

THE RATIONALITY OF ADVERTISING. AN ANALYSIS OF RATIONAL, EMOTIONAL, INTEGRATIVE AND MECHANISTIC ADVERTISING

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Abstract: Given that several opinions have emerged in the literature over time according to which advertising addresses the irrational side of the public, this study aims to demonstrate that there is rationality even in types of advertising that at first glance do not target the consumers' rationality: emotional, mechanistic and integrative advertising. The study also aims to identify what types of rationality exist in these types of advertising, with reference to the Weberian theory of rationality, from which it focuses on instrumental rationality and value rationality. The main results of the research show that beyond the emotional impact that advertising has, the public is looking for rational objectives to purchase a product. These objectives are linked to the audience's values and its need to adapt to the demands of society. The study also shows that all types of advertising can be rationalised, as audiences do not automatically react to 'irrational' messages but decide on the basis of reasoning. Advertisers know this game of rationality and irrationality and use it frequently.

Keywords: *rational advertising; instrumental rationality; value rationality; emotional advertising;*

Introduction

Several opinions argue that advertising is irrational (see Arrington, 1982, Vil-larín, 2017) or that it appeals to the irrational side and that it has a persuasive or even manipulative force that can make people buy based on the stimulus-response relationship, without the need for rational arguments. But at the same time there are theories that the rational side of advertising and the emotional side are not mutually exclusive (Ogilvy, 2004). In this context, the present study aims to show that there is rationality even in the types of advertising that are considered irrational or persuasive.

To do so, we will analyse the four types of advertising: rational, emotional, integrative and mechanistic (Jouve, 2005) in terms of the discourse and arguments used to uncover the meanings of the advertising message and whether the last three (considered persuasive) are indeed purely irrational discourse.

As we will see in the theoretical part of the paper, the last three types of advertising are focused on brand values and message construction based on meanings rather than rational arguments. In order to observe the implications of rationality in these types of advertising, we will analyse them from the perspective of Max Weber's theory of rationality, as he believes that people can also be rational based on values, calling this action value rationality (Weber, 1978).

At the same time, we will try to observe what the implications of instrumental rationality are in rational advertising, in terms of how advertisers choose the right means to achieve their audience's goals.

In the process we will delineate the types of rationality according to advertising types, assigning one or more types of rationality to an advertising type, following the analysis of four advertisements corresponding to rational, emotional, integrative and mechanistic advertising. In this way, we will be able to determine whether these types of advertising are rational or not.

Theoretical framework

The rationality-irrationality game in advertising

In the analysis of advertising, several views have emerged over time that argue that it appeals to the irrational side of the public and that it often attempts to manipulate the public through advertising. For example, Arrington (1982) believes that advertising can: „(1) control behavior, (2) produce compulsive behavior, or (3) create wants which are not rational or (4) are not truly those of the consumer” (p. 11).

Rory Sutherland (2020) believes that through storytelling and the introduction of symbols into advertising discourse, audiences can be more easily attracted than through rational arguments. Sutherland (2020) places the value of products before their quality in advertising and believes that creative ways of presenting a product are very important, thus opposing the idea that people decide objectively when buying a product.

Alonso Villarán (2017), who believes that advertising has so much manipulative power that it can affect the moral authority of the public and lead to the creation of a public that buys products automatically. But, at the same time, Villarán also takes into account Beauchamp's idea which brings into question the term rational persuasion and defines it as follows: „a deliberative and successful attempt by one person to encourage another to freely accept beliefs, attitudes, values, or actions through appeals to reason” (Beauchamp, 2001, p. 477).

Villarán (2017) considers that advertisers have three options: ,to rationally persuade us, to coerce us, and to manipulate us’ (p. 2), but acknowledges that the three options are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

David Ogilvy makes an essential contribution to understanding advertising as a rational mechanism on the one hand, but one that does not exclude the emotional component. The main ideas that Ogilvy explains this interplay of rationality and emotion in advertising are: advertising should not only be informative, but also

contain emotional elements, but at the same time the audience should not be underestimated, i.e. emotions should be integrated in an intelligent way (Ogilvy, 2004).

All these views make us understand that although advertising may sometimes appeal strictly to the irrational side of the public, there are situations where the irrational is intertwined with the rational. This situation where rationality does not exclude emotion is specifically human. Although we humans are rational, emotions are an integral part of our lives.

From a psychological point of view, advertising appeals to both the rational and the irrational (emotional, social, etc.) side of the audience. In the next section we will look at the division of advertising based on psychological criteria, in order to more easily delineate the rational and irrational purposes of advertising.

Types of advertising by psychological criteria

Advertising can be approached according to several criteria, but the most important criterion for this study is the psychological one. Taking this criterion into account, Jouve (2005) divides advertising into:

- Rational advertising which, as its name suggests, targets the rational side of individuals and is based on economic arguments, emphasising the benefits of the product in relation to the price.
- Psychodynamic (emotional) advertising addresses the deep psychological structures of the audience. It aims to create a feeling of satisfaction or release from an unpleasant situation.
- Behaviourist (mechanistic) advertising aims at the immediate purchase of the product, based on the stimulus-response relationship. The main technique used in mechanistic advertising is the ad bomb.
- Socio-cultural (integrative) advertising aims to create a sense of belonging to a group and promotes the idea of social excellence.

We see in these types of advertising a play between the rational and the emotional, between touching the sensitive side or even the human subconscious and the rational economic arguments thrown into the advertising game.

At first glance, rational advertising would be the only type that addresses the rational side of individuals, while the other types would address other sides considered irrational: the emotional side, the subconscious, the social side, stimulus-based action. However, the most recent studies have shown that rationality exists at the subconscious level, for example, „emotional and nonemotional information processing, action preparedness, psychological defense mechanisms, cognitive regulatory control processes, and human-specific cognition (negative symptoms)” (Bowins, 2018, p. 28). Also, affect-based actions can be rationalized if the person acts strictly on their emotions (Weber, 1978).

Given this, but also the theories discussed earlier that there are situations in advertising where the emotional and rational sides are not mutually exclusive, we can conclude that the existence of rationality even in persuasive types of advertising (such as emotional or integrative advertising) and in mechanistic (response-stimulus relationship-based) advertising is possible.

Rationality of advertising

To set the tone of advertising discourse in relation to customer needs, an interesting approach may be from the perspective of Max Weber's theory of rationality. From his colossal work, for the present study we will extract two types of rationality, through which we want to identify the objectives and psychology behind advertising: instrumental rationality and value rationality.

These types of rationality derive from the types of social action identified by Max Weber (1978): on the one hand instrumentally rational social action (*zweck-rational*) that: „is, determined by expectations as to the behaviour of objects in the environment and of other human beings; these expectations are used as conditions or means for the attainment of the actor's own rationally pursued and calculated ends", and on the other hand, value-rational social action (*wertrational*) that: „is determined by a conscious belief in the value". Belief in value can pertain, Weber says, to religion, ethics, aesthetics, or other reasons (pp. 24 - 25).

The distinction between these two types of rationality lies in how the individual is guided in their actions. Instrumental-rational action considers the consequences and their calculation, while value-rational action focuses on the „intrinsic properties of an act," towards values that lead to a certain action (Brubaker, 1984, p. 25).

In the study of advertising, Weber's two types of rationality can be found in Martin Mayer's theory of added value. Essentially, Mayer opines that advertising conveys more than information rationally to the public and that it makes the public value certain products based on the meanings that advertisers attach to these products (Mayer, 1958).

Mayer's theory shows us that in advertising there is a permanent interplay between the rational arguments put into play by advertisers to make the public buy a product - the establishment of practical means to achieve ends, understood as instrumental rationality, and the arguments concerning the meanings and values of the product - value rationality.

Preston (1967) develops Mayer's theory in a very interesting way. He refers to the seminifications of the product in a social context. For example, Preston (1967) argues: „suppose, however, that such ads permit a satisfaction based on the knowledge that the product is a familiar one in the person's society. We should not assume arbitrarily that this adds value to the product only irrationally' (p. 220). In other words, what Preston conveys is that beyond the idea of added value, people are looking for a rational objective for buying the product, such as - this product is presented as having x, y, z values, these values are accepted by the society I live in, therefore I can buy this product.

Seen from the outside, the purchase decision, especially in the case of advertising based on value rationality, where product meanings are used more than economic arguments, may seem irrational, but if we take into account the intrinsic meanings of the audience, they become rational, as Preston (1967) points out: persons who respond to a product irrationally in the view of some observer may

really be responding quite rationally with respect to their own knowledge of their own goals” (p. 219).

These approaches to the rationality of advertising reinforce the information presented earlier and confirm that, although at first glance certain types of advertising may appear irrational, the signals that audiences attribute to them can be constructed on rational grounds.

The fact that the public makes the purchase decision on the basis of value signals and not on the basis of seemingly rational arguments such as price and product efficiency does not mean that the decision was irrational, but that it was made on the basis of a value system influenced by internal and external factors, this action is translated as value rationality.

Further on, in the research section we will show concretely what the implications of the two types of rationality: instrumental and value-based, are in each type of advertising and depending on the results we will determine whether these types of advertising can be categorized as rational.

Research Methodology

The present study aims to demonstrate that even in these persuasive practices in advertising, certain types of rationality are used. The premise is that all types of advertising can be rationalised, even if at first glance some of them (emotional, integrative and mechanistic advertising) would target the irrational side of the audience.

The research method used is a case study, based on the analysis of advertising discourse according to the arguments used. We will consider 4 advertisements corresponding to the four types of advertising: rational, emotional, mechanistic and integrative. The criterion on which the four advertisements were chosen is the frequency with which the selected brands: Nivea, Rolex, Harley-Davidson and Old Spice use each advertising type.

In most cases, Nivea prefers a rational approach based on product benefits, Rolex prefers an integrative approach that creates a strong connection between the brand and customers, Harley-Davidson focuses on an emotional approach that conveys brand values, and Old Spice prefers a mechanistic approach where the advertising bombardment is the main element of persuasion. The selection of these representative brands is not only based on the observation of their advertising behaviour, but we will check if they really fit into the listed advertising types by applying their characteristics to each ad.

We will analyse these advertisements with the aim of identifying: the characteristics that fit the four selected advertisements into the four types of advertising, highlighting the types of rationality stated by Max Weber - value rationality and instrumental rationality in these advertisements, the purpose of a particular type of rationality in advertising discourse.

The research questions that the present study aims to answer are:

- If rational advertising targets the rational side of individuals, do other types of advertising necessarily target the irrational side?

- What types of rationality do emotional, integrative and mechanistic advertising have?

All these elements will lead us to the main objective of this study: to demonstrate that advertising cannot always be considered irrational.

Nivea: rational advertising



A black and white advertisement for Nivea Active3 3-in-1 shower gel. The background features a man in a shower, smiling and lathering his hair and chest with foam. The word "SHAMPOO" is overlaid on the left, "SHOWER" on the right, and "SHAVE" in the center, all in large, bold, white capital letters. In the bottom right corner, a bottle of Nivea Active3 shower gel is shown, with the label "NIVEA FOR MEN ACTIVE3 SHOWER, SHAMPOO, SHAVE" and "Shower Gel Body, Hair & Shave". Below the man's head, the text "Get more done in the shower with the extraordinary lather of Nivea's first 3in1 shower gel." is followed by the "ACTIVE3" logo. Below this, it says "Discover more about what men want at NIVEAFORMENusa.com". At the bottom left, the phrase "WHAT MEN WANT" is written in bold. In the center, there are three small icons: a bottle, a head with a comb, and a razor.

SHAMPOO

SHOWER

SHAVE

NIVEA
FOR MEN

Get more done in the shower
with the extraordinary lather
of Nivea's first **3in1** shower gel.

ACTIVE3

Discover more about
what men want at
NIVEAFORMENusa.com

WHAT MEN WANT

NIVEA
FOR MEN
ACTIVE3
SHOWER, SHAMPOO, SHAVE
Shower Gel
Body, Hair & Shave
Natural MICRO

Figure 1: Nivea. What men want

Nivea's brand approach is one of rational advertising, presenting the benefits of the product. The „3 in 1” or „active 3” mentions refer to the effectiveness of the product and the time savings men want in terms of body care.

Likewise, icons indicating that the product can be used as a shower gel, shampoo and shaving lubricant refer to the functional characteristics of the product. These features have an instrumental rationality, according to the relationship between means and ends (Weber, 1978), as they are based on the customer's objectives and needs, as the slogan indicates: „what men want”. Rational advertising can be identified in this case by: the informative character of the advertisement, the reference to the benefits of the product, the functional arguments of the product and the economic arguments. Noting that all these characteristics are functional and refer to efficiency, it is easy to see that we are dealing with instrumental rationality.

Harley-Davidson: emotional advertising

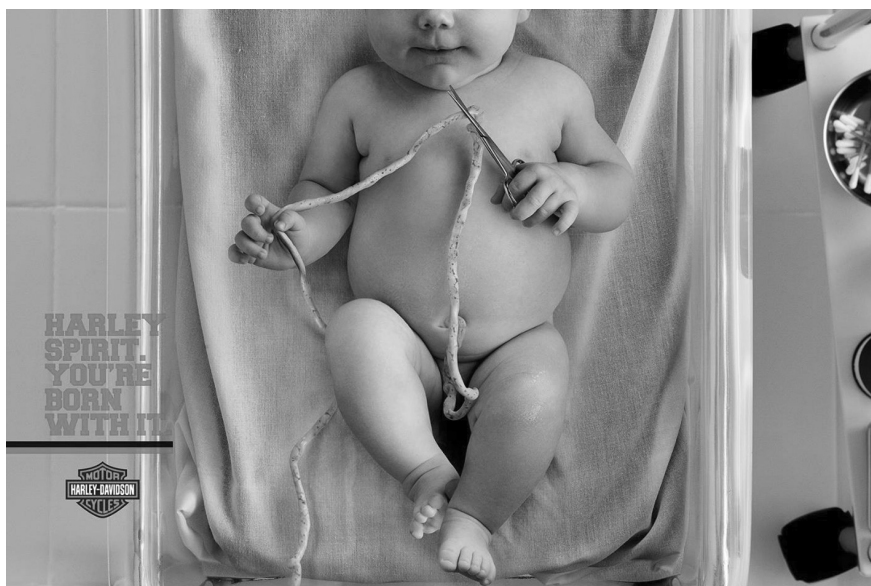


Figure 2: Harley-Davidson. Harley spirit. You're born with it

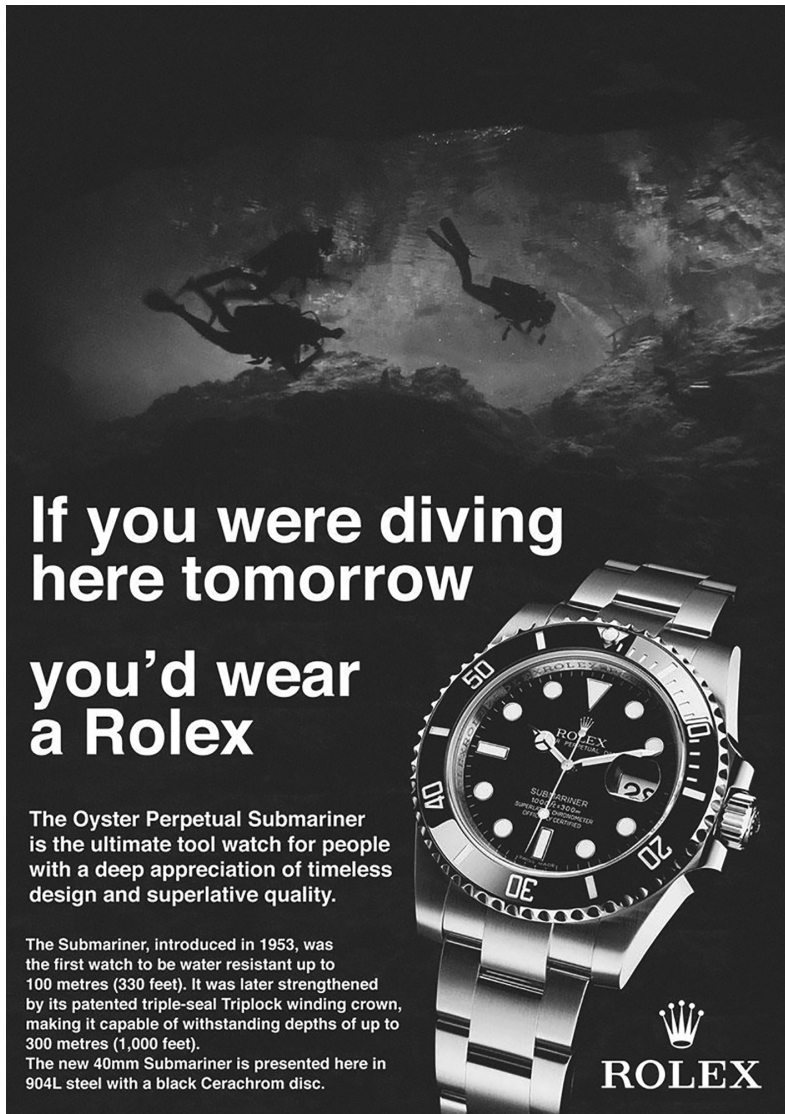
Harley-Davidson opts for emotional advertising with a strong impact. We notice that although no characteristics are mentioned such as: rebellious, independent, free - all of these are found in the phrase „Harley spirit”. The brand values are not explicitly presented, but they emerge from the image and the slogan.

The characteristics of emotional advertising present here are: communicating to the subconscious of customers, using symbols (baby cutting its own umbilical cord) to create meaning (independence, freedom) and appealing to customers' emotions.

The Harley-Davidson ad has a value rationale that highlights the brand's strengths, without the need for product specifications or even a product image, but rather a strong symbol that shows the brand's values.

Value rationality brings meaning to the audience, brings brand identity to the forefront and leads through this to distinguish Harley-Davidson from other competing brands. So, in this example, Harley-Davidson not only wants to excite the audience, but also to convey in a value-rational way that their products are about gaining a free spirit or that their target audience falls into this category of those who are rebellious and independent.

Rolex: integrative advertising



**If you were diving
here tomorrow
you'd wear
a Rolex**

The Oyster Perpetual Submariner is the ultimate tool watch for people with a deep appreciation of timeless design and superlative quality.

The Submariner, introduced in 1953, was the first watch to be water resistant up to 100 metres (330 feet). It was later strengthened by its patented triple-seal Triplock winding crown, making it capable of withstanding depths of up to 300 metres (1,000 feet). The new 40mm Submariner is presented here in 904L steel with a black Cerachrom disc.

ROLEX

Figure 3: Rolex. If you were diving here tomorrow you'd wear a Rolex

The type of advertising used in this example is integrative advertising. In this example, Rolex plays a game between value rationality and instrumental rationality. On the one hand, the brand's identity in relation to customers is exposed, by referring to „people with a deep appreciation of timeless design and superlative quality”, and on the other hand, several references are made to the efficiency of the product: „in 1953 was the first watch to be water resistant”; „triple-seal Triplock winding crown”.

Value rationality aims to create a relationship between the brand and the customer, by integrating the customer into a select audience that has the ability to appreciate high quality products, while Instrumental Rationality seeks the needs of this select audience and satisfies them through clear product features.

Old spice: mechanistic advertising



Figure 4: Old Spice. Smell like a man, man

The Old Spice body care company is known for its quirky ads, which always have a humorous tone. In the example above we are presented with an archetype of the strong, well-groomed man in a hilarious manner. The slogan „Smell like a man, man” includes this ad in the mechanistic advertising type, as this idea is repeated in the form of the ad bomb in all Old Spice ads and is followed by a jingle that immediately enters the audience's mind.

The rationality of this ad is based on certain symbols and values of the brand, so it is a rationality of value. For example: the white horse is an expression of purity, the fact that the action takes place on the beach refers to the marine-influenced fragrance that Old Spice products contain, and the slogan, in addition to its role of fixing itself in the audience's mind, induces the idea that once the product is bought it will lead to the exacerbation of the customer's masculinity.

We can therefore see that although we are talking about mechanistic advertising, the exhortation to purchase the product is not based solely on the stimulus-

response relationship, but involves a certain type of reasoning before purchase: I buy this product because I want to be considered masculine, because its attributes are specific to an individual who exudes masculinity. Thus, we are not only discussing the meanings of the product, but the intrinsic meanings and values of the audience, as Preston (1967) pointed out.

Results

The analysis of the four advertisements shows that whether the advertising type addresses the rational, emotional or social side of customers, each advertising type corresponds to a type of rationality: instrumental or value-based or both. As a general result of the analysis it can be said that none of the advertisements is purely irrational. For an overview of how instrumental rationality and value-based rationality have implications in the chosen and analysed advertisements, we have produced a table highlighting which type of rationality corresponds to which advertising type:

Instrumental rationality	Rational advertising
	Integrative advertising
Value rationality	Integrative advertising
	Emotional advertising
	Mechanicist advertising

Table 1. Highlighting instrumental rationality and value rationality in relation to types of advertising

The first research question is thus immediately answered - if rational advertising is aimed at the rational side, it is not necessarily the case that other types of advertising are aimed exclusively at the irrational side. The analysis of the advertisements shows that there can be a rational basis on which emotional, socially implicit or even mechanistic advertising discourse is built - so there can be rationality in emotional, mechanistic and integrative advertising.

In order to observe how instrumental rationality and value rationality have implications in each type of advertising, we will answer the second research question: what types of rationality do emotional, integrative and mechanistic advertising have?

In the case of rational advertising, we have identified instrumental rationality as the main means by which advertisers try to attract audiences. The Nivea advertisement provides details about the effectiveness of the product and the functional aspects of the product - i.e. it gives the audience the idea that through their product they will possess the means to their ends.

The Harley-Davidson advert, which falls into the category of emotional advertising, has a discourse loaded with value rationality, as it expresses, through

the symbol of the baby cutting its own umbilical cord, the brand's values. The audience is loyal through value-based reasoning: if I buy the product I will align myself with the brand's values and be perceived as independent, rebellious and free-spirited. So advertising is not purely emotional, as the audience does not buy the product as a result of the emotional impact of the image directly, but as a result of reasoning.

The example of integrative advertising, the Rolex advertisement refers both to the social side of individuals, to the idea of integration into a select group through the value elements of the product, such as: 'timeless design', but at the same time there is also an approach that refers to the functionality of the product: 'triple-seal triplock winding crown' - so there is both value rationality and instrumental rationality in this example.

The Old Spice advert, framed in the mechanistic advertising type has a value rationality through the power of the symbols used. As we have shown in the analysis of the advertisement, there are several symbols that refer to the values and identity of the brand: the white horse - as an expression of cleanliness, the sea - a reference to the marine fragrance, specific to the brand and last but not least the archetype of masculinity, rendered in a humorous manner. All this shows us that beyond the specific techniques of mechanistic advertising, such as the repetitive slogan, this advertisement wants to convey rational-value arguments for buying the product.

Conclusions

The research has shown that there may be rationality in every type of advertising. Even if at first glance some advertising types seem to appeal to the irrational side of the audience, we have shown that there are rational arguments even in emotional, integrative and mechanistic advertising. However, the study never mentioned that there are no situations in which advertising is irrational. There certainly are, but at the same time, there are situations where rationality is combined with emotional elements, as advertisers know they need to reach both sides of the consumer psyche.

The fact that rational advertising is aimed at the audience's rationality does not mean that other types of advertising should be labelled irrational. Advertising techniques are much more complex because of the value rationality by which audiences recognise the values of brands as congruent with their personal values, but also with the values of the society in which they live.

Therefore, in order to define advertising as rational or not, it is not enough to divide it into advertising types, but a closer analysis of the arguments put into play by advertisers and especially of the meanings they create in the public's mind is needed.

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