

Stylistic Strategies in Cosmetic Advertising: Analyzing Rhetorical Figures in Benefit Taglines

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Abstract

Advertising plays a central role in shaping brand identity and persuading consumers. This study investigates how rhetorical figures contribute to the persuasiveness of Benefit Cosmetics' taglines. Drawing on McQuarrie and Mick's (1996) taxonomy, five selected taglines were analyzed using a qualitative descriptive approach. The analysis identified nine types of rhetorical figures: sibilance, assonance, consonance, parallelism, antithesis, onomatopoeia, allusion, personification, and metaphor. Results indicate that scheme, particularly repetition-based figures, is the most frequently applied figurative mode because of its clarity and memorability. Among the rhetorical figures, allusion appeared most often, although its persuasive impact was less direct compared to repetition. Each rhetorical device was found to highlight specific product qualities while simultaneously enhancing the memorability of the brand. These findings suggest that rhetorical figures not only embellish language but also function as powerful persuasive strategies in advertising. The study underlines the importance of stylistic choices in marketing discourse and encourages future research to explore larger datasets, multimodal contexts, and additional theoretical perspectives to deepen understanding of how rhetorical figures shape consumer perception.

Keywords: *advertising, stylistics, taglines, rhetorical figures, cosmetics*

Introduction

In contemporary markets, competition has intensified across nearly every sector, with businesses striving to capture consumer attention through increasingly creative promotional strategies. Advertising remains one of the most dominant tools in marketing, serving not only to introduce products but also to influence perceptions and establish brand identity. As Knezovic (2024) defines, advertisements are “tools used in marketing and advertising to promote or sell a product, service, or idea.” To be effective, an advertisement must do more than simply present a product; it must engage audiences through memorable and persuasive language.

A key component in shaping an advertisement's impact is the tagline. Nick (2021) describes a tagline as a “quick and memorable statement associated with a business, brand, or product.” Because taglines often condense the core identity of a product into a few words, they play an outsized role in consumer recall and brand differentiation. In the beauty and cosmetics industry, where products are numerous and highly competitive, a well-crafted tagline can be decisive in attracting and retaining customer interest.

One way in which advertisers enhance the linguistic appeal of taglines is through the use of rhetorical figures. Within stylistics—the study of style across genres and modes of discourse (Nordquist, 2024)—rhetorical figures represent deliberate deviations from

conventional expression. McQuarrie and Mick (1996) define them as “artful deviations in the form taken by a statement,” and their taxonomy remains one of the most influential frameworks for analyzing how rhetorical figures function in advertising.

According to McQuarrie and Mick (1996), rhetorical figures are organized into two figurative modes: scheme and trope. The scheme mode involves excessive order or patterned regularity, making it the simpler and often more accessible form. It includes rhetorical operations such as repetition (the recurrence of sounds or structures) and reversal (the use of mirror-image structures). The trope mode, by contrast, involves deviation or irregularity in expression, realized through rhetorical operations like substitution (requiring interpretive adjustment by the reader) and destabilization (where meaning is initially indeterminate). Both modes comprise a wide variety of rhetorical figures—such as assonance, metaphor, allusion, and personification—each carrying distinct persuasive functions.

The persuasive power of rhetorical figures lies in their ability to enhance memorability and create positive associations. Repetition-based schemes, for instance, may simplify message retention, while tropes such as metaphor or allusion invite interpretive engagement, leading to deeper cognitive processing. In advertising, these stylistic devices not only embellish language but also serve to highlight product qualities and differentiate one brand from another.

Several studies have demonstrated the importance of rhetorical figures in advertising discourse. Tonawanik (2015), for example, examined 81 taglines from Malaysian women’s magazines and identified 13 types of rhetorical figures, with metaphor being the most dominant. The study highlighted how rhetorical operations, particularly destabilization, contribute to meaning-making and persuasive impact. Similarly, Nurhadi, Sabrina, and Widodo (2023) analyzed Maybelline’s digital beauty advertisements and found that hyperbole, visual and kinesthetic imagery, and repetition were frequently employed. Their research demonstrated the interplay between textual and visual strategies in constructing persuasive beauty marketing. Another relevant study is by Chetia (2015), who explored rhetorical devices in Indian advertisements and observed the prevalence of metaphor, simile, and personification as common techniques for engaging audiences.

While these studies underscore the centrality of rhetorical figures in advertising, each presents certain limitations. Tonawanik (2015) and Chetia (2015) focus primarily on textual analysis but cover multiple brands, limiting depth in brand-specific stylistic strategies. Nurhadi et al. (2023) incorporate both textual and visual dimensions, but their analysis is confined to one campaign and emphasizes imagery rather than linguistic structures. The present research distinguishes itself by concentrating exclusively on textual strategies within a single brand—Benefit Cosmetics—and by systematically applying McQuarrie and Mick’s (1996) taxonomy. This narrow but deep focus allows for a detailed examination of how rhetorical figures function in shaping Benefit’s tagline discourse and persuading target audiences.

The study also seeks to address a broader question about the role of linguistic creativity in the cosmetics industry. Beauty products often compete on claims of innovation, quality, or transformative potential. In this context, stylistic devices become more than ornamental—they act as strategic tools that frame products as desirable, effective, or even magical. By investigating Benefit’s taglines, the study reveals how specific rhetorical choices reflect and reinforce broader marketing objectives.

Accordingly, the research is guided by two main questions:

1. What types of rhetorical figures are used in Benefit Cosmetics' taglines, based on McQuarrie and Mick's (1996) taxonomy?
2. How do these rhetorical figures contribute to the persuasive impact of the taglines?

By addressing these questions, the study contributes to ongoing scholarship in stylistics and advertising discourse. It highlights the interplay between linguistic form and persuasive function, while situating rhetorical figures as crucial elements of marketing communication. The findings not only enrich theoretical discussions of rhetoric and stylistics but also offer practical insights for advertisers seeking to craft memorable and persuasive brand messages.

Method

This research employed a qualitative descriptive design, as the data consisted of textual elements in the form of product taglines. Qualitative methods are particularly well-suited for exploring non-numerical data and uncovering the meanings embedded within texts. As Bhandari (2020) explains, qualitative research focuses on understanding concepts, opinions, or experiences rather than measuring variables, making it appropriate for stylistic analysis.

The data source for this study was a set of five taglines from official Benefit Cosmetics advertisements. These taglines were selected because of their prominence in the brand's global marketing campaigns and their creative use of language to represent product qualities. The taglines analyzed include:

1. *Roller Lash: The mascara that hooks, lifts and curls*
2. *Gimme Brow+: Poof! From skimpy brow to wow brow*
3. *Boi-ing Cakeless Concealer: Cover more. Cakeless.*
4. *High Beam: Your glow is my command*
5. *The POREfessional: Your secret weapon against pores*

The analytical framework applied was McQuarrie and Mick's (1996) *A Taxonomy of Rhetorical Figures*. This taxonomy categorizes rhetorical figures into two figurative modes—scheme and trope—each associated with specific rhetorical operations. Scheme involves patterned regularity, represented by repetition and reversal, while trope involves deviation, represented by substitution and destabilization. Each operation contains several rhetorical figures such as alliteration, parallelism, metaphor, and allusion.

The procedure of analysis began with identifying the rhetorical figures present in each tagline. Each tagline was examined to determine whether its linguistic features corresponded to repetition, reversal, substitution, or destabilization. Once identified, the figures were categorized under their respective modes (scheme or trope). Lexical meanings of keywords were also consulted using reputable dictionaries to support the interpretation of each rhetorical figure.

Following identification, the persuasive effects of the rhetorical figures were analyzed. This involved examining how the figures emphasized product features, enhanced memorability, or contributed to consumer appeal. References to product claims from Benefit Cosmetics and relevant cosmetic literature were used to validate interpretations.

Finally, the analysis was structured to highlight both the types of rhetorical figures found and their persuasive functions. This dual focus allowed the study to address the research questions: (1) What types of rhetorical figures are used in Benefit's taglines? and (2) How do these figures contribute to persuasion in advertising discourse?

Results and Discussions

The analysis of five Benefit Cosmetics taglines reveals the strategic use of various rhetorical figures that contribute to both linguistic creativity and persuasive impact. Each tagline demonstrates how stylistic devices reinforce the qualities of the product being promoted while simultaneously increasing memorability for the audience. Across the data, nine types of rhetorical figures were identified: sibilance, assonance, consonance, parallelism, antithesis, onomatopoeia, allusion, personification, and metaphor. These figures appear across both figurative modes—scheme and trope—with scheme, particularly repetition-based devices, emerging as the most dominant. In the following sections, each tagline is discussed in detail to illustrate the rhetorical figures used and their persuasive implications.

Tagline 1: *Roller Lash – “The mascara that hooks, lifts and curls”*

The first tagline, taken from Benefit’s Roller Lash mascara, illustrates the use of sibilance, a figure belonging to the scheme mode under the operation of repetition. As Cove (2024) explains, sibilance occurs when hissing or hushing sounds are repeated in a phrase or sentence, thereby drawing the reader’s or listener’s attention to particular words. In this tagline, sibilance is evident in the sounds /ʃ/, /s/, and /z/ in words such as *lash*, *mascara*, *hooks*, *lifts*, and *curls*.

The repetition of these consonant sounds functions to emphasize the key product actions: tying, lifting, and curling eyelashes. For example, *lash* signifies the eyelashes themselves, *hooks* suggests fastening or catching, *lifts* implies upward movement, and *curls* refers to shaping into a curve (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.; Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries, n.d.). Together, these lexical choices construct a message that the mascara is capable of securing and reshaping eyelashes, thereby producing the effect consumers desire.

The persuasive appeal of the tagline is reinforced by the product’s formulation and design. Roller Lash mascara contains Acacia Senegal Gum, which promotes lash cohesion and provides a natural lifting effect (Eye Care Cosmetics, n.d.). Additionally, its distinctive hook-shaped brush facilitates application and enhances curling without the need for an eyelash curler (Benefit Cosmetics, n.d.; Ochell, 2016). By combining the stylistic device of sibilance with product claims, the tagline highlights the mascara’s unique advantages and makes the promise of curled and lifted lashes more memorable to potential customers.

Tagline 2: *Gimme Brow+ – “Poof! From skimpy brow to wow brow”*

The second tagline from Benefit’s Gimme Brow+ product demonstrates a more complex interplay of rhetorical figures, namely assonance, parallelism, and onomatopoeia. While assonance and parallelism fall under the scheme mode through repetition, onomatopoeia belongs to trope through substitution. Together, these figures generate rhythm, structure, and vivid imagery that reinforce the transformative promise of the product.

The first figure, assonance, is realized through the repeated diphthong /aʊ/ in *brow* and *wow*. McQuarrie and Mick (1996) note that vowel repetition draws attention to certain elements and strengthens rhythm, while Deguzman (2025) emphasizes that it enhances the musicality of text. By echoing the same sound in quick succession, the tagline achieves a catchy, memorable effect that highlights the product’s core focus—eyebrows (*brow*)—while associating them with admiration and surprise (*wow*). This

repetition reinforces the idea that the product transforms ordinary brows into impressive ones.

Next, parallelism appears in the paired phrases *skimpy brow* and *wow brow*, both of which follow the Adjective + Noun structure. According to Harris (n.d.), parallelism underscores the equivalence or contrast of ideas by presenting them in balanced forms. Here, the juxtaposition contrasts *skimpy*—defined as insufficient or lacking (Collins Dictionary, n.d.)—with *wow*, an interjection of delight (Oxford Learner’s Dictionary, n.d.). The parallel structure makes the transformation clear: from sparse, unimpressive brows to fuller, eye-catching ones.

Finally, onomatopoeia emerges in the opening word *poof*. As Harris (n.d.) explains, onomatopoeia enlivens text by imitating sounds, often suggesting immediacy or sudden change. *Poof* evokes the sound of something appearing magically, reinforcing the claim that the product delivers instant results. Consumers are invited to imagine their brows becoming fuller and more attractive “as if by magic,” which elevates the persuasive force of the tagline.

The effectiveness of this linguistic construction is supported by the product’s design and ingredients. The brush is infused with Bamboo Cellulose Fibers, known for their volumizing properties (Anselmi et al., 2019), while Pro-Vitamin B5 nourishes and strengthens brows (Rocasuba, 2023). Thus, the stylistic devices not only produce an engaging tagline but also align with the product’s actual capacity to create fuller, impressive eyebrows.

Tagline 3: *Boi-ing Cakeless Concealer – “Cover more. Cakeless.”*

The tagline for Benefit’s Boi-ing Cakeless Concealer employs two rhetorical figures: consonance and antithesis, both of which operate within the scheme mode but highlight different rhetorical strategies. Consonance works through repetition, while antithesis relies on reversal to set opposing ideas side by side.

Consonance appears in the repeated /k/ sound in *cover* and *cakeless*. Heckmann (2022) describes consonance as the recurrence of consonant sounds, which functions to emphasize and draw attention to specific words. By repeating the /k/ sound, the tagline stresses the dual promise of the product: its ability to *cover* imperfections and deliver a *cakeless* finish. Here, *cover* refers to concealing blemishes and uneven skin, while *cakeless* negates the undesirable effect of heavy, cracking makeup. As Nikolopoulou (2024) notes, consonance often adds cohesion to text while spotlighting core ideas; in this case, the sound pattern binds two distinct qualities into a single memorable message.

Antithesis is found in the contrast between *more* and *less* (embedded in *cakeless*). Harris (n.d.) defines antithesis as the juxtaposition of opposing concepts in parallel structures, clarifying subtle distinctions. The tagline suggests that consumers can achieve *more* coverage with *less* heaviness. This duality enhances persuasion by reassuring potential buyers that they need not compromise—coverage is maximized without sacrificing comfort or natural appearance.

The rhetorical construction resonates with the product’s composition. The concealer contains lightweight ingredients such as Cyclopentasiloxane, which provides a smooth application and prevents cracking (Cafasso, 2017). The linguistic contrast in the tagline therefore mirrors the product’s actual performance: abundant coverage that resists the cakey texture often associated with heavy concealers.

Through consonance and antithesis, the tagline communicates a concise yet powerful message: users can expect a product that performs beyond expectations while

avoiding common drawbacks. The stylistic choices make the promise clear, catchy, and reassuring, which strengthens both brand identity and consumer trust.

Tagline 4: *High Beam* – “*Your glow is my command*”

The fourth tagline, used for Benefit’s High Beam highlighter, combines allusion and personification, both of which fall under the trope mode through destabilization. These figures require interpretive effort from the audience and, in doing so, make the message more engaging and memorable.

The figure of allusion appears in the phrase *your glow is my command*, which adapts the familiar expression *your wish is my command*. Harris (n.d.) defines allusion as an indirect reference to a well-known phrase, person, or event that evokes recognition in the reader. By replacing *wish* with *glow*, Benefit invites consumers to recall the original idiom while reinterpreting it in the context of cosmetics. The allusion implies that the product readily fulfills the user’s desire for radiance, just as a servant might carry out a master’s command. This playful intertextuality positions the product as both dependable and transformative.

Personification further enriches the tagline. The pronoun *my* suggests that the product itself possesses agency, as though it were capable of responding to a command. Harris (n.d.) explains that personification attributes human qualities to nonhuman entities in order to clarify abstract concepts or make them relatable. Here, the highlighter is depicted as an active partner in beauty routines, granting the wearer the radiant glow they seek. Such humanization strengthens the bond between product and consumer by presenting the cosmetic as more than a tool—almost a reliable companion.

The persuasive effect of this construction is supported by the highlighter’s formulation. Containing Mica, a mineral known for its reflective and luminous qualities, the product delivers the shimmer and warmth promised in the tagline (Naturally Balmy, 2023). Thus, the rhetorical figures not only make the slogan stylistically appealing but also anchor it in the product’s actual performance.

By weaving together allusion and personification, the tagline creates a memorable, layered message. Consumers are encouraged to see the highlighter as a responsive agent that can instantly deliver brightness and vitality. This rhetorical strategy enhances the perception of the product’s value, linking linguistic creativity with cosmetic efficacy.

Tagline 5: *The POREfessional* – “*Your secret weapon against pores*”

The tagline for Benefit’s POREfessional primer employs metaphor, a trope operating through destabilization. Metaphor involves speaking of one thing in terms of another (Harris, n.d.), and in this case, the product is equated with a *secret weapon*.

The metaphor positions the primer as a powerful yet discreet tool, capable of addressing a common beauty concern: visible pores. The phrase *secret weapon* typically refers to an unexpected advantage that ensures success (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). Applied here, it suggests that the primer provides users with a hidden solution that gives them superiority over skin imperfections. This figurative comparison frames the product not merely as makeup, but as an indispensable ally in achieving flawless skin.

The imagery created by this metaphor intensifies the product’s persuasive appeal. By invoking the idea of a *weapon*, the tagline signals strength and effectiveness, while the modifier *secret* adds intrigue, implying exclusivity and insider knowledge. Consumers are invited to feel that they possess a powerful tool unknown to others, which enhances their sense of confidence and empowerment.

The tagline's promise is supported by the product's characteristics. As described in Benefit's promotional materials, the primer creates a smooth, matte finish while blurring imperfections, aided by ingredients such as Silica that reduce the appearance of pores and fine lines (Socialite, 2020). Its versatility across skin types and climates further strengthens the credibility of the metaphor, aligning linguistic creativity with practical performance.

Through this metaphor, the tagline underscores the primer's role as both corrective and transformative. By equating the cosmetic with a secret weapon, the advertisement encapsulates its effectiveness in a concise, memorable phrase. The rhetorical figure thus amplifies the product's appeal and solidifies its position as one of Benefit's best-known offerings.

Conclusion

This study examined the use of rhetorical figures in five taglines from Benefit Cosmetics, applying McQuarrie and Mick's (1996) taxonomy to identify both the types of figures and their persuasive functions. The analysis revealed nine figures—sibilance, assonance, consonance, parallelism, antithesis, onomatopoeia, allusion, personification, and metaphor—distributed across the two figurative modes of scheme and trope.

The findings demonstrate that scheme, particularly repetition-based figures such as sibilance, assonance, and consonance, was the most frequently used mode. These figures proved effective in creating memorable and easily understood taglines, which enhances brand recall. By contrast, trope figures such as allusion and metaphor required greater interpretive effort but offered richer associations and creativity. Interestingly, allusion appeared most often among the figures, though it was less immediately persuasive compared to repetition. This suggests that Benefit strategically balances accessibility and creativity in its advertising language, ensuring taglines are both catchy and distinctive.

The results confirm that rhetorical figures are not mere stylistic embellishments but function as essential persuasive strategies. They highlight key product qualities, align with brand claims, and reinforce consumer perceptions of value. This underscores the broader role of stylistics in marketing discourse, showing how linguistic creativity contributes directly to brand identity and consumer engagement.

The study carries several limitations. The dataset was restricted to five taglines from one cosmetic brand, and the analysis relied primarily on McQuarrie and Mick's framework. Broader research involving more brands, multimodal approaches that integrate visual elements, and the application of additional rhetorical or stylistic theories would enrich understanding. Time constraints also limited the scope of discussion in some areas.

For future researchers, expanding the dataset, exploring digital advertising platforms, and considering cross-cultural variations in tagline reception are recommended. By doing so, subsequent studies could provide deeper insights into how rhetorical figures function across contexts. Ultimately, the present study reinforces the importance of linguistic creativity in advertising and suggests that rhetorical figures remain powerful tools in shaping persuasive brand messages.

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