Claus' presence in the *Coca-Cola* brand commercials is extremely frequent. He became an emblem of promoting this beverage during the winter holidays. Therefore, the *mythos* is a very active component within the iconic rhetoric that is specific to this brand.

3. Referential coordinates of the narrative rhetoric within the *Coca-Cola* brand iconicity

The organization of the image narrative discourse within the commercials owns, in our opinion, a particularity: it gets over exordium, that is the beginning part of the narrative discourse, holding an essentially phatic function, presenting briefly the problems to be approached. The receiving act of the iconic sign removes this rhetoric component going straight to the narrative itself of the promotional act.

The issue of the visual narrative of the *Coca-Cola* brand commercials has been very little analyzed so far. Generally, it is defined the aesthetic criterion in favor of identifying and deciphering the way the image signifies something. In the analysis that we propose here, we start from the premise that the language is a fundamental means of communication. By means of images

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one can communicate easier, clearer and more persuasive than through words. The image, in the promotional process, becomes it itself a commodity that needs to fascinate and raise as many buyers' interest as possible. In addition, the image is completed by the viewer, through a certain form of reading that exceeds the limits, of any kind, imposed by the iconicity of the graphic representation. In terms of the cognitive relation, the representation of the image involves a narrative interpretation based on a reading of the image built up on the semiotic evaluation of the iconicity that the advertising represents.

Perceived as a form of communication, the interpretation of the *Coca-Cola* brand commercials can be accomplished only taking into account a viewer's cultural code. As well, the commercial interpretation cannot be achieved without involving the viewer's prior knowledge. If, for example, the rhetoric of a political discourse involves socio-historical experiences, the rhetoric of the *Coca-Cola* brand commercials involve items regarding a certain *class*, respectively, the class of the carbonated beverages. Understanding this class cannot be achieved but by accessing some perceptual knowledge (visual, gustative etc.). The discourse generated by the rhetoric of the *Coca-Cola* brand commercials images becomes an inter text because it is not achieved only from the point of view of the emotions it raises, but there are involved elements collateral to the text, too, such as: touch, taste vision, etc. The rhetoric of the commercials images forces the receiver to assemble a large variety of items that come from its entire sphere of knowledge. The rhetoric receiver's goal is to persuade the virtual buyer about the significance and efficiency of the product. The image sets the limits of a rhetoric analysis system tributary to the conception about the reading of any discourse. As far as the *Coca-Cola* brand commercials are concerned, we can analyze them as a speech from a short story. What is specific to the discourse of the commercials is the fact that, at the basis of the code that mediates the relationship transmitter – receiver, there lies a certain similarity relationship between the object itself and the form that this object embraces within the iconic represen-

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tation. What the iconic discourse brings in addition is the fact that it can represent a copy of reality (the photography of the product) or a conventional representation of this. Consequently, the rhetoric of this type of advertising discourse can bring forward an image congruent with the object or one that can be a symbolic transcription of it. In the annexes 1 and 2 we have a conventional Santa Claus' image but, adjoining, we have a copy of some *Coca-Cola* bottles.

What we consider particular within the iconic rhetoric of the analyzed brand commercials is the relation action – narrative. This relation goes beyond marked framework of the semantic and semiotic load. The contents of these images, chosen conventionally as being emblematical for the brand, enables going beyond the analysis field (the rhetoric of the advertising speech) and entering a sphere of the pragmatic. This utilitarian dimension is, in fact, the goal of the commercials.

The character from the chosen annexes is Santa Claus. Within the promotional series of the *Coca-Cola* Company product, the character from the chosen annexes is Santa Claus. Within the promotional series of the *Coca-Cola* Company product, he represents a widespread series. Within this promotional series, it was not meant to tell a story (for example, Santa Claus comes to bring everybody presents every year), but it was underlined a specific meaning, an exact message, that of showing the importance and the spread of the *Coca-Cola* brand. The image depicting Santa Claus illustrates a certain concept, an image of generosity, of richness, of joviality. The narrative series has a narrative character. The hero, Santa Claus, comes to everybody every year and performs an act of generosity. His action has an iterative – predictable character.

The image rhetoric is based on a paratactic narrative, there is no main plot, and the hero does not evolve as far as the epic is concerned towards a crisis and a denouement. The narrative is a juxtaposed one. It involves a rhetoric structure with many levels and aspects such as:

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3.1. *Coca-Cola* brand image intertextuality

The issue of the image intertextuality in the *Coca-Cola* brand commercials has not been approached up to the present. It will fall into the criteria applicable to the literary text, with the specification that it will have attributes specific to the iconic explanation. The main premise is that the image text produces a continuous structuring on the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axis. The intertextuality, as we accept it in the current analysis, is general and implicit, being into an organic coexistence with the discourse that the image generates. As far as the annexes 1 and 2 are concerned, the receiver performs an intertextual aspect that hints at an event (moment of the year when the people offer presents to each other). What is the most important for the commercial itself is that it is alluded to the idea that the most recommended present in this context is the advertised product by the *Coca-Cola* brand. The parameters of communication involve Santa Claus' image and identity. He is perceived as an item connected to others within the intertextual framework that tries to establish a relationship with the receiver who is seen, in his turn, as one that accepts and understands the intertextual framework, respectively, the fact that Santa Claus belongs to the winter holidays and that, during these holidays, the social code suggests presents exchanges.

We consider that the identity itself of the character, Santa Claus, is intertextual, what involves a mix of cultural moments (religious, temporal, attitudinal). The receiver, who knows the social code, is present in the understanding of the image, he cooperates to achieve the meaning of the image. On this line, the iconic discourse generates an external intertextuality of the brand, that involves using the social code in assessing the rhetoric of the pragmatic message.

If we start from the definition that Julia Kristeva gives to intertextuality, this is characterized by "the turning of a system or

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of more signs systems in another one or transpositions *field* of more codified systems"[1]

In the annexes 1 and 2, we have the system represented by the *Coca-Cola* brand that interpenetrates (transpositions) with the system generated by the Santa Claus' image and significance. This systems combination and intertextual components chaining are meant to lead to building a stable meaning and, if possible, unique. On this line, we consider that the image intertextuality contributes to achieving a certain iconic productivity.

Within the *Coca-Cola* brand image intertextuality, the whole language of advertising is the result of a juxtaposed relationship consideration, such as: past / present, tradition / contemporaneity, reiteration/non reiteration, reality/imagination etc.

To paraphrase Julia Kristeva, who considers that the "intertextuality is the index of how a text reads the history and integrates into it,"[2] we can say that the intertextuality becomes a way the commercials, generally, must be understood and integrated in the historical context. These commercials can be found elements that the same author, Julia Kristeva, calls "ideograms". In her opinion, an "ideogram" is a "common function linking a concrete structure to other structures in an inter textual space."[3]

By "linking a common structure to other structures" we understand, in our case, going beyond the visual images as descriptive elements, possible interpretations of a semiotic code, and their interpretation in a pragmatic context that represents, within the commercials, the main goal of the iconic message.

Therefore, outwards the brand images there intercross intertextual codes and multiple meanings, whose significance is subjected to a relationship such as *text – intertext – context*. The context, as we understand it here, is one of a higher level, namely, it enforces and directs the values within the relationship text/inter text and transposes them in a contextual-social dimension, respectively in a commercial world, a world projected onto a pragmatic

[1] Julia Kristeva, *La révolution du language poétique*, PUF, Paris, 1974, p. 60.
[2] *Idem*, p. 226.
[3] *Idem*, p. 268.

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coordinate. The context has here, in this demonstration, the capacity of destructuring, of reconfiguring and of redistributing the elements that make up the commercials intertextuality. This makes this intertextuality to differentiate from the pure intertextuality due to the defining presence of the pragmatic aspect.

3.2. The rhetoric variation of the iconic identity

In the current analysis, we propose a new term, that is ”the iconic identity variation”. The fact that, within the *Coca-Cola* brand commercials, there is an overwhelmingly various representation of this, makes this variety to become a determinative attribute, specific to the brand. The annexes 1 and 2 have a conventional, normative, and determinative character, also, but an emblematic character, as well, regarding this variety.

The spread of the brand legendary dimension, all over the world, brought about an extraordinary avalanche of iconic forms in which, many times, during the winter holidays, there comes up Santa Claus' figure. His presence in continuously metamorphosing hypostases and forms, brings about a variety of image rhetoric that gives rise to some superposed messages and narrative structures. The central narrative core from the annexes 1 and 2 produces a rhetoric based on an event. Each level of the narrative has semantic and semiotic categories that enable the coherent reading of the image whose components, sometimes redundant, are assembled into a building with independent meanings.

The Coca-Cola brand images variety makes the discourse not to be unilateral or limited, but one that integrates in a continuously altering pluralism. The variety governs the rhetoric identity of the brand iconicity. We, thus, have a variety of images centered upon an object that is the source of the brand iconicity. Here we speak about a rhetoric that is mainly pragmatic. In other words, the image rhetoric, regardless the variety that it draws on, is based upon a message such as: *Buy* Coca-Cola *for the winter holidays!*

a. The actional rhetoric

The commercials from the annexes 1 and 2 refer to an action. What characterizes any narrative is the fact that it represents one

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or more actions. If, from the literary point of view, a story has more stages (the initial situation, the confrontation that generates a crisis within the evolution of the action, a climax and a denouement), the image narrative has no plot or denouement moments. The image rhetoric, though an actional one, does not cause conflicts, tensions, emotional confrontations but, beyond this particularity, the actional characteristic of the image is included in the hero's biography. Santa Claus, through his identity, does something: he brings everywhere and everybody presents. The hero is not a historical one, but one who is centered on a specific time unit, respectively the moment of the winter holidays. The action is linear, simple, the central character, Santa Claus, has a known mission, that of sharing presents. What makes the character's action to gain greatness is the fact that he offers a special present. This present is the *Coca-Cola* beverage that, in many commercials, he offers it to himself and, always, to the others. In the commercials from the annexes 1 and 2, the action is juxtaposed: *Coca-Cola* is offered to everybody who waits for Santa Claus. The character is about *to trigger* the act of giving or is in the process of giving the gift represented by the brand. The cultural code by means of which the it is made the deciphering of the sender's rhetoric enables the visual reading to interpenetrate instantly with the biography of the central character. The action reflected in the image is, automatically, timed and its specific is known. Therefore, the viewer projects over commercials a sum of elements previously known and makes of these a base for understanding the commercial message: during the winter holidays, Santa Claus will take an action that will make everybody happy. The character's generosity materializes through giving the *Coca-Cola* brand. Consequently, the advertisements are organized temporally, the image respects a certain chronology imposed by the cultural code. The logical time corresponds here to the rhetoric time, the temporal order of the hero's action is achieved, automatically, by the temporal order of the cultural code: Santa Claus arrives at a certain moment, with a certain goal, both of them being known by the viewer. Regarding the space he exercises his generosity,

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we must underline that it is unknown. The character is staged for his action, that is offering an invariable present: *Coca-Cola*. But this stage has, in our opinion, the deliberate undetermined attribute of location. The action can take place anywhere: at everybody's home, at neighbors, at friends, in Europe or in the USA. Beyond the unspecified place of action, the stage has a dynamic character, the viewer has the feeling of assisting an ac-tion that takes place in the present or it will take place in the future. The character is caught in full mobility and his act seems to be a volunteer one, accomplished with pleasure. The receiver has the task, through a metaphysical transfer, to fill in the image rhetoric with the action place.

b. The image authority

The way we understand the current narrative in the images from the annexes 1 and 2, we consider that we must make a mention regarding the iconic dimension and significance. As stated above, the central character is Santa Claus, but the authority of the image does not lie in this character, but in the brand that it promotes. Therefore, there is alternation regarding the share of the central elements in the iconic message. The emphasis falls, for the beginning, on Santa Claus but it transfers on the brand.

This brand authority, as far as the commercials in question are concerned, sends directly to the promotional value of the images. Configuratively, the image is uniform, but in terms of importance hierarchy of the iconic elements, what prevails from the transmitter's point of view is the product *Coca-Cola*. Under this evaluation, Santa Claus is only a narrative reason, while the brand is the narrative theme.

c. The multiple identity of the iconic narrator

The image rhetoric is produced differently in comparison with the rhetoric generated, for example, by a political speech. Within the commercials from the annexes 1 and 2, we consider that we have a double identity of the iconic narrator. Let's explain why. There is an identity of the image designer properly, of that who designed the advertising, who devised it (the transmitter within the communicational act message – code – receiver).

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Lapping over this identity we identify that of Santa Claus. The main difference between these identities is that the image narrator, Santa Claus is an exemplary one, who has a certain invariable, positive, optimist mood and sends the receiver a message that laps over his character. He identifies himself completely with his gestures, he is satisfied with the product that he promotes and with everything he does, he circumscribes to an act of persuading the auditorium. The hero invites to action – that of buying because he himself consumes this product. The narrator is the hero, and the promotional agent, as well. In addition, behind this agent there is another one: the *Coca-Cola* Company. The character tells something through his generosity act and, in the same time, he shows something. This makes his discourse to be metadiegetic. Therefore, behind the commercials designer, as well, who can be any illustrator, there is another identity that is the *Coca-Cola* Company. This is one of the particularities of the commercials image rhetoric. If, for example, a political orator promotes his qualities, within the image rhetoric, the central character does not promote himself, but he promotes a secondary entity.

1. Metalepsa

The metalepsa refers to the mixture of the narrative levels. What is particular regarding the images from the annexes 1 and 2 is that the interference between the narrative levels is made between the reality level and that of the pragmatic functionality. On this line, Santa Claus, comes during the winter holidays, his presence is felt because everybody gets a present, but, in the same time, he brings something new, something different, namely, the *Coca-Cola* beverage.

The codes by means of which the metalepsa is deciphered, involves the specific of the culture where the images are integrated. The image, in its complexity, generates a rhetoric by means of which there are suggested different understanding relationships deciphered through the valences of the cultural code. The iconic generates a rhetoric with a generous opening towards distinct areas, that permanently helps understanding the meaning levels.

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2. The rhetoric deciphering

In understanding the commercials, the viewer starts from the minimal element of a visual story, that is given by the foreshadowing of a character in action. Santa Claus makes an action – that of sharing presents – and the narration is achieved at the reception level. On this line, the image gets a value in itself only the moment it is made a combination between what can be seen and what the receiver knows regarding what is rendered through the iconic rhetoric. In every image, there are certain undetermined areas that will get consistency only after an empathic reading. Therefore, the deciphering of the images meanings from the annexes 1 and 2 get consistency by deciphering the rhetoric load that are based on a cultural key. Only using this key one can reach at correctly deciphering the visual rhetoric. The conceptualization of the key is made by involving the thinking mechanisms of some visual and linguistic elements. At the visual level, there interferes the perception, and, at the linguistic level, the image gets significance through logical organizations, inductive and deductive, based on language. These can conceptualize events, processes, moods, etc.

3. The rhetoric unit

This refers to the unity of the subject, action unity and character unity. It is necessary to specify that, regarding the *Coca-Cola* brand commercials, this unity is often broken in order to intrigue the receiver and to make the image memorable. Within the commercials represented in the annexes 1 and 2, this unity is obvious, and the visual narrative does not ask for a great interpretative effort. We have a character with a known biography, Santa Claus, that generates a unity of the subject. The cultural key of the society can decipher the meaning of the iconic rhetoric. The character makes explicit reference to a product that is represented through a simple spatial configuration and easy to understand. The character's interpretation can be both symbolical and narrative. In comparison with this, the theme interpretation, that sends directly to the narrative unity, is an explicit pragmatic one.

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The character is not a budding one, he has a well known identity. Activating his biography in the commercial sphere broadens the hero's attributes through promoting a worldwide famous brand. In this way, there takes place a hero's value transfer towards the brand and backward, in a superposition and identity process.

The fact that, over the year, during the winter holidays, everywhere there comes up this juxtaposition, makes the relationship between the brand and Santa Claus to go beyond the allusive level, by means of repeatability, and to reach the rank of defining micro theme. There is achieved a unity between a visual unity (Santa Claus and the *Coca-Cola* brand) and a goal (that of selling the product).

By juxtaposing the brand to Santa Claus' image there is achieved a certain *becoming* of the two elements, that, through this rhetoric particularity, creates a text, meaning, and action mixing.

4. Conclusions

The images rhetoric of the Coca-Cola brand commercials must be understood as a reading of the image that links organically the image and the pragmatic component of these. The understanding of these two elements of the iconic rhetoric, specific to the commercials, involves the understanding of the iconic rhetoric by means of which it is suggested the idea of exceptionality of the *Coca-Cola* brand. The current analysis highlighted the dimensions of the visual rhetoric and, in the same time, emphasized the importance of knowing the cultural code in understanding the meanings of the iconic style. The use of the open valences of the cultural code is mandatory for the understanding of the visual rhetoric, that constitutes the foundation of the commercial message sent by the advertising. The way this message is deciphered remains an open issue. The current analysis was intended to be an evaluation method of a semio-linguistic aspect, whose evolution represents, every year, the subject of some very various debates.

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ANNEXES



1



2

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