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Towards a Rhetoric of Interaction:
three case studies

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ABSTRACT
The study of rhetoric evolved from focusing solely on discourse, in Ancient Greece, to the inclusion of audiovisual elements in the 20th century. Today, a ubiquitously digital world opens a new field of research, which might be called "rhetoric of interaction". The purpose of this work is to explore rhetorical possibilities of interactive features, that is, how different interactive design solutions may influence the apprehension of messages and help the building of arguments. The study is based on the analysis of three websites: "Central Cervejas", a virtual tour through a Portuguese brewery; "Lifesaver", a lesson of life-saving methods by the British Resuscitation Council; and "Sortie en Mer", an advertisement for a safety gear company. The methodology of analysis concentrates on three main aspects: a) communicated function, b) engagement of users, and c) presence of rhetorical appeals (ethos, logos and pathos).

Author Keywords
rhetoric, interaction, immersion, rhetorical appeals, persuasion.

INTRODUCTION
Websites, as much as any communication piece, are laden with rhetoric. They may want to convince users to buy a product or a service, engage in a project, identify with a brand, or believe in their content. They try to persuade users that it is worth to stay connected.

Text and images play an important part in constructing arguments and influencing users, but there is another important rhetorical component, especially in digital communication: interaction. The ways websites interact with users are tools for persuasion, influencing how audiences apprehend messages. Still, while much has been studied about verbal rhetoric since Ancient Greece and about visual rhetoric since the mid-20th century, the

same does not apply to interaction rhetoric. The purpose of this paper is to explore rhetorical possibilities of interactive features through the analysis of three websites: a virtual tour through a Portuguese brewery; a lesson of life-saving methods by the British Resuscitation Council; and an advertisement for a safety gear company.

RHETORIC AND INTERACTION
At first, classical rhetoric focused on speech and, later, on written texts. In the 20th century, authors such as Bonsiepe [4], Barthes [1] and Durand [8] expanded the field, applying its principles to visual arguments. Later, Buchanan [5] examined rhetoric of objects, and, in the beginning of the 21st century, authors such as Bonsiepe [3] and Joost [10] initiated studies of audiovisual rhetoric. The evolution of the field follows that of technology: the spread of scripting techniques relates to textual rhetoric; the age of massive reproduction of images, to visual rhetoric; mass production and consumerism, to object rhetoric; and dissemination of film and video, to audiovisual rhetoric. Today, a ubiquitously digital world enables the study of interaction rhetoric.

Interactivity is what differentiates digital from traditional communication and entertainment, allowing users to become participants. The sensation of being an active part of the process — which enhances the possibility of user engagement to any idea advocated by the website —is influenced by how much control users are convinced to have, that is, how much they feel that what happens on screen is a direct result of their inputs. The engagement of users can also be increased by promoting a sense of immersion. Through the use of multimedia cues, such as sounds and video, a website can go from resembling a document to be read to simulating a space to be explored and experienced. Immersive websites bring users into the narrative or the message. As pointed out by Miller [16], it is like — instead of merely watching a movie — becoming a character in it.

An important aspect to consider in immersive experiences is the point of view (POV) of users, which can be either

first or third-person [16]. In a first-person POV, users see the action as if really being there, that is, through their own eyes. Visually, that is represented by the view of parts of the body, like arms and hands, as a person usually sees them, and by camera movements that resemble the way heads usually move. A third-person POV shows facial expressions, which can be effective to communicate emotions, but hinders the sense of immersion.

METHODOLOGY

There are several elements that contribute to the overall rhetoric of a website, like text, graphics, multimedia, aesthetic appeal, technological sophistication and usability. While using these aspects as support for the analysis, the present work focus on the interactivity of the website, concerning three aspects: a) communicated function, b) engagement of users, and c) presence of rhetorical appeals (ethos, logos and pathos).

The analysis of the function follows the methodology proposed by Foss [9], based on the object's function as perceived by the critic, that is, the one conducting the analysis. Foss defends the use of the term function, rather than purpose, in order to dissociate the judgment from any possible intention of the object's creator. This methodology proposes that "a work, once done, stands independent of its production and the intentions of artists or creators are irrelevant to critics' responses to their works" [9]. The function considered in the analysis is not, then, the one intended by the creator but rather the one communicated by the object, as interpreted by the critic.

The degree of engagement depends considerably on users' perceived extent of control over their character as they operate within the digital space [18]. The greater the sense of control over actions, the greater the immersion

and sense of participation will be. The degree of control may vary from completely eliminating it, as in non-interactive websites, to co-authorship, where users are active in the construction of the website. In between these extremes, there are different levels of perceived and actually exercised control.

Based on principles of classical rhetoric, we can analyze the presence of three appeals: ethos, logos and pathos. Ethos focuses on attributes of the speaker, such as character and credibility; logos, on the message and the use of reasoning to construct an argument; and pathos appeals to emotions of the audience.

CENTRAL CERVEJAS

Sociedade Central Cervejas e Bebidas is a traditional Portuguese beverage company and one of its most traditional features is the Vialonga Factory. A way of visiting the factory is through a virtual tour in the company's website, an interactive video where users can walk through the premises while eventual bits of textual information are displayed. Users have a first-person POV and can move forward or backwards through the visit by scrolling the mouse (or up/down arrow keys) and reveal additional textual information with clicks (Figure 1).

The functions communicated by the website are to establish the image of Central Cervejas as a reference of quality and as an open and honest company, familiar with the latest technologies.

These functions relate to the appeal of ethos, that is, to the character of the company. Ethos can be established by three aspects: a) practical wisdom, as in expertise in the subject; b) virtue, that is, moral character and honor; and c) goodwill, which is connected to a disposition toward the audience [6]. The virtual tour explores practical

Figure 1. Scenes from the virtual tour.

Figure 3. Question and task.

coming from a tour guide (that we never see), which intensifies both the sense of it being an actual tour and the credibility of the information. On the top right side corner of the screen, there are badges of accolades awarded to the website (Figure 2), acting as validation of the quality and innovation of the website — concepts which can be transferred to Central Cervejas. The overall aesthetic appeal also contributes to the appeal of ethos, since it helps to build an image of professionalism and quality.

LIFESAVER

Lifesaver is an app presented by the Resuscitation Council UK with three short films, fusing interactivity with live action. Actors perform emergency situations in order to teach users correct methods of resuscitation. The app is played like a game: there are 50 decision making steps and a number of tasks where cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) must be virtually performed. As users answer questions, make decisions and take actions, they learn safety measures and step-by-step CPR procedures (Figure 3).

According to the Resuscitation Council, an estimated 60,000 people each year in the UK have an out of hospital cardiac arrest, and a bystander could double the person's chance of survival if able to perform CPR. Frequently, however, people lack knowledge and/or confidence to help. The main function of the app is to build confidence through knowledge, in order to raise the rate of intervention by bystanders.

The app oscillates between first and third-person POV (Figure 4). Since the introduction of the main character is from a third-person POV, the voiceover narration plays an important part in establishing that this is the character that will be controlled by the user. As the character comes into the scene and notices the emergency situation, the voiceover says "Let's say this is you. You are not a first-aid expert. What would you do now?" The call to action is reinforced by a text in capital letters that appears on screen: "WHAT DO YOU DO?" (Figure 5).

Figure 2. Textual information inside speech bubble and award badges.

wisdom by showing images of their brewing process and textual information. Virtue is demonstrated by presenting the company as honorable enough to endure scrutiny, even if virtual. Goodwill is validated by the sense of control experienced by users during the visit.

The immersive navigation is the main interactive feature of the website, bringing a sense of presence to users. Rhetorically, this interaction operates in a twofold manner, making users feel as both "witness" and "pupil". The sensation of being a witness comes from the impression of scrutinizing the actual premises, enhancing the argument of quality and openness. The experience may also bring memories of school field trips, building a state of mind of being a pupil. The users' position as learners heightens the company's position as teacher, holder and sharer of knowledge, reinforcing the argument of credibility as well as goodwill.

The interactive feature also builds an image of being technologically advanced. The techno-ethos [13] is formed from the technological proficiency the website displays. Technological sophistication conveys innovation, competitiveness and being up to date.

Besides interactive features, other elements support the desired ethos. Information bits are presented inside speech bubbles (Figure 2), conveying the idea of it

Figure 4. – First-person and third-person POV.

The interaction is based on clicking / dragging / pushing keys (computers) and clicking /swiping / shaking (on mobile devices). Clicking is applied when answering questions. Dragging and swiping are requested for actions such as tilting a head or lifting a chin. Pushing keys or shaking mobile devices are requested for tasks such as chest compressions, when computer users must push Q and P keys (mobile devices' users must shake their machines) in the appropriate time and rhythm.

In order to fulfill the function of building confidence in users, the app's graphics and motion are realistic, creating an immersive experience that is as close as possible to real life emergency situations. The more people feel like they are experiencing an actual crisis, the more they become prepared for similar situations.

Users exercise control by answering questions or performing requested tasks. Questions are based on binary models, with only two possible options and, therefore, two only possible outcomes in the narrative. If users choose the wrong answer, they are asked to try again. The narrative might be perceived as a branching structure, where users build a sequence of events through decisions and task completion, but it is, in fact, a linear narrative since all options end up leading users back to the same pre-defined path. The course through the three films is also outside users' control, since the second film is locked until the first one is completed, and the third film is locked until the second one is completed. That videogame-like phase structure increases the feeling of being in a learning environment, which is usually marked by cumulative and sequential arrangement.

The emphasis on information and logical arguments is rhetorically related to the logos appeal, that is, to persuasion through the level of complexity and density of facts, where reasoning should be logical, relevant and easy to follow, allowing users to understand and examine rational arguments. Lifesaver uses knowledge to build confidence, delivering teaching points along the storyline. Events prompt dilemmas that require critical decisions.

After each decision, the app shows the immediate result, leading to another critical point. Decision making and task completion are therefore connected to knowledge acquired in previous steps, requiring users to exercise memory and the ability to make logical associations. Positive feedback in right answers and accumulation of knowledge improve users' confidence throughout the course of the storyline, supporting the main function of the app. The structure is clear and logical, with an explicit goal (keep a character alive) and a straightforward plan to be executed (answering questions and competing tasks).

The app's mode of interaction supports a scenario where two main agents collaborate: an information provider and an information user. The app assumes the role of teacher/examiner, while users act as students/examinees. The examiner holds the power to deliver information and give feedback, and the student is responsible for moving the storyline further. Feedback plays an important role in building users' confidence, and happens in different ways throughout the story. After questions, answers are followed by a "try again" or a "very well" response and occasionally by a short explanation. During tasks, users get specific feedback, such as "slower" or "faster". Performance is measured by scores that can be saved and shared on social media. Feedbacks give users a satisfying sensation of proficiency and achievement, which can be transformed into confidence.

Figure 5. Character introduction and call to action.

Figure 6. Charles and the view from the fall.

SORTIE EN MER

Guy Cotton, a French company specializing in outdoor apparel and nautical safety gear, presented an interactive video called "Sortie en Mer" that may be seen as a drowning simulator. The story begins on a sailboat, where a character named Julien, played by the user, is sailing with a friend called Charles. After Julien gives Charles control of the rudder, he falls off the boat and Charles doesn't seem to know how to turn the boat around and rescue his friend. Julien finds himself in the water, without a life jacket and watching as the boat drifts away (Figure 6). A message shows up on screen, telling the user to scroll up (or swipe, if using a tablet) in order to stay on the water's surface.

If users do not follow this instruction, the man drowns in a matter of seconds. If they do, the man keeps on fighting to stay alive. In his struggle, Julien goes through stages of suffering, as if he was actually drowning. He kicks off his shoes in order to swim better and the cold water causes numbness to his limbs, until he loses his fingernails. If

users keep on scrolling, the man goes on, crying for help and hallucinating rescue teams that never come. As users get tired of scrolling, Julien, exhausted, sees flashes of a woman, lying in bed, and then screaming (Figure 7).

The efforts, however, are in vain, because, no matter how fast and continuously users scroll, the man eventually gets too tired, sinks to the bottom of the ocean and drowns (Figure 8). When that happens, a text appears on the screen, declaring for how long the struggle went on: "You drowned after x minutes." The video ends with a message that explains the point of the story — "At sea, you tire faster than you think. Whenever you go out to sea, wear your life jacket." (Figure 9)

The main goal of the video is to persuade people to wear a life jacket every time they go out to sea. The central message is that trying to keep the head above water is more tiresome than one might think, so wearing a life jacket may be the difference between life and death. This is obviously related to the fact that the piece was commissioned by a company that sells life jackets.
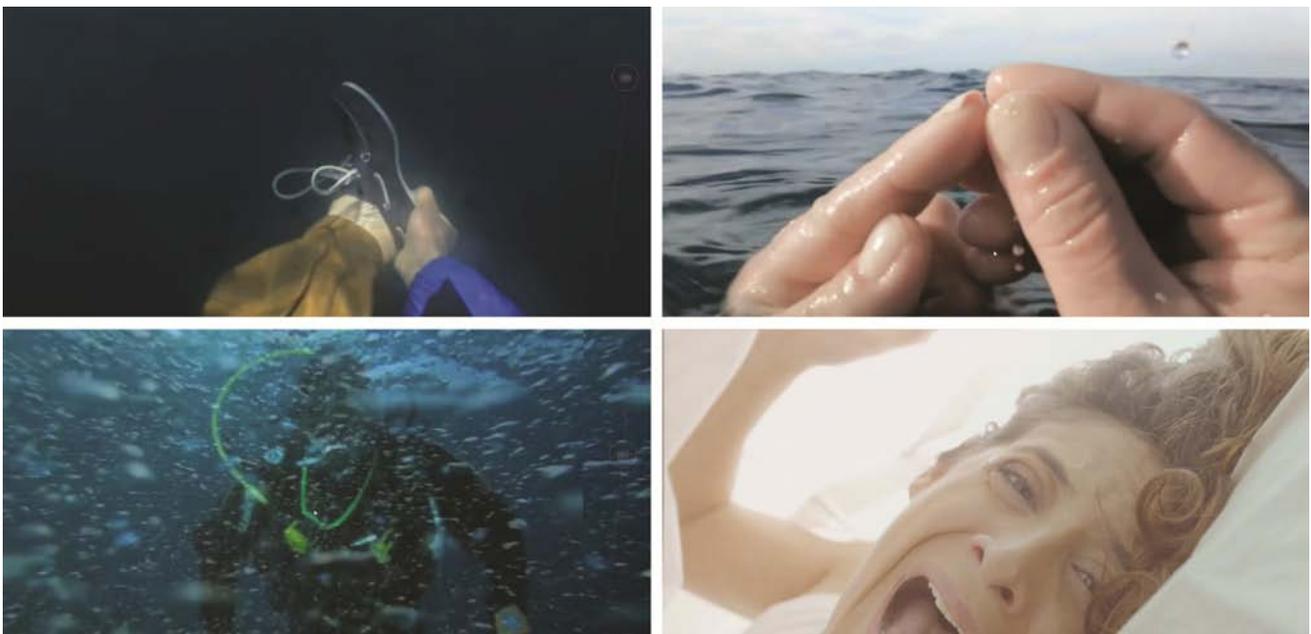

Figure 7. Physical challenges and hallucinations.

Figure 8. Drowning.

Throughout the whole video, users have a first-person POV, even during hallucinations, enhancing the connection with his struggles. The sense of participation is also physical, since users control, by scrolling or swiping, if the character stays on the surface. The interaction connects users' real physical actions and the character's virtual movements, making users actually feel tired. The immersive storytelling creates a connection between that physical tiredness and possible consequences of being exhausted while at sea.

The appeal of the video is essentially emotional, evoking feelings in order to persuade. In that sense, the piece is strongly related to pathos, the means of persuasion based on the emotions aroused in the audience. The main argument — that it is important to wear a life jacket — is not made by convincing that Guy Cotton is a respectable and efficient company, that sells well-made safety gear (which would be ethos), nor by listing logical reasons why a person needs help to float on open sea (which would be logos). Here, users are convinced by the emotions they feel: fear of being left behind, physical exhaustion of fighting to stay afloat, shock of watching fingernails peel off, frustration of sinking no matter how hard you try to avoid it, resignation of inescapable death, and even a masochist satisfaction of going through stages of suffering. Emotions make the experience more immersive and compelling, increasing the connection between user and message.

CONCLUSION

These brief analyses are sufficient to at least suggest a shift or an expansion of the rhetorical field. If last century was the age of persuasion through texts and images, the 21st century seems to be the time for the rhetoric of digital media, including interaction. The manners in which users interact with digital messages have influence on how they apprehend them, working, therefore, in a rhetorical way.

It is important for researchers to study rhetorical possibilities of interaction, so that the field advances not only theoretically, but also in practical terms, expanding abilities of interaction designers when it comes to constructing arguments in digital media. The analysis of existing websites can be a stepping-stone for developing a framework for evaluating digital pieces within a rhetorical perspective, and contributing to the emerging theory of interaction rhetoric.

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Figure 9. Final messages.

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Central Cervejas - http://www.centralcervejas.pt

Lifesaver - https://life-saver.org.uk

Sortie en Mer - http://sortieenmer.com