

The Persuasive Role of Rhetorical Figures in Sprite Advertisement Taglines

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Abstract

This study examines the use of rhetorical figures in Sprite advertisement taglines and their role in enhancing persuasive power. Taglines, as concise linguistic devices, are central to shaping brand identity and attracting consumer attention. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, this research analyzes six Sprite taglines released between 1960 and 2020. Data were obtained from the History Oasis website and examined using McQuarrie and Mick's (1996) taxonomy of rhetorical figures, which classifies them into rhetorical operations (repetition, reversal, substitution, destabilization) and figurative modes (schemes and tropes). In addition, Leech's (1996) framework on advertising language was applied to evaluate the persuasive functions of memorability, readability, appeal, and power to persuade. The analysis revealed the presence of several rhetorical figures, including consonance, assonance, alliteration, parallelism, pun, metaphor, antithesis, ellipsis, and asyndeton. Repetition-based figures, particularly consonance and assonance, appeared most frequently, creating rhythm and reinforcing brand recall. Trope figures such as pun and metaphor enriched the taglines by introducing layered meanings and associations that engaged consumers cognitively and emotionally. The findings suggest that rhetorical figures play a vital role in Sprite's advertising discourse by highlighting product qualities, strengthening memorability, and reinforcing persuasive impact. This study underscores the significance of stylistic strategies in global brand communication and contributes to broader discussions in linguistics, stylistics, and marketing discourse.

Keywords: *tagline, rhetorical figures, advertising, stylistic, Sprite, persuasive power*

Introduction

Advertising has become an inseparable part of modern communication, shaping how products are presented, consumed, and remembered by global audiences. In today's competitive marketplace, advertisements are no longer limited to introducing a product or service; they also serve to construct brand identity, appeal to emotions, and persuade potential buyers. Across diverse media—television, print, digital platforms, and social networks—advertising functions as a powerful discursive tool that combines visual and linguistic creativity to capture attention. Within this complex ecosystem, the tagline plays a particularly important role. As a short and memorable expression, it encapsulates a brand's promise while distinguishing it from competitors.

A well-crafted tagline is more than a decorative phrase. It condenses the essence of a brand into a few carefully chosen words, often evoking emotions, sparking recognition, and embedding itself in consumer memory. By doing so, it ensures that the brand is not

only noticed but also recalled at critical moments of decision-making. One linguistic strategy that strengthens a tagline's memorability and persuasive function is the deliberate use of rhetorical figures. These are deviations from ordinary language designed to produce stylistic, aesthetic, or emotional effects. Figures such as metaphor, alliteration, parallelism, pun, and antithesis enrich the textual surface, making language more striking and effective.

The study of rhetorical figures falls under stylistics, a field that examines style in language and its effects across genres. McQuarrie and Mick (1996) argue that rhetorical figures are "artful deviations in expression" that increase the likelihood of message processing and recall. Their taxonomy categorizes rhetorical figures into two figurative modes—schemes and tropes—organized by four rhetorical operations: repetition, reversal, substitution, and destabilization. Scheme typically relies on patterned regularity (e.g., rhyme, alliteration, parallelism), while trope introduces deviation in meaning (e.g., metaphor, pun, personification). Both modes enhance persuasive communication, but in different ways: schemes provide rhythm and clarity, while tropes invite deeper cognitive engagement.

Beyond classification, rhetorical figures are valued for their persuasive functions. Leech (1996) identifies memorability, readability, appeal, and power to persuade as core functions of advertising language. Figures of sound, such as alliteration or assonance, create rhythm that aids recall. Figures of meaning, such as metaphor or pun, encourage consumers to interpret layered associations, which can create stronger emotional bonds with the brand. Together, these stylistic strategies ensure that taglines are not only eye-catching but also effective in influencing consumer attitudes and behavior.

Numerous studies have highlighted the importance of rhetorical figures in advertising. Sekhar (2017), for instance, examined brand names such as Frisbee, Kleenex, and Band-Aid, concluding that stylistic devices make advertising expressions more memorable and striking. Michalik and Michalska-Suchanek (2016), in a study of 49 slogans in the automotive and aviation industries, identified frequent use of figures such as alliteration, rhyme, hyperbole, and rhetorical questions. These devices were found to reinforce persuasive appeal and brand distinctiveness. Similarly, Chetia (2015) analyzed rhetorical devices in Indian advertisements, observing that figures like metaphor, simile, and personification shape both the denotative and connotative interpretation of marketing messages.

While these studies demonstrate that rhetorical figures enhance the persuasive force of advertising, they also reveal certain limitations. Sekhar (2017) as well as Michalik and Michalska-Suchanek (2016) analyzed multiple industries, providing breadth but less depth in terms of individual brand strategies. Chetia (2015) offered cultural specificity but did not apply a comprehensive theoretical taxonomy. In contrast, the present study applies McQuarrie and Mick's (1996) framework systematically to a single global brand—Sprite—and examines how rhetorical figures are used across different decades. This narrow yet focused scope allows for a more detailed analysis of the consistency and evolution of rhetorical strategies within one brand's advertising discourse. The choice of Sprite as the object of study carries its own significance. As a global soft drink brand under The Coca-Cola Company, Sprite has consistently relied on creative taglines to promote qualities such as freshness, authenticity, and energy. Since its introduction in 1960, Sprite has used slogans that reflect not only product features but also cultural shifts, from youth rebellion in the 1960s to individual authenticity in the 1990s, and even contemporary concerns about climate and lifestyle in the 2020s. By tracing rhetorical

figures in Sprite taglines from 1960 to 2020, the study demonstrates how linguistic creativity contributes to long-term brand identity.

The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. What types of rhetorical figures are used in Sprite advertisement taglines?
2. What rhetorical operations do these figures perform?
3. What figurative modes do these figures belong to?
4. How do these rhetorical figures contribute to the persuasive effects of Sprite's taglines?

By addressing these questions, this study contributes to both theoretical and practical knowledge. Theoretically, it enriches stylistics by applying a well-established taxonomy of rhetorical figures to real-world advertising discourse. It also integrates Leech's (1996) framework to demonstrate how figures fulfill core persuasive functions. Practically, the findings offer insights for advertisers and copywriters, showing how stylistic creativity can enhance the clarity, memorability, and emotional impact of taglines. For students and researchers, the study provides a model of how stylistic analysis can be applied to global brands, offering a foundation for comparative studies across products or industries.

In sum, this research builds on existing scholarship while filling a gap by combining McQuarrie and Mick's taxonomy with Leech's persuasive functions in the focused context of Sprite's slogans across six decades. It argues that rhetorical figures are not only aesthetic devices but also strategic tools that reinforce product identity and consumer engagement. By analyzing how these figures operate in Sprite's advertising language, the study highlights the enduring role of stylistic strategies in shaping persuasive communication in global marketing.

Method

The present study adopted a stylistic approach within a qualitative descriptive framework. Rather than quantifying the frequency of features, the focus was on describing how rhetorical figures appear in advertising discourse and how they contribute to persuasion. A qualitative design is appropriate because the data consist of words and expressions, and the goal is to explore meaning and communicative function (Bhandari, 2020).

The research object is a collection of Sprite advertisement taglines spanning several decades. Sprite was selected because it is an internationally recognized brand whose marketing campaigns have consistently relied on striking linguistic choices to convey freshness and authenticity. Concentrating on one brand over time enables a closer look at how stylistic strategies are employed with consistency while also adapting to different cultural moments.

The data were gathered through library-based research, specifically from a publicly available digital archive that compiles Sprite slogans from the 1960s to the 2020s. From this archive, several taglines were chosen purposively because they exhibit clear stylistic features and are representative of the brand's evolving identity. The chosen taglines were then treated as the primary data set for detailed analysis.

The theoretical foundation rests on McQuarrie and Mick's (1996) taxonomy of rhetorical figures, which distinguishes between two figurative modes—schemes and tropes—and organizes them into four rhetorical operations: repetition, reversal, substitution, and destabilization. This taxonomy provides a systematic framework for identifying how stylistic devices operate at both structural and semantic levels.

To interpret the communicative value of the rhetorical figures, the study also drew on Leech's (1996) account of advertising language. Leech outlines core persuasive functions—memorability, readability, appeal, and power to persuade—that explain how stylistic devices support advertising effectiveness. Combining McQuarrie and Mick's structural taxonomy with Leech's functional perspective allowed for a two-layered analysis: classification of figures and evaluation of their persuasive role.

The analytic procedure unfolded in three stages. First, each tagline was examined phonetically and lexically to detect figures of sound, structure, or meaning. Second, the figures were classified according to their rhetorical operation and figurative mode. Third, the persuasive functions of the identified figures were interpreted in light of Leech's framework. Supporting references from dictionaries and relevant advertising sources were consulted to validate the interpretations.

This methodological design makes it possible to explain not only which rhetorical figures appear in Sprite's advertising discourse but also how they contribute to shaping the brand's persuasive power across different decades.

Results and Discussions

The analysis of Sprite's taglines reveals that rhetorical figures are central to the brand's strategy of projecting freshness, authenticity, and energy across different cultural moments. Each slogan demonstrates a distinctive linguistic pattern, yet all share the common goal of reinforcing memorability and persuasive force. The figures identified span both schematic and tropic modes, realized through operations such as repetition, reversal, substitution, and destabilization. These rhetorical strategies are not merely ornamental; they are tightly connected to Sprite's brand positioning as a bold, youthful, and refreshing soft drink.

The following discussion presents each tagline in detail, showing which rhetorical figures are employed and how they contribute to persuasive impact. By examining the slogans individually, it becomes evident how sound, structure, and meaning are creatively manipulated to strengthen Sprite's identity and consumer appeal.

"Taste Its Tingling Tartness" (1960)

Sprite's earliest tagline highlights the sensory qualities of the drink by drawing attention to both its sound pattern and its flavor description. Two rhetorical figures stand out: consonance and assonance, both classified under the operation of repetition in McQuarrie and Mick's (1996) framework.

Consonance is evident in the repeated /t/ sounds in *taste*, *tingling*, and *tartness*. Such recurrence produces a sharp, crisp rhythm that mirrors the fizzy sensation of carbonated drinks. Cove (2024) notes that consonance strengthens memorability by drawing the listener's ear to specific sounds, and here the sharp /t/ effectively evokes the idea of tanginess and freshness.

Assonance occurs through the repetition of the vowel /ɪ/ in *its* and *tingling*. This lighter sound complements the harsher /t/ consonant, balancing sharpness with a sense of brightness. McQuarrie and Mick (1996) argue that repetition of vowel sounds creates musicality and ease of processing, making the tagline smoother and more appealing to consumers.

The interplay of consonance and assonance is not merely decorative. It works to replicate the product experience in linguistic form: the *tingling* evokes the effervescent mouthfeel, while *tartness* signals the lemon-lime sourness that distinguishes Sprite from

other sodas. By compressing these sensory cues into a rhythmic, almost chant-like structure, the tagline becomes highly memorable.

Leech (1996) emphasizes that memorability is a core persuasive function of advertising language, and this tagline exemplifies that function. The sound repetitions not only attract attention but also encourage consumers to associate Sprite with liveliness and refreshment. In this way, the slogan serves as both a description of flavor and a persuasive invitation to experience it directly.

“Image is Nothing. Thirst is Everything. Obey Your Thirst” (1996)

This slogan from the mid-1990s marks a shift in Sprite’s branding toward authenticity and individual expression. Its persuasive strength lies not only in what it says but in how it is structured, as multiple rhetorical figures work together to produce rhythm, contrast, and urgency.

Several schematic devices can be observed. Consonance occurs through the repetition of the /θ/ sound in *nothing*, *everything*, and *thirst*, while assonance appears in the recurring /i/ vowel across *image*, *is*, *nothing*, and *everything*. These repetitions create a subtle musicality that aids recall, echoing Leech’s (1996) observation that rhythmic patterns make slogans easier to process and remember. Rhyme reinforces this effect through the repeated “-ing” ending in *nothing* and *everything*, giving the slogan a compact, chant-like quality.

The parallel construction of *Image is Nothing* and *Thirst is Everything* introduces parallelism, which strengthens clarity and balance. As Straub (2024) points out, repeating grammatical structures enhances memorability and makes contrasts more striking. Within this structure, the opposition of *nothing* and *everything* forms an antithesis, a reversal operation that dramatizes the message. Harris (n.d.) notes that antithesis heightens persuasion by drawing sharp boundaries between competing concepts—in this case, superficial image versus fundamental human need.

The final command, *Obey Your Thirst*, shifts the tone from descriptive to imperative. Its brevity and directness act as a call to action, encouraging consumers to prioritize authenticity and immediate desire over appearances. This directive adds urgency and injects a sense of empowerment, aligning with the youth-oriented marketing of the era.

Taken together, the interplay of repetition, contrast, and command makes this tagline particularly persuasive. The rhythmic figures ensure memorability, the parallelism and antithesis highlight the core message, and the imperative transforms the slogan into a personal challenge. Sprite thus positions itself not just as a drink, but as a brand aligned with honesty and individuality.

“Taste Sprite Naturally Tart” (1970)

This slogan reflects the early 1970s trend of emphasizing naturalness and health consciousness in consumer culture. Sprite aligns itself with that discourse by highlighting both its flavor profile and its “natural” qualities, reinforced through a mix of sound and structural rhetorical devices.

Two figures of repetition stand out: chime and consonance. According to McQuarrie and Mick (1996), chime occurs when keywords begin with identical consonants. Here, the /t/ sound initiates both *taste* and *tart*, producing a sharp opening that echoes the product’s tangy flavor. Consonance amplifies this effect, with the /t/ recurring in *taste*, *Sprite*, and *tart*. The repetition creates a crisp, rhythmic pattern that

mirrors the sharpness of carbonation while making the tagline easier to recall. Stegman (2019) observes that repetition in advertising language fosters familiarity, which increases the likelihood of brand recognition.

In addition to sound-based figures, the slogan employs ellipsis, a substitution device under trope. The phrase *Taste Sprite Naturally Tart* omits words that would normally complete the sentence, such as “it tastes.” The truncated structure produces a more direct, impactful message without altering meaning. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) notes that ellipsis in advertising shortens expression while preserving clarity, thereby capturing attention more effectively.

Together, these figures create both rhythm and concision. The chime and consonance anchor the tagline in consumers’ auditory memory, while the ellipsis ensures brevity and readability. This combination highlights Sprite’s defining qualities—its tart, lemon-lime flavor and natural freshness—in a way that is easy to grasp and recall.

From a persuasive perspective, the slogan appeals simultaneously to memorability and readability, two of Leech’s (1996) advertising functions. The sound patterns make the tagline catchy, while the ellipsis keeps it compact and effortless to process. As a result, Sprite successfully communicates freshness and natural flavor in a form that resonates with consumer expectations of the decade.

“I Like the Sprite in You” (1980s–1990s)

This tagline emerged during a period when advertising often emphasized individuality, authenticity, and cultural expression, particularly within youth-oriented markets. Its effectiveness lies in the use of pun and metaphor, both of which belong to the trope mode under destabilization. These figures invite consumers to interpret layered meanings rather than relying on surface-level description.

The most striking device is the pun on the word *Sprite*. Literally, it refers to the soft drink brand. Phonetically, however, it echoes the word *spirit* /spirit/, meaning energy or vitality (Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries, n.d.). This duality creates playful ambiguity, suggesting that drinking Sprite is associated not only with refreshment but also with a lively, spirited personality. Chang (2018) argues that puns in advertising capture attention and provoke deeper thought, thereby strengthening persuasion. In this case, the pun persuades by linking the beverage to desirable traits of courage and enthusiasm.

The tagline also employs metaphor, particularly in the phrase *the Sprite in you*. On a literal reading, this would imply the presence of the drink inside a person. Figuratively, however, *Sprite* represents freshness and energy as personal qualities. McQuarrie and Mick (1996) explain that metaphor involves replacing one concept with another based on similarity. Here, the brand name itself becomes shorthand for positive attributes, subtly implying that consumption of Sprite enhances one’s individuality and vitality. Septianto et al. (2022) note that metaphors in advertising strengthen brand positioning by mapping product qualities onto consumer identities.

Together, the pun and metaphor produce a slogan that is both playful and aspirational. Consumers are encouraged to see themselves reflected in the brand—not only as people who drink Sprite, but as individuals embodying the traits the brand symbolizes. This alignment of product with personal identity enhances both appeal and persuasive power, two of the functions identified by Leech (1996). The slogan therefore succeeds by transforming Sprite from a simple beverage into a marker of authenticity and youthful spirit.

“Heat Happens: Stay Cool” (2022)

This recent slogan reflects Sprite’s adaptation to contemporary consumer concerns, particularly the global discourse on climate and lifestyle stress. The tagline achieves its persuasive effect through antithesis and asyndeton, figures that dramatize contrast and condense expression.

The central device is antithesis, realized in the opposition between *heat* and *cool*. According to Harris (n.d.), antithesis highlights persuasion by juxtaposing opposing concepts in parallel form. Here, *heat* connotes discomfort, intensity, or even climate change, while *cool* signals refreshment, relief, and composure. The phrase *heat happens* normalizes adversity as inevitable, while *stay cool* positions Sprite as the solution. This rhetorical tension ensures the slogan resonates both literally—refreshing against physical heat—and metaphorically—maintaining calm under pressure.

The structure also employs asyndeton, the omission of conjunctions. Rather than connecting the clauses with “but” or “so,” the two segments are presented in a stark sequence: *Heat happens: Stay cool*. This omission quickens the rhythm and heightens impact. As Leech (1996) observes, brevity contributes to readability and memorability in advertising. The abruptness mimics the immediacy of Sprite’s effect, reinforcing the brand’s promise of instant refreshment.

What distinguishes this tagline is its ability to integrate product value with broader cultural messaging. By acknowledging challenges (*heat happens*), it positions the brand as both realistic and reassuring. The imperative *stay cool* personalizes the call, suggesting that Sprite empowers individuals to handle difficulties with ease. This reflects Leech’s (1996) persuasive function of appeal, where slogans not only describe a product but also evoke emotional resonance.

Overall, the combination of antithesis and asyndeton yields a tagline that is concise, impactful, and culturally relevant. It persuades by dramatizing a problem and offering Sprite as the effortless solution, ensuring both memorability and brand loyalty in contemporary markets.

“Freedom from Thirst” (2000s)

This slogan captures Sprite’s positioning in the 2000s, when advertising increasingly connected products with empowerment and lifestyle choices. The tagline’s persuasive strength is rooted in metaphor and ellipsis, figures that combine to deliver a powerful yet concise message.

The phrase *freedom from thirst* is a clear metaphor. Literally, freedom refers to release from social, political, or personal constraints. Here, the concept is mapped onto the everyday experience of quenching thirst. McQuarrie and Mick (1996) describe metaphor as a substitution device that invites audiences to understand one domain in terms of another. By equating thirst with a form of oppression, and Sprite with liberation, the tagline elevates the act of drinking soda into an experience of empowerment. This metaphor resonates with consumers seeking autonomy, particularly younger audiences for whom freedom is a valued ideal.

In addition, the slogan employs ellipsis. Grammatically, the phrase omits the verb, which would typically be “gives you” or “offers.” Instead of saying “Sprite gives you freedom from thirst,” the tagline compresses the statement to *Freedom from Thirst*. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) explain that ellipsis functions by omitting recoverable

elements to make an expression more concise without losing clarity. Here, the omission produces a punchy, slogan-like rhythm that strengthens readability.

The combination of metaphor and ellipsis achieves multiple persuasive functions as outlined by Leech (1996). The metaphor enhances appeal by framing Sprite as a source of liberation, while the ellipsis ensures memorability by condensing the message into just three words. Together, they reinforce Sprite's promise not only of refreshment but also of symbolic empowerment.

This rhetorical construction reflects how Sprite adapts its branding to cultural values of the time. By associating the product with freedom, the slogan links an everyday need to a universal aspiration, ensuring relevance across different markets and demographics.

Conclusion

The analysis of Sprite's taglines across several decades illustrates how rhetorical figures have been instrumental in shaping the brand's persuasive identity. Rather than relying on descriptive language alone, Sprite consistently draws on stylistic devices to connect its product to broader cultural values and consumer experiences. Each era of the brand's advertising demonstrates a distinctive balance of sound patterns, structural contrasts, and figurative meanings that together reinforce its position as a refreshing and youth-oriented beverage.

Figures of sound, such as consonance, assonance, and alliteration, served to mimic the sharpness and liveliness of carbonation while ensuring the slogans could be easily recalled. Structural figures like parallelism, antithesis, ellipsis, and asyndeton gave the taglines brevity and rhythm, qualities that are crucial for readability and impact. At the same time, tropic devices such as pun and metaphor introduced interpretive depth, allowing Sprite to link its product with ideas of authenticity, empowerment, and resilience. This combination shows that the brand not only sought to describe its qualities but also to position itself within cultural narratives relevant to its consumers.

Viewed through Leech's (1996) framework, the persuasive strength of these taglines lies in their ability to address multiple functions at once. Memorability was secured through repetition and rhythm, readability through concise phrasing, appeal through playful or symbolic associations, and persuasive power through commands and contrasts that challenged consumer perspectives. By aligning stylistic strategies with shifting consumer values—from naturalness in the 1970s to individuality in the 1990s and resilience in the 2020s—Sprite demonstrated adaptability while maintaining a coherent brand voice.

The scope of this research was limited to a small selection of slogans from one brand, and the focus remained on textual rather than multimodal analysis. Future studies could expand by including visual elements, comparative datasets across brands, or cross-cultural reception studies.

Nevertheless, this study highlights that rhetorical figures are not incidental in advertising discourse; they are fundamental to how brands sustain recognition and loyalty. Sprite's slogans exemplify how language, when strategically crafted, functions as a long-term resource for persuasion and identity construction.

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