

The evolution of rhetoric in the electronic age



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The reason for this research paper is to discuss the future rhetoric of our new Electronic Generation. Rhetoric is an art of public speaking and, in our day and age, electronics play a major part. This paper will explain the rhetorical aspects of this potential transformation into an "all electronic world". The information of this paper will explain the history of rhetoric and how we got to where we are today. It will also speak of some of the major philosophers about this change in our new generation.

Rhetoric is defined as the art or study of using language effectively and persuasively. From ancient Greece to the late nineteenth century, it was an essential part of Western education to teach public speakers and writers to persuade listeners to action with arguments. At the turn of the 20th century, there was a profound interest of rhetorical study began to grow in the organization of departments of rhetoric and speech at colleges and universities, as well as the development of national and international professional organizations. Some modern theorists believe that it was important to restore the interest of the study of rhetoric because of the renewed importance of language and persuasion in the progressively reconciled environment of the twentieth century and through the twenty-first century, with the media spotlight on the wide differences and analyses of political rhetoric and its results. With the expansion of marketing and of mass media such as photography, telegraphy, radio, and film, rhetoric is being more notably conveyed into people's lives.

In spite of its legacy as a moral way for persuasion, rhetoric has come to take on negative undertones. Through the years, generations have forgotten what's the real meaning of rhetoric is and has somehow implicate that this

word is deceptive and untrustworthy. Today, rhetoric is greatly utilized by mass media in a derogatory manner, particularly when associated to public policies and politicians.

Rhetoric as a systematic study was developed by a group of orators, educators, and advocates called Sophists. In the book, *The History and Theory of Rhetoric: An Introduction* by James Herrick, he states, “ Sophists employed paradoxes to shock their audiences, but also by this means to provoke debate and inquiry” (Herrick, 2009). The Sophists’ outlook on rhetoric may very well have been the spark that ignited today’s global misunderstanding on the meaning behind rhetoric. Sophists viewed rhetoric as a means that could unite pleasure with government. Sophists believed that words had the ability to medicate the audience. Although during this time when rhetoric was a skill with an increasingly expressive demand, it began to alter to a negative nuance as Plato’s criticisms grew more popular.

The most primitive paradigm of rhetoric as a derogatory word can be followed back to Plato and his opinions about the Sophists. As one of Socrates’ renowned students, Plato often portrayed the Sophists as highly skillful writers who made the most of misleading language methods to persuade and influence audiences. Plato’s assumption on Sophism, also reiterated through the writings of Isocrates, was based on the gluttony, deception and the general lack of trust and apprehension for justice. Sophists could manipulate speech to make the worse situation appear better.

The term Sophism continues to maintain the negative reputation in today's society. In *Rereading the Sophists: Classical Rhetoric Refigured*, author Susan Jarratt defines sophism as "a derogatory term for a carefully crafted yet false argument aimed at deceiving someone" (Jarratt, 1998). Sophism is also used today to describe rhetorical circumstances in which emotional demands may be emphasized over logical demands. Sophism and rhetoric have shared these negative connections into our modern era.

As Christianity began to extend in the Middle Ages after the fall of the Roman Empire, societies started to connect rhetoric as expressive and fancy, but it was short of any knowledge or general idea. Due to the Church not believing expressiveness was an important aspect to communication and speech, rhetoric was diminished and viewed depreciatively.

By the sixteenth century, rhetoric's reputation had been revitalized, but some prominent scholars continued to pass judgment on rhetoric. Reformer Peter Ramus questioned rhetoric by stating that rhetoric was mainly a kind of verbal enhancement and as a result of little consequence. As Ramus praised dialectic and called rhetoric into question, rhetoric lost its theoretical influence, and was again viewed as nothing more than a stylistic, pessimistic speech tool. In his scheme of things, the five components of rhetoric no longer lived under the common heading of rhetoric. Instead, invention and disposition were determined to fall solely under the heading of dialectic, while style, delivery, and memory were all that stayed for rhetoric. In *The Electronic Word: Technology, Democracy, and Arts* written by Richard Lanham, he expresses that Ramus "separated thought from language" by developing a replica of education in which "reason breaks free of speech"

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(Lanham, 1993, pp. 157-158). Language became an impartial tool for conveying the findings of other disciplines, and was no longer viewed as the basis of an art form that has been mastered by an educated person for its own sake.

Another major contributor to the development of Western thinking about rhetoric is the great Greek philosopher, Aristotle. Aristotle was a student of Plato who famously set forth an extended treatise on rhetoric that is still repays careful study today. One of the most significant contributions of Aristotle's approach was that he saw rhetoric as one of the three basic essentials of philosophy, in conjunction with logic and dialectic. In the opening words of *Rhetoric* authored by Aristotle, he asserts that "rhetoric is the counterpart of dialectic" (Aristotle & Roberts, 1954, p. 30). Logic, according to Aristotle, is the area of philosophy concerned with ways of thinking to reach scientific assurance while dialectic and rhetoric are concerned with possibility and therefore is the parts of philosophy best suited to human affairs. Dialectic is an instrument for theoretical debate; it is a way for listeners to assess credible knowledge with the intention of learning. Rhetoric is an instrument for sensible debate; it is a way for convincing a common group of listeners using reliable knowledge to resolve practical issues. Dialectic and rhetoric together create a relationship for a method of persuasion derived from knowledge rather than playing on emotion.

Today, modern scholars emphasize why rhetoric has taken on a derogatory connotation. They presume that there is a tendency to forget rhetoric's past, which has damaged democracy by labeling all political speech as trickery, as <https://assignbuster.com/the-evolution-of-rhetoric-in-the-electronic-age/>

well as unsuccessfully teaching the general public to vitally understand and make use of good speech. Richard Lanham (Lanham, 1993, pp. 243-246) disputed that the model of electronic words and texts has a natural potential to encourage democratic discourse and human thinking. Nevertheless, the source for Lanham's optimistic view of the digital age — a perception that electronic textually makes “ no invidious distinctions between high and low culture, commercial and pure usage, talented or chance creation, visual or auditory stimulus, iconic or alphabetic information” (Lanham, 1993, pp. 14) — is besieged by some basic opposition which not only imply but reinforce all these oppositions. As Richard Lanham documented in his book, *The Electronic Word*, the presentation of words through the static textual display of print is quickly being replaced by the more fluid textual forms of the computer screen, which are radically altering our existing definitions of literacy. Lanham believes these new textual forms — such as e-mail, network exchanges, and hypertext — are changing our intellectual perception back to the root source of Western rhetoric:

“ We can . . . think of electronic prose as moving back toward the world of oral rhetoric, where gestural symmetries were permitted and sound was omnipresent. Any prose text, by the very nature of the denial/expression tensions that create and animate it, oscillates back and forth between literate self-denial and oral permissiveness, but electronic text does so much more self-consciously, simply by the volatile nature of the written surface. A volatile surface invites us to intensify rather than subdue this oscillation, make it more rather than less self-conscious” (Lanham, 1993).

In addition, while some may feel the electronic explosion of inert textual structures serves to mark the death of the Western education, as demonstrated in the linear structures of print, Lanham believes it completes fairly the opposite and brings literacy more similar to another oscillation that Western thinking has always displayed.

Reflecting the internal tension of elitism versus populism inherent in distinct ludic and resistance versions of postmodern theory, Lanham's digital rhetoric exemplifies an unsure oscillation between critical and aesthetic approaches to hypertext on one hand, and a more popular " democratic" appreciation of electronic media, the sub-cultural intertextuality of global culture, and hypermedia on the other. As Lanham exemplifies many of the hypermedia theorists and critics retained their privileged literary and critical assumptions, undermining claimed connections to the popular cultural extensions of electronic media. This is possibly because of the opposing and subjective ways in which an all-purpose hypermedia model alternates between focusing on designed interactive descriptions and the act of reading or reception as an essentially unintentional process, and (2) decreases human language and communication generally to the expressions of distinct images and information — consequently also supporting an underlying conflict between print-age examples of language-use and the new and ever-present popular electronic culture. The integration of hypertext concept into a general hypermedia framework of electronic literacy is more than only a matter of describing hypermedia as hypertext extended to include electronic multimedia effects such as digitized sound and graphics. Postmodern literary models of meaning as a contingent product and play of open-ended

narratives, language games, and reader-response clearly lent themselves to theorizing about hypertext. Such privileged models of textuality, reception, and aesthetic process or objects were implicitly at odds with the semiotic move to go from the subtle and intricate textual allusions of open-ended narratives mediated as verbal language-use to include the media of electronic popular culture in terms of language reduced to and even replaced by electronic imagery obsessed with the transitory fixations of human memory and desire.

The residual print assumptions of a convergence between the hypermedia model of electronic literacy and postmodern critical theories or practices is perhaps most effectively analyzed in terms of how points out, hypertext encourages both writers and readers to confront and work consciously and concretely with deconstruction, intertextuality, the decentering of the author, and the reader's complicity with the construction of the text. In other words, the idea of hypertext effectively reinforces the postmodernist theories of such theorists as Barthes, Derrida, and Baudrillard that natural languages and other systems of representation—especially those involving electronic visual media—are autonomous in relation to the diverse and contingent contexts of individual language users, specific language events, and discrete forms of verbal or visual representation.

The twentieth century is perhaps the most exhilarating period in which to study rhetoric since the Middle Age. This has come about with the beginning of what is generally referred to as the New Rhetoric; the rediscovery of rhetoric's epistemological significance and the critical role of persuasion and argument to our everyday lives. It is impossible to name all the causes for <https://assignbuster.com/the-evolution-of-rhetoric-in-the-electronic-age/>

this new-found importance or all the contributors to the New Rhetoric, but among the most influential we must certainly consider I. A. Richards whose work on metaphor associated rhetoric to literary studies, Chaim Perelman, whose book *The New Rhetoric* is now a classic, Steven Toulmin, best known for his inquiries of argument, and possibly the most influential rhetorician of our era, Kenneth Burke.

In teaching in the Middle Ages and years before, we have determined that rhetoric was a tool to teach students how to write good essays and, in other areas, it was a tool for persuasion. Rhetoric is widely used in business, politics, and technical writing. For example, the structure and style of letters, memos, speeches, and other kinds of documents follow the rhetorical standards. The old rhetoric dealt primarily with the structure and content of an essay or presentation. With New Rhetoric, rhetoric is given new limits. It now includes philosophy and sociology. It is no longer how to inscribe a good essay or speak a good speech, but how well we recognize communication and its influences on our lives. With the discovery of the World Wide Web (WWW), rhetoric had received a new, powerful field of its purpose. For the most part, rhetorical principles reveal its power in different kinds of Web projects.

The five parts of the classical notion -invention, arrangement, memory, delivery, and style-are one way we might start mediating about how to apply rhetorical ideas to writings in the twenty-first century and beyond. After all, literacy has undergone many changes in the past-from orality, to writing, to print-and it will likely undergo many more, in ways we cannot even now imagine. We need to think about how computers and computer writing will

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impact the future of rhetoric, of composition and composition classes, and of literacy itself.

Making hypertext documents on the WWW (World Wide Web) offers a wide range of freedom. The most astonishing difference in an electronic document is the skills to provide fairly instant access to the resources you gather during the invention process. To fully exploit the capabilities of hypertext, you should offer hypertext links that lead directly to the material you use in supporting your claims. Providing links to this material involves the audience in the invention process; your audience can have access to your primary materials and verify the validity of your evidence. Locating supporting information is greatly facilitated by search engines that can explore the Web for you, tracking down useful and relevant evidence to support your own presentations. In addition, many Web sites grant permission to use their digitized images.

In an electronic document, there is no easy distinction between a beginning, middle, and an end. Determining a suitable arrangement for your electronic document depends on your creativity. Innovative arrangements are largely a matter of style can have powerful emotional appeal for an audience.

Gorgias recognized the persuasive power of atypical uses of language, for changes in the usual order and meaning affected the audience. Today in the electronic age, Gorgias' insights still remains true, but of course their submissions have expanded. Writing documents for the WWW creates an entirely new world, or cyberspace, one wide open to new ways of expression, and maybe meaning. An image, like a figure of speech can communicate

meaning and provide your rhetorical principle. The same can be said for color. Color, like a trope, covers your meaning, provides your reason or at least it can. Of course, and image, and color has to provide a purpose but it must be suitable to the situation.

Memory is fourth of the ancient standard of rhetoric. In the ancient law courts and assemblies, men were often called upon to deliver speeches without the help of written comments. The Greeks and Romans developed intricate memory systems that allowed them to give speeches precisely as it was written. “Memory” on the Web means some entirely different. Most people take it to mean the ways that readers can remember where they are and where they have been while they surf the net.

In the days when text was written only to be conveyed verbally, the ability to persuasively delivery of a speech was one of the premier talents. Delivery is obviously related to the other standards, especially style, because your usefulness as an orator of text varying in large parts on the method of delivery that you chooses. In the hypertext world, delivery takes on some new obstacles. We’re no longer certain who will be “listening” to our speech, nor are we positive that they’ll even “hear” it the same way. The documents we generate are read by browsers, which decipher the HTML code for presenting on the monitor. Because each of these browsers maintains very different features, successful delivery is contingent on writing documents that predict the difference among browsers.

Rhetoric, this art of persuasion, totally distorted our insight of the truth. Everything depends on the ability of speaker or writer to affectively captivate

the audience using his or her credibility, detailed style, and compelling arguments. Anything can be shown as the truth. Due to this capability to alter anything to the truth the Rhetoric became an indispensable tool in the business communication. How to persuade people to purchase goods, services, ideas—anything, that business word generates? How to encourage them that “ this” is a necessity or “ this” is the truth? It cannot be accomplished without rhetoric. The rhetorical theories had been altered by our highly technological age, but they did not modify in their real meaning. There is the truth that subsist in rhetoric—its values itself.

Rhetoric has not lost its inability in 21st century, but vice versa, we can observe that rhetorical theories reveal itself in any document individually from technology that was used for its establishing. On the one hand— Rhetorical theories are used in today’s writing, publishing, and electronic documents as a way of persuasion. On the other hand—rhetoric is no longer an essential humanist study of structure and content but a study on how and why we communicate and what we can learn from the methods of communication.