

Rhetoric Analysis - VW Lemon Ad

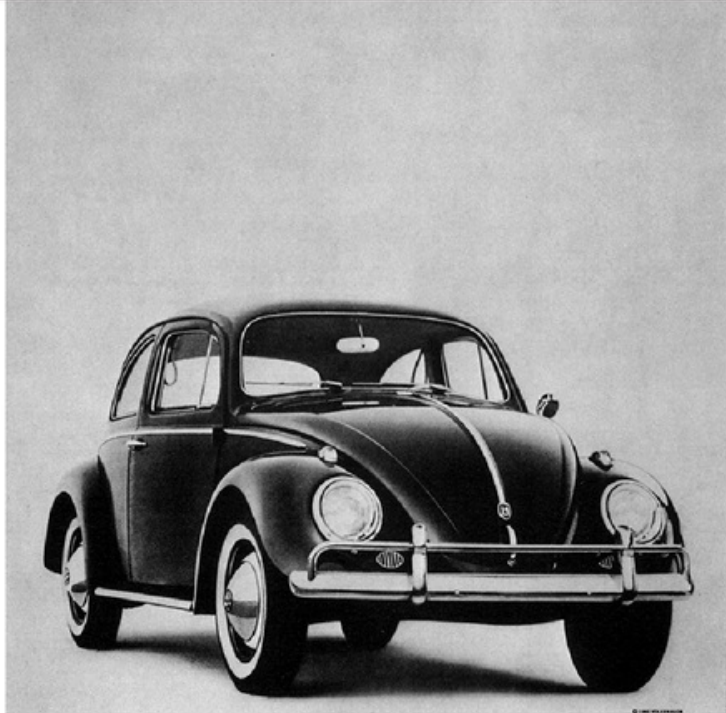
by Silvana Coronado

CHARACTER COUNT

5242

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Lemon.

This Volkswagen missed the boat. The chrome strip on the glove compartment is blighted and must be replaced. Chances are you wouldn't have noticed it, Inspector Kurt Kroner did.

There are 3,309 men at our Wolfsburg factory with only one job: to inspect Volkswagens at each stage of production. 3,000 Volkswagens are produced daily; there are more inspectors

than cars!

Every shock absorber is tested (spat checking won't do), every windshield is scanned. VW's have been rejected for surface scratches barely visible to the eye.

Final inspection is really something! VW inspectors run each car off the line onto the Funktionsprüfstand (car test stand), raise up 137

check points, gun ahead to the automatic brake stand, and say "no" to one VW out of fifty.

This preoccupation with detail means the VW lasts longer and requires less maintenance, by and large, than other cars. It also means a used VW depreciates less than any other car!

We pluck the lemons; you get the plums.



1

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ENC3170—Rhetorical Practice and Theory

Assignment 1— Rhetorical Analysis Essay

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The introduction of the Volkswagen Beetle in 1960 was one of those David versus Goliath epic stories. Volkswagen was facing a solid American automotive industry, a three-some powerful entity that held 90%¹ of the market share, as a foreigner and with a vehicle that was far from resembling what Americans recognized as the ideal vehicle. Volkswagen announced its daring enterprise with an equally shocking advertising piece, the "Lemon Ad".

2

The "Lemon Ad" was successful because of its multi-facet strategy that included a strong appeal to pathos to connect with the members of the counterculture movement; the establishment of trustworthiness - ethos - by describing in detail Volkswagen's quality control system; the logical appeal of the value of the vehicle; and the kairotic time of its publication.

3



Volkswagen's publicist understood its target market, the young-adult baby boomers. This generation was challenging the traditional long-held values and thinking, as well as the social rules of behavior. They were leading movements such as civil rights, free-speech, anti-war, feminism, environmentalism, drug experimentation, and sexual revolution. Volkswagen's advertising agency made clever design choices to separate the "Lemon Ad" from the typical car advertising to appeal to the rebellious spirit of its audience.


They designed a black and white ad; full color advertising was the norm among car ads. From a visual perspective, gray scale images relate to austerity, color to affluence. The monochrome ad supported the Beetles' values of frugality and unpretentiousness; it created an effective contrast against the American car ads' premises of affluence, luxury and power. The text boldly used three quarters of a page to show an anti-model of a car; half of it was empty space. The layout of the ad and the proportion between the image and the available space gave a clear priority to the anti-model.


The typographical choices reinforced the uniqueness of the ad. The sans serif type, rarely used at that time, gave it a less formal tone. The bold typestyle of the word "Lemon" highlighted the controversial automotive industry lingo. All the visual elements of the text reinforced the idea that Volkswagen Beetle's values were aligned with the counterculture movement philosophy and effectively stated that Volkswagen's Beetle embraced and celebrated being different, appealing to the pathos of its audience.

The headline "Lemon" and the three-column text set-up, newspaper style, cued the audience that they were about to read a story. The narrative created an emotional connection with the audience by transporting them to the place and time where the action was taking place; that was accomplished by offering details such as number of employees, number of






inspections, number of check points, name of the inspector that catch one of the defects, and specifics of the inspection process.  6


From a Dramatistic Perspective, the use of the word “Lemon” broke a couple of rules. It’s an American English slang, recognized in 1909, that means “worthless thing.”² A serious company would not use slang on its communications. Also, it is a radioactive word in the auto industry. No car manufacturer wants its cars related to a “Lemon.” They broke the rules to ignite people’s curiosity, persuade them to read the story, and finally earn their goodwill by making them smile when they found out, at the end of the story, that “Lemon” only names the auto that never left Germany to come to the United States.  7

The narrative, like a newspaper story, included a teaser: “This Volkswagen missed the boat.” This short sentence effectively built up anticipation. The story told the consumer the reasons why the character in the picture was not able


to travel, and in an informal style, described the strict quality control Volkswagen’s cars endured. Details such as the name of the inspector, Kurt Kroner, made the story more personal. The use of slang “Lemon” and clichés “missed the boat” or “final inspection is really something!” set an informal tone and made an emotional connection by speaking the audience’s language.

The storytelling style was used as a pathetic appeal, but it also served as an ethical one because it established trustworthiness by delineating the company’s strict quality control system. The ending, “We pluck the lemons; you get the plums,” informed the audience that they were reading the story of the car that never made it to the dealer, the car that they didn’t have to worry about, because the lemon stayed in the factory. Instead of appealing to ethos by listing the car’s qualities, they earned trust and credibility by showing how important quality control was for Volkswagen through an entertaining short story.  8



The text also made a logical appeal by using phrases such as “Chances are you wouldn’t have noticed it” and “VWs have been rejected for surface scratches barely visible to the eye”. By telling the audience that the company did not cut corners, the text invited the audience to deduct that if VW took such great care of nuances, then the most critical parts of a vehicle such as the motor or the brakes must be in perfect condition.  9

The ad gave a direct reason why to buy the Beetle: “VW last longer and requires less maintenance...it also means VW depreciates less”, these  11 statements appealed to the young buyers that did not have much money to spend on a car.

Volkswagen took advantage of the kairos of having a very unique car when the counterculture movement was born. Volkswagen marketers recognized it and were able to showcase the VW Beetle’s anti-model design and frugal values to their target market; they seized the moment and profited from it. The kairos of this event not only changed the advertising industry but the auto industry as well.  12

Works Cited




- Offer, Avner. The American Automobile Frenzy of the 1950s. Discussion Papers in Economic and Social History. Number 11. University of Oxford. December 1996. Rev. 1998. Web. January 31st, 2013.
- Online Etymology Dictionary. Douglas Harper. 2001. Web. January 31st, 2013.

 10





95 / 100




PAGE 1

-  1. very nice design to the document--love it!
-  2. this was their first ad in the US? wow!
-  3. good--clear, sharp, evokes my interest



PAGE 2

-  4. nicely put
-  5. excellent points

PAGE 3

-  6. more? this paragraph feels underdeveloped
-  7. again, well done
-  8. good points

PAGE 4

-  9. seems like a lot of ethos in all of this
-  10. Excellent work, Silvana. While there are a few rough points (mostly noted above in your test), overall this is a strong, thoughtful analysis of the ad and laid out as a persuasive and meaningful argument. Thank you for your obvious work here.

Purpose (38/40 points): The author explains their analysis of the text clearly and demonstrates insightful use of rhetorical terms, concepts, or ideas;
Context (19/20 points): The analysis has a clear sense of the text's scope and context, including an assessment of the audience for the analysis;
Organization (20 points): Purpose is clear for the essay and for each paragraph or section of the essay;
Document Design (10/10 points): The document is designed with the audience in mind and represents information accurately;
Mechanics (8/10 points): There are no noticeable spelling or grammar errors.

95/100 (well done!)

11. mechanics of language fall apart a bit in this paragraph

12. big final claim; not sure it's needed or warranted