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ENC1101

February 1st, 2012

Rhetorical Analysis of “Trapped”

Many commercials today are not solely informational, but are usually trying to persuade the viewer. Many examples that are prevalent right now are the commercials of politicians currently running for office. One would think the commercial is persuading you to vote for the candidate in the commercial, but in reality, it’s just the opposite. An overwhelmingly common theme in most of these campaign commercials is to persuade the viewer NOT to vote for whom they see. Most viewers rhetorically analyze these commercials automatically and understand the commercial is sarcastic or obviously negatively advertising the candidate. I will be analyzing the DNC TV AD “Trapped”, in which Mitt Romney is in a fictional film, sarcastically mocked for his changing standpoint on political subjects.

As Lloyd Bitzer, a rhetorical scholar explains, in any situation there is always a designated exigence. He explains, “In any rhetorical situation there will be at least one controlling exigence which functions as the organizing principle: it specifies the audience to be addressed and the change to be effected.”(Bitzer 7). There is a main exigence that is the focus of the situation and usually directs the other constituents. In my political advertisement the controlling exigence is to sway voters away from Mitt Romney by using sarcasm and humor to exploit some of his flaws. In my comical advertisement, they depict Mitt Romney as a star in a upcoming movie “Trapped” where he is two people trapped in one body. They begin to show multiple topics on which Mitt has argued for both sides such as, Pro-Choice and Anti-Choice, Pro-Health reform and Anti-Health reform. The commercial uses pathos to affect it’s viewers emotions by showing clips of Mitt from previous campaigns. The use of quoting Mitt favoring each side of each argument, gives the viewer a feeling that Mitt does not have strong values and does not stand his ground. Ethos is also used in the actual quotes because the audience sees Mitt Romney verbally stating what the commercial is claiming, which gives it credibility. This could lead to voters not voting for Mitt Romney, which ultimately is the exigence of this ad. In addition to the content of the fake movie trailer, the actual visuals of the commercial affect the viewer as well. They see this movie trailer showing Mitt Romney as a superhero, while the commercial negatively shows his flip-flopping views. As the more it looks like a realistic, action movie trailer, it only adds to the humor and sarcasm intended by the creators. The commercial also uses a common narration voice as one would see in an actual trailer for a real movie. The satiric trailer is another attempt to affect the audience’s emotions by making them laugh, which does not make for a favorable campaign.

Furthermore, the potential voters and anyone else who has seen this ad are considered its audience. This commercial was on tv and YouTube as well. The creators of this ad focused this commercial appealing to the potential voters. They tried to persuade that audience against Mitt Romney. A problem with their advertisement is the constraints which are associated with those who see the commercial. For example, one might not see this ad because they don’t use YouTube or don’t see it on tv because of the channels they watch. Another constraint could be the viewer may not take the ad seriously and still vote for Mitt Romney. This ad may appeal to the Logos of the audience if the voter thinks it is logical or not to change your view on something. This is another constraint because the viewer may agree with Mitt’s present views and feels the older quotes used in the ad are outdated and therefore irrelevant. They may feel it is logical for him to change his views according to today’s society. All these constraints and more, result in the commercial’s effectiveness.

Overall, if one rhetorically analyses this commercial they would understand the intent was to portray Mitt Romney as a fickle candidate and to turn the audience against him. They want to show that Mitt’s campaign for office is almost fictional in its attempt by creating “He will say anything” as his so-called superpower. I believe most of the audience of this commercial will feel that it is unfavorable that a candidate changes his opinion on subjects. This advertisement’s use of humor can create an idea among viewers and voters that Mitt Romney’s campaign is nothing less than a joke.

Works Cited

Bitzer, Lloyd F. "The Rhetorical Situation." *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 1, 1 (1968): 1-14.

DNC TV AD: “Trapped” Online Posting. YouTube, 27 November 2011. Web. 27 January 27 2012