Las modalidades del *ethos* en la publicidad
Ethos and its modalities in advertising

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Resumen

Este estudio se centra sobre el estatuto del *ethos* dentro de las estrategias contemporáneas de la publicidad y pretende comprender y analizar mediante ejemplos, cómo las marcas se presentan y gestionan discursivamente su credibilidad. La investigación se compone de tres partes, cada una responde a diferentes aspectos

relacionados con este tema desde un enfoque relacionado con el dominio de la retórica y la semiótica textual.

En la primera parte, responderemos a la pregunta cuál es el *ethos* aristotélico y en qué medida este concepto presupone dos dimensiones principales: la primera de ellas se refiere al carácter del remitente basado en la tradición; Y la segunda de ellas se refiere a una reputación carismática relacionada con la capacidad para proyectar una subjetividad conveniente (persuasiva).

En la segunda parte, tenemos la intención de desarrollar esas ideas, respondiendo a las siguientes preguntas: ¿cómo están esas dimensiones de *ethos* en el registro publicitario? ¿Y cómo se puede conectar el discurso publicitario centrado en la gestión del *ethos* con las estrategias de imagen de marca?

En la última parte, mantendremos la posición dentro de algunas modalidades de enunciación de publicidad donde es posible dar fe de cómo se gestiona el *ethos* publicitario, es decir, entre aquellas en las que el emisor de publicidad se presenta explícita o implícitamente como un enunciador. ¿Cómo se incorpora esta gestión en algunas prácticas textuales?

Este estudio revisa las contribuciones epistemológicas de la retórica aristotélica, la semiótica textual y publicitaria, y complementa y profundiza las ideas ya desarrolladas en otros ensayos.

Abstract

This study[1] focuses on the status of ethos in contemporary advertising strategies and aims to understand, using examples, how brands present themselves and manage their credibility from a discourse perspective. The research is composed of three parts, each discussing different aspects related to this topic, from a rhetoric and text semiotics standpoint.

The first part answers the question of what the Aristotelian *ethos* is. To what extent this concept concept includes two major features: one concerning a sender's character based on tradition, and another referring to a charismatic reputation connected to the sender's ability to project an appropriate (persuasive) subjectivity?

The second part aims to further develop these ideas, answering the following questions: what form do those features of *ethos* take in advertising? How can advertising discourse centred on *ethos* management connect with brand image strategies?

The last part puts forward the position that it is in some advertising utterances that is possible to attest to how the advertising *ethos* is managed, namely among those by which the advertising sender is explicitly or implicitly presented as an enunciator. How is this management embodied in some textual markers?

This study reviews epistemological contributions from Aristotelian rhetoric, textual and advertising semiotics to complement and deepen ideas already developed in other studies.

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1. Epistemic framework

Studying *ethos* in advertising presupposes the existence of an entity (the adman or advertiser) who, with regard to promoting merchandise, projects a certain subjectivity towards a public (target). Aristotle identified this entity as a speaker who presents and defends a thesis in front of an audience.´

1.1. Êthos vs éthos

Aristotle's Rhetoric, Book I (1998), contains a section on the definition of rhetoric and its logical structure, in which *ethos* is conceived as proof provided by the discourse (hence it is intrinsic, like *pathos* and *logos*), in which the character of the speaker, an enunciator[2], is generated, always aiming to produce the same result in the audience: confidence in what he proposes/says/sustains (Aristotle, [1356a]).

Let us develop this concept of «character».

We have already mentioned that it is a «discursive reality», an intrinsic proof generated within the communication process. It should also be connected with «credibility», a quality that results from a person's ability to be sensible, sincere and sympathetic. Sensible: able to give reasonable and pertinent advice. Honest: not concealing thoughts or knowledge. Friendly: willing to help the audience (Reboul, 1998: 47; see also Aristotle, Book II, 1377 b; 1366 a). In other words, wisdom, sincerity and sympathy are embodied in prudence (*phrónexis*), virtue (*areté*), and benevolence (*eunóia*) (see also Rodrigues, 2008: 197; Amossy, 2018: 17-19; Eggs, 2018: 32-40).

In *ethos* —that is, in the speaker's character management— there is an ethical and deontological dimension that requires a brief diversion in search of the etymological derivations that this word —*ethos*— presupposes: *ÉTHOS* (with an acute accent) and *ÊTHOS* (with a circumflex accent). We have based this distinction on António Amaral's research (Amaral, 2016).

Going back to the etymological root of *ethos*, we discover the words *habit* and *habitat*. *Habit* involves use, tradition, which forces the word to be included in «*mores*», thereby transitioning to the realm of morality, the conventional and the obligatory. *Habitat,* on the other hand, contains a personal, subjective, procedural character, with praxiological relevance. *Ethos* is like a person's *topos*, a «subjective place» where the virtuous character is contained and in which two possible routes may converge: that of a morality acquired from the inculcation of customs —*ÉTHOS*— and that relating to the decision-making ability to choose, evaluate and ponder virtuously (i.e., teleologically, not in the name of a particular purpose, but in the common interest, the collective interest) —*ÊTHOS*. In short, the virtuous character

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2 With regard to the French terms and expressions stemming from textual semiotics, we have based the English version of this text on Greimas and Courtés (1979).

of *ethos* will not only result from the application of a skill (which is the product of a civic education alongside respectful knowledge of the rights and duties of the parties involved in the proceedings), but also from an environment (the modulation of the subjects in concrete situations that sometimes put them to the test).

This dichotomy is relevant for understanding the state of the art in advertising communication. If we consider the deontological *ÉTHOS* as a pre-discursive one and the procedural *ÊTHOS* resulting from each advertising campaign, then we may be able to understand some phenomena about negative attitudes in society towards the role played by advertising in general and by brands in particular. Today's negative advertising *ÉTHOS* is a consequence of the advertising industry itself, which is increasingly competitive, controversial, exaggerated, with brands contradicting and discrediting themselves and over-investing in mass media, leading to audience saturation and a noisy, polluted media ecology. As well as this, the very specific nature of advertising discourse is usually based on a non-credible expressiveness connected to a «good and the best» register. The negative advertising *ÉTHOS* affects the persuasive nature of promotion strategies forcing brands —despite the glamour of their campaigns— to react in order to avoid being judged not to have any marketing or civic relevance. It is precisely these reactive discourse strategies which underpin a procedural *ÊTHOS*. Some will be presented in the third part of this article.

1.2. Discursive and pre-discursive dimensions

The *ÊTHOS*/*ÉTHOS* dichotomy explained by António Amaral finds is complemented by how Kelen Rodrigues distinguishes the Aristotelian *ethos* as one of objective and neutral meaning (in which «habits, manners, customs and character fit in») from one founded on morals (where «the virtues are based on honesty, benevolence or equity» (Rodrigues, 2008: 196)). Based on this dichotomy and viewing it from an angle of analysis arising from the sociological and pragmatic studies approach, Ruth Amossy discusses the fact that *ethos* may present a discursive and non-discursive (institutional) dimension (Amossy, 2018: 136-143). In its non-discursive dimension, there is an idealized, formalized *ethos* resulting from the sedimentation of symbolic exchanges overruled by previous social mechanisms and positions (Rodrigues, 2008: 6). It is in this domain that we find the pre-discursive *ethos* conceived by Dominique Maingueneau (Amossy, 2018: 16; Maingueneau, 2018: 71). It is a subjectivity tailored by everything in the realm of consensus: not strictly enshrined values (António Amaral's moral domain), but also the shared sense (the common sense) —the world of everything that is already accepted, recognized as true, legitimate, credible, valid. Although this *ethos* is a formal category, it still presents a dynamic specificity as it varies according the locutionary processes related to the speaker and audience involved and the communication situations. It is, therefore,

an abstract *ethos* that is also concrete enough to fit the theme and the audience; an *ethos* that mobilizes moral and cultural schemes, but with the purpose of facilitating interactions, giving them legitimacy because they fit into previous schemes. In short, this idealized *ethos* has an institutional foundation which lies in shared beliefs in the *doxa*, and it is responsible for producing a speaker's starting status: a position characterized by a certain degree of legitimacy. From the perspective of discursive analysis, it is responsible for creating the «scene» —the starting point of the communication process as well the range of positions and roles linked to how the stereotype is enshrined or managed. On this subject of stereotypes, it should be noted that they are only effective on the condition of their being embedded in a «guarantor» —someone who ensures that what is said is inseparable from the way it is said. The pre-discursive *ethos* is a category that requires a body and a personality (a profile, a character) in a communication situation (therefore, in a theme) and with an audience.

In addition to this pre-discursive *ethos*, another is developed —a discursive *ethos*, in which the subjectivity of the speaker no longer results from a framework of expectations, but from what he will say and how he will say it, encompassing psychological characteristics and a specific embodiment closely connected to a range of rhetoric resources, namely figures and *tropos* (Spang, 1997: 132-234). The conjugation of the pre-discursive *ethos* (in which stereotypes of a particular culture and historical moment are mobilized) and this discursive *ethos* (relating to what is said) produces the effective *ethos*. Supported by a subject with certain configurations (body, voice, gesture), located in a time and place (therefore, in a scene), it is the foundation of an identity, whether or not this is congruent with the communicational context and objectives that are intended to be legitimised.

2. *Ethos* and advertising: Georges Péninou and Jean Marie Floch

The advertising *ethos* presupposes the existence of a «subjective discourse» centred on an advertising entity called a «brand». From a semiotic point of view, a brand is an advertising sign with a double meaning. On the one hand, it is a name —the sign that identifies a type of merchandise (or the producer thereof) and a range of meanings that are connected to it; on the other, it is the sign of an advertising enunciator. This dichotomy must be emphasized: a brand may be the register of something publicized and the entity that promotes something to someone reflecting communicational contexts and expectations from what is enshrined in an «advertising veridiction contract». By this we mean a set of precepts tacitly agreed upon by the parties about what is considered to be a viable, plausible, legitimate, credible, true (advertising) message.

This dichotomy between how brands may be conceived as uttered entities or subjects of utterances is fruitful, as it allows for an understanding of rhetorical strate-

gies of *ethos* management. Brands may emerge as advertising entities (therefore, subjects of «advertising utterances»), trying to manage advertising credibility or, on the contrary, denying that assumption, masking themselves behind advertising campaigns as mere trademarks of the promoted goods. The purpose is to achieve another kind of credibility: one that strictly comes from an alleged advertising objectivity.

Concerning the brands' *ethos* related with the ways in which they are presented in adverts with a particular reputation, Georges Péninou describes how they are connected in a branding process (Péninou, 1976: 95-106). Péninou states that the emergence of a brand, when presenting some kind of reputation —an advertising *ethos*— is the result of symbolic operations comprising three phases: nomination, predication, and exaltation. Each is responsible for meaning effects that we may classify as the dimensions of the brand's *ethos*.

All brands are attached to a proper name. Therefore, the first function of the advertising discourse is nomination. This process is also connected to a symbolic demarcation operation relating to hitherto indistinct objects under a mass, bulk production regime. The nominative advertising exercise is always one of individualization (*Idem*: 97). It involves a process of transition from the realism of the subject (thus adjacent to the common name) towards the symbolism of the person (the proper name). If the existence of brands —as proper names— integrates the merchandise into people's worlds, then they come to comprise a mix of attributes that, more than general categories, appeal to subjective peculiarities. This process is embodied in a kind of a symbolic «advertising baptism». In short, the brand name supports an «advertising being», a set of attributes that, at a later stage in this process, imposes a process of constant promotion. The first dimension of the advertising *ethos* connected to how brands are presented in advertisements involves a nomination operation which will bring to the brand its first semiotic peculiarity, one of a symbolic singularity (see also Behar, 1977: 57-82; Lomas, 1996: 67-106).

Another symbolic operation is implemented in the shift from the brand's name to the brand's image: predication. The various characters in the brand's name will now acquire consistency and homogeneity (brand image) —an *ethos*. The brand's name becomes the connotative sign of a set of ideological values in an axiological system (hence it is no longer a «personal identity» but rather a «personality»). Brands acquire a psychological profile —they present traits of a certain virtue, strength, uniqueness, all related to a reasoning and an ethic. Reasoning, in the perspective that this *ethos* was developed (and managed) for a persuasive purpose; ethic, because this psychological profile can either be the result of an aggressive policy (the brand's image is connected to a widespread mobilization of the mass media) or a more participatory, mild strategy (based on empathy and a less impactful but continuous approach) (Péninou, 1976: 100).

While the brand's name is a stable, symbolic reality, its predication is the other side of the coin, contributing to destabilization. The brand's profile is also subject to the action of time, permanently at risk of obsolescence because it is subject to the whims of people, changes, fashions and moods, and requires perpetual movement of communication in order to maintain or increase it. It is this process of symbolic management that is included in the exaltation stage, and is a permanent process of glorification and institutionalization of the brand. Not only is the ritual management of the brands' character at stake, but also a latent and permanent symbolic fight against those that do not have the attributes claimed by them. For example, the establishment of the Portuguese slogan «Omo lava mais branco» («Omo washes whiter») always assumes a distinction from other laundry detergent brands, which are alleged to perform worse.

Using George Peninou's studies, we have described how it is possible to study the advertising *ethos* from the point of view of how brands are presented within advertising texts. However, it is also relevant to consider how the advertising *ethos* may be a pragmatic effect from how brands (as advertising enunciators) present themselves to their targets (advertising receivers). *Ethos* brands does not strictly derive from what is advertised but also from *how* they utter advertisements, as well from their attitude towards the own advertising communication process. Should entities strive to transmit commercial information as effectively as they can, or to build a reputation based on fantastic, striking and amusing advertisements?

This problematic was analysed by the French semioticist Jean Marie Floch in a study on several advertising philosophies (Floch, 1995: 183-226; see also Traini, 2008: 41-47 and Volli, 2004: 57-76). In the context of advertising as a mass communication genre, he described how certain «advertising gurus» (David Ogilvy, Jacques Séguela, Ph Michel and J.-M Dru) conceived what «good advertising» should be. For this study we are interested in the contradictory positions of David Ogilvy vs. Jacques Séguela, which have many implications for understanding the *ethos* of brands as advertising enunciators.

Whatever it promotes, advertising can never be misleading. For David Ogilvy, it must be consistent, true, and credible. What is at stake is the claim for a non-misleading advertising, a factual promotion regime facilitating an enunciator *ethos* based on «honesty» and «objectivity». These are the main fundamentals of an advertising veridiction contract, which, according David Ogilvy, should favour a kind of a referential language, thus contributing to the ideological construction of a brand's *ethos* based on «truth».

In the context of this study, «advertising truth» should be understood as a «meaning-making effect». It is derived from the ways in which what is promoted must be suitable to the specific characteristics of the goods themselves. At the other

end of the spectrum is Jacques Séguela's position, whose conceptualization of what advertising discourse should be refers to other truth clauses, this time connected to a charismatic *ethos* grounded in recreation, spectacle, creativity and original modes of promotion. A proper advertising expression is no longer needed to convey the goods' specific features, but instead one for amusement by associating brands with movie stars, dreams, humour, sexual arousal, entities from idyllic or surreal worlds, and so on. The omnipresence of a brand as an advertising enunciator obfuscates and hides the discourse modalities connected to promoting the goods, relating them to a kind of secret or dream domain and imposing a capacity for interpretation on the target.

As can be seen, different positions towards the expressive regime of advertising are founded on diverse truth statutes (objectivity *vs* spectacularity) and on different *ethos* advertising profiles: one of a sober (advertising) expressiveness, which contrasts with another based on charisma, spectacle, and fantasy. Each presents particular features from the point of view of advertising utterance practices. For example, practices based on spectacle are embodied in a register where the brand's charisma is more important than the attributes of the merchandise promoted. On the other hand, there are brands that aspire to provide the receiver with a kind of «dip» into what is being promoted and to «make them believe the true nature» of the product's unique selling propositions.

Jean Marie Floch identified the discursive strategies behind this «make them believe the truth» regime, based on which the brand's *ethos* is managed: 1) narratives (storytelling); 2) figurativization (absence of abstract meanings); 3) description implying the use of temporal distinctions (before/after), concrete data (extrinsic proofs) or allegedly real aspects (intrinsic proofs) (Floch, 1995: 195). Together, all of these, with the absence of adjectives or slogans.

The French semioticist also stressed how this regime is characterized by an internal referent – a concept that should be understood as the symbolic construction of an «ideal of referentiality». The brand's *ethos* is progressively grounded in demonstrative and prescriptive discourse procedures: e.g., that pressuring hard selling advertisements related to the inventory of characteristics and the exploration of testimonies given by credible actors illustrated by realistic iconographic registers, specifically photographs. Internal referentiality is also a consequence of paratext practices whereby the components of the advertisement refer to and prepare others: the titles (forms of exordium) refer to photos which illustrate the product and the brand (narration) which, in turn, refer to explanatory texts by means of prescriptions, demonstrations, comparative tests (proofs which are not necessarily extrinsic, but must seem to be…) and graphic schemes referring in turn to calls for action (peroration). The purpose of the latter is to manage a link with the merchandise ontologically located at the point of sale.

2.3. Complements: on the fragility of the today's advertising ethos

The discursive strategies of managing and positioning *ethos* used by brands do not arise by chance. There are factors explaining how it emerges and develops. Some from Xiaoli Nan and Ronald Faber's research are presented below.

2.3.1. Scepticism towards advertising

Xiaoli Nan and Ronald Faber (Nan & Faber, 2004) argue how this is a structural, social phenomenon. They support their position using studies that cover a long enough time to show the recurrence of negative, suspicious and sceptical attitudes from civil society concerning advertising because it is seen as a kind of a superficial and unreliable mass communication genre. The authors stress how scepticism has also stemmed from a kind of a civic education about the media and consumerism. It is, therefore, the result of socialization that has led to a negative attitude towards advertising, which is «decreasingly seen as a credible mass communication genre and more as a noisy device tending to reduce products to mere props in a show» (Camilo, 2010: 144). More precisely, this scepticism affects brands' pre-discursive *ethos*, resulting in a kind of anti-advertising moralism.

2.3.2. Advertising as a noisy mass communication genre

The reception and understanding of messages are permanently affected by interferences produced by other brands' campaigns, presenting or offering the same type of products or purchase. Behind this noisy environment, there is commercial competition founded on a kind of an «advertising logomachy». The everyday laudatory and hyperbolic advertising registers undergo interference from others created by competing brands, always founded on implicit or explicit comparisons.

Although there is an important core behind the advertising communication genre, noise interferes with the optimal conditions of reception for more thoughtful interpretation and recognition of the usefulness of what is being promoted. One way to overcome this problem is by increasing the frequency with which messages are transmitted —at the risk of providing even more saturation and boredom to audiences— or opting for spectacular but less credible creative strategies. Advertising noise affects the pre-discursive *ethos* because it causes brands to be ignored or judged as superficial or unreliable.

2.3.3. Advertising over-investment

As a way of reacting against this noisy environment, advertisements have been decreasing in size and duration, which has affected the quality of a more argumentative discourse on the characteristics of the products, while at the same time

creating intense spectacularity. From a rhetorical point of view, this overinvestment results in a devaluation of the advertising *logos*, obfuscated by an exaggerated use of a *pathos* and spectacle-based approach.

On one hand, with regard to the modalities of advertising utterances, brands have become increasingly connected to a regime overly determined by fun, recreation, exuberance, artificiality, and superficiality. They are increasingly accused of impertinence for producing advertising campaigns that violate the Aristotelian precept of benevolence/solidarity, according to which what is said always must always be relevant (*eunóia*). They became too phatic, merely speaking out ostensibly. On the other hand, with regard to what is promoted, the message is increasingly less evident of what is intended to be promote, making what once formed the core of the message —a commodity or purchase— irrelevant. This expressive irrelevance is counterbalanced by the omnipresence of the brand itself in the ad: just a symbol, a logo. Here is a kind of an advertising heraldry no longer based on reference to a product but merely the designation of a name/logo, as claimed in the precept of «brands yes, products no» (Klein, 1999: 43; 38-48). This discourse trend will affect the *ethos* of brands regarding two characteristics: *phronesis*, because there is nothing useful for the consumers left to advertise, and *areté* because, if there is still something, it is not properly publicized.

In short, and to systematize our thesis on this matter, all these reasons contribute to the emergence of negative attitudes towards brands' *ethos*, favouring the adoption of discursive strategies by their management. Some of them will be described in following section.

3. *Ethos* management discourse modalities

The current scepticism towards brands is a result of the fact that advertising is a communication process that proposes utopian values usually incompatible with those that come from acquiring or consuming products. This incompatibility is not easily resolved, and involves discourse strategies to convey to the advertising receivers (audiences) the feeling that what is being promoted is in accordance with veridictory modalities that assure the conditions for an «advertising truth». These discourse strategies encompass both the modes of advertising utterance and the very configuration of advertising messages. What is described below is part of the study conducted by Luiz Sánchez Corral (Sánchez Corral, 1997: 168-195).

3.1. Ethos credibility strategies from the configuration of the advertising message

From the *décalage* between utopian values and exchange/use values, advertising is a fallacious discourse, a form of illusory mass communication genre about com-

modities. Its pragmatic effectiveness and credibility will therefore be greater the better the synthesis between the illusion derived from advertising messages and the ontological reality. This can be made possible from two discourse configurations: concealment of the advertising specificity and plausibility.

3.1.1. Brands' concealment

Beside the concealment of those configurative signs that determine the advertising specificity of the messages, the same dynamics may arise with how brands are promoted through a process of decontextualization and trivialization. The goal is to no longer be recognized as «advertising brands». It is important to hide its primordial economic origin in a historical, social, political framework. Through sponsorship or patronage in relation to a very diverse range of activities, they progressively acquire a purposeful blurring to eliminate the critical conscience of audiences, as they begin to ignore their economic and advertising origins. In addition, brands acquire other symbolic attributes: those resulting from their juxtaposition with a huge range of activities and domains, thus a range of symbolic gains of a civic, cultural, sporting nature.

3.1.2. Brands' plausibility

Brands' (re)credibility also requires a very accurate advertising expressiveness to give them an imprint of truth.

In narrative terms, their *ethos* is made more plausible by certifications, comparative and laboratory tests, testimonial statements. The advertising is captured by a scientific, technological, historical, civic and even political discourse This precept also facilitates a configurative concealment of the advertising expressiveness, as previously mentioned, through the transtextual adaptation of the characteristic styles of other textual genres: journalistic discourse (e.g., press releases), scientific and economic discourse (e.g., technical reports), court discourse (e.g., testimonials). Additionally, messages include argumentation by enthymeme in which the attributes that constitute the brands' reputation are increasingly based on unverified and implicit premises.

3.2. Ethos credibility strategies in utterance advertising modalities

While the management of brands' *ethos* is decided by how their attributes are considered plausible, within the domain of advertising utterance modalities, it stems from how they are communicated. Three discourse strategies are recognized: one that involves a subjectivity, one characterized by objectivity and a third, which is the most frequent in advertising texts, characterized by a conjunction of the other

two modalities. Focusing on the strategies of subjective and objective advertising utterances, we find Émile Benveniste's dichotomy between history and discourse (1966: 237-250) behind these modalities.

With historical utterances, facts are sought to be presented without the intervention of the enunciator. The most paradigmatic model would be a historical (or journalistic) narration of events. In turn, discourse utterances require the manifestation of an enunciator (an «I») who explicitly addresses a receive (a «you»), as well those other deictic figures of space and time («here», «now»). Structurally, advertising is a text genre in which «discourse utterances» predominate. With the exception of some messages in the field of advertising teasing strategies, there is always an explicit presentation of the advertising addresser (the brand), considered as the enunciator.

The credibility of the brands' *ethos* is managed by these strategies, resulting from how they position themselves as advertising enunciators. They may opt to make explicit their subjectiveness (charismatic *ethos*) or rather make implicit their subjectiveness (therefore seeking to conceal themselves in the advertising message —non-charismatic *ethos*).

3.2.1. The charismatic *ethos*

The brands' *ethos* relies on a veridiction contract in which plausibility derives from the recognition of the brands as credible «advertising enunciators». This modality presents the following specific features:

1) Subjective discourse

Advertisements present a register with the brands being presented as a guardian figure worthy of trust and prestige, that is, as the depository of a performative competence contributing to the lack of distinction between what belongs to the domain of the advertising brand —the entity that utters the advertising text— and what belongs to the branded merchandise.

Assuming themselves as credible advertising utterance entities, the brands' *ethos* obeys various discourse possibilities.

In the first, direct contact with the audiences is established and assumed. Brands present themselves as advertising entities in that advertisements strictly consisting of a logo, a name, and a slogan.

Within the second possibility, brands are presented by personalizing the attributes that underlie their *ethos*. They are embodied in a mascot, such as Joe Camel for Camel's cigarettes or the Esso tiger.

In the third possibility, brands may be mediated by somebody who lends them his or her presence. The advertising discourse becomes ambiguous because two

orders of values are communicated at the same time: the brands' descriptive va-
lues, those that form the foundation of their *ethos*, and those belonging to the
actors/protagonists who represent them. Underlying this ambiguity is the strategic
foundation of a metonymy or metaphor: somehow the values of those actors/pro-
tagonists are either common or sufficiently evocative of the brands' and therefore
require careful casting.

Within this modality, we find two main categories of actors/characters: celebrities
and prescribers. Celebrities are advertising actors who convey their own biogra-
phic values. They are connected to a «soft subjectivity»: not emphatic, latent and
enigmatic. At the same time, the advertising appeals become more suggestive in
which the gaze, although directed towards the receiver, is not combined with an
interpellating and emphatic gesture referring the existence of a commodity, as
happens in the case of prescribers or presenters. The celebrities' dramaturgy com-
plements that given by the category of prescribers — advertising actors/characters
who assign technical and professional competence to the brand's. This is the case
for doctors, for example: advertising actors whose function is not only to instruct
but also to recommend. In these strategies, iconographic and graphic signs are
explored as often as verbal ones. Sometimes they are even more evident where
there is a projection in the brand's *ethos* of the charisma and mystery already
embodied by these actors/characters.

In addition to this cast in advertising, others groups of agents are similarly relevant:
consumers and presenters. Consumers are witnesses of how their own descriptive
values (e.g., health, prosperity, wealth, in short, the range of gratifications coming
from the Maslow's pyramid of needs) have emerged from what brands promise and
are attributes of their reputation/*ethos*. In turn, concerning the presenters, the
intersubjectivity is based on the interpellation of audiences regarding a demons-
tration of the brand's attributes.

This «delegated subjectivism» continues to contain intersubjective contact: one
enunciator addresses the receiver but through someone who speaks on his behalf.
The pragmatic effect of this discourse modality can be easily deduced: an impartial
expressiveness which should not be confused with objectivity. Indeed, this effect
already presupposes other discourse specificities —those regarding an «opacity»
of the brands as enunciators where the subjectivity of the first person (the «ego»
that summons an «alter») is replaced by the objectivity of the third person (the
«self» who is «spoken»).

2) Emotive discourse

A personalized and emotive discourse is used (from the perspective of the language
functions related to Roman Jakobson's studies) in which there is a whole range of
subjective qualities projected into the brand's *ethos*.

This subjective register also includes an evaluative expressiveness provided by adjectivization. Also, it may imply the mobilization of a fundamental advertising actor: one able to personalize the brand itself, whether in the form of a mascot (e.g., the Nesquik rabbit) or a human being (e.g., the Martini man from the Three Red Dots campaign, the Marlboro Cowboy, the Victoria's Secret models).
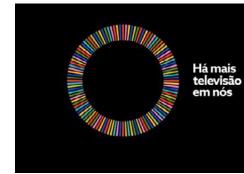
3) Intersubjective discourse

The omnipresence of an «advertising ego» (the brands as advertising enunciators performed by certain actors) is also decided by the relationship with an «advertising alter» (that is, a «you» evoking the advertising audiences as receivers) through an entire advertising intersubjective discourse: e.g., direct addresses, interpellation gestures and poses. It may also include graphic resources and the use of the imperative and apostrophes to emphasize the relationship between these entities.

4) Transformation of the «self» into a «majestic us»

This (inter)subjective discourse may also be intensified whenever brands present knowledge about their own existence. They speak and present themselves autobiographically from a glorious perspective in a utopian world of their own. Take for example the Portuguese coffee company Delta's advertising campaign, focusing on its head figure, Rui Nabeiro (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Delta's advertising campaign[3]   **Figure 2.** NOS' teaser campaign

Source: Delta.

Source: NOS.

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3 «We have been dreaming of making this advertisement for 50 years. The dream of making a coffee appreciated from Ribeira to Foz and whose fame stretches to Alfama is no longer a dream. The dream of building a name bigger than Campo Maior and proving that it does not matter where you come from, but where you want to go, is no longer a dream. It is a reality that is turning 50 years old. Still, sometimes we have to drink a coffee to wake up and say with a sigh – this is not a dream, it is real. Rui Nabeiro. Delta, 50 years waking up Portugal».

There are cases where this «advertising ego» is transformed into a majestic «us». As happened with Louis XIV, who claimed «*L'état c'est moi*», some brands include the audience and the markets in their utterances as well. Look at NOS' teaser campaign (a word which is similar to «us» in Portuguese, «*nós*»). NOS, a Portuguese telecommunications company, published an advertisement with the headline «*Há mais em nós*» («There is more in us»). To what extent does this «us» involve both the brand as the enunciator and the targets as the advertising receivers (Figure 2)?

3.2.2. Non-charismatic *ethos*

Brands' credibility may also be focused in the historical modality, in which they tactically choose to perform a subtle and indirect advertising utterance. The aim is now to bring the effect of objectivity. These are the facts which will speak on the brand's behalf as they are the fundamental parts of its *ethos*. Brands manage a kind of «discursive absence». In fact, they never are absent, because they are always presupposed in the message utterance. What they now seek is simply to evoke an illusion of objectivity.

The historical utterance modality presupposes advertising stories performed by certain advertising actors/characters, such as consumers, prescribers or those whose dramaturgical role is to evaluate the brand's success. In the discourse utterance modality —therefore assumed as subjective/charismatic— there are also prescribers, consumers, and even witnesses. The difference lies in the narrative status of these actors. While in the discourse modality they represented the brands or the target audiences themselves, in the case of the historic utterance modality they are transformed into protagonists of certain advertising stories. Thus, the purpose of this register is to report their positive experiences with the descriptive values promised by the brands and which underpin their *ethos*.

These discourse modalities are more effective when, under the veridiction contracts, other clauses exist favouring the adoption of a «subjective brand opacity». The brand's charismatic *ethos* is no longer a guarantee of the advertisement's credibility alone. On the contrary, it is now decided by the drama performed by these actors.

We systematize the main foundations of this alternative advertising *ethos* management:

1) Brands' concealment as advertising enunciators

The advertising *ethos* derives exclusively from the brands' status as uttered entities. It is the staging of their attributes (that is, the attributes in a «brand image», according the Georges Péninou's studies) that will determine their «advertising character».

2) The factual register.

The brands' charismatic *ethos* gives way to a techno-operative *ethos*. This prag-matic effect is better achieved by a non-fictional register or, at least, one that is impossible or difficult to prove, in order to prevent any chance of accusation of insincerity, as already mentioned. This stems from the discursive modalities evi-denced by Jean Marie Floch regarding the operative and referential advertising advocated by David Ogilvy.

3) Reorganization of the advertising text

Advertising messages have started including other types of narrative programs implying the transformation of the advertising receiver status. Receivers started to be portrayed as ignorant subjects (people who want something but do not know how or are unable to get it), transiting towards the pole of wisdom and/or power in contact with the promoted brand's descriptive values.

Within this transformation, brands are meant as operator entities making available/promising new modal values or the transformation of those already owned by the receiver. By modal values we mean requirements underlying the performance of a narrative programme. In this case, the promised modal values —which consti-tute the predicates of the brands' image— fall under the domain of desire, power and know-how. Under desire, brands are set by their most attractive attributes (included in main narrative programmes). On the other hand, within the modal values of power and know-how, these predicates now relate to secondary narrative programmes of an instrumental nature (fundamental for achieving qualifications to perform the main ones).

Conclusion

In this study, we intended to analyse the status of *ethos* within advertising com-munication processes.

In the first part, we provided an epistemological framing of *ethos* within the scope of rhetoric studies in search of the dichotomy that the term presupposes: *éthos*, as the domain in which there is a character based on tradition, custom, moral and deontological rules, a character which is conventional and compulsory; *êthos,* as the domain of a character which, while correlating with the underlying *éthos*, is personal, subjective, present in the management of each situation. This dichotomy was also developed within a sociological framework and related to discourse analy-sis. In this domain, the contribution of Dominique Maingueneau on the «effective *ethos*» was highlighted, in which there is a discourse and pre-discourse *ethos*.

In the second part, we showed how these dichotomies may be found in the ad-vertising discourse stemming from two dimensions of analysis. The first relates to an «uttered subjectivity», that is, the register of an advertising identity (name)

associated with a set of attributes aimed to develop a «brand image» from the perspective of a specific personality, a character —an *ethos*. A fundamental author can be found in this concept: Georges Péninou. In the second dimension of analysis, resulting from a textual semiotics approach, *ethos* is managed with the modalities of discourse utterance. Another author came up as a reference: Jean Marie Floch, namely his study on the philosophies of advertising conceived as advertising utterance modalities. We ended with the formulation of some ideas regarding the pragmatic context of advertising communication which may explain some of current civil society's scepticism and disenchantment towards it.

In the third part, and with reference to the contributions of Jean Marie Floch, Sánchez Corral and, indirectly, Algirdas Greimas and Joseph Courtés, we sought to classify some forms of advertising utterance concerning the management or recovery of brands' *ethos*. We revealed two major groups according to the explicitness or concealment of a charismatic *ethos*. Each one (and its derivations) involves interesting advertising figurations in the sense of proposing prototype actor/character sets. This is the case, for example, of mascots and celebrities or consumers and scientists. We are convinced how this aspect of advertising actors/characters is relevant and warrants further development towards a discursive analysis on the dramaturgical nature of the advertising *ethos*.

Finally, we would like to emphasize the seminal nature of this study, requiring further development —including comparative research that is more descriptive and empirical in scope and based on the following issues:

a. What is the relationship between «advertising character» and «advertising ethos»? To what extent are certain configurations of ethos materialized in advertising discourse recurrences provided by performances by certain characters? Do they have a structural status, inherent to the specific features of discourse and processes of advertising communication, or are they merely circumstantial and therefore reflect marketing strategies, market sectors and contexts of advertising utterances?

b. How effectively is the advertising ethos a discourse practice related to the management of brand images and the phenomenon of branding?

c. What are the effective pragmatic effects of these discourse strategies for the credibility of advertising brands?

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