Res Rhetorica

ISSN: 2392-3113

Retoryka edukacji i innowacji (cz. II)
Rhetoric of Education and Innovation (part II)
12 (1) 2025
ISSUE EDITORS: ANNA M. KIEŁBIEWSKA, MARIA ZAŁĘSKA

Ministerstwo Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego

Projekt finansowany ze środków budżetu państwa, przyznanych przez Ministra Edukacji i Nauki w ramach Programu „Doskonała Nauka".

Doskonała Nauka II

VARIA

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Same ol' situation (S.O.S.)? Using traditional rhetorical methods to examine contemporary artifacts

Znów ta sama sytuacja? Używanie tradycyjnych metod retorycznych w badaniach współczesnych komunikatów

Abstract

Traditional models of rhetoric, based on classical and neo-classical texts, have fallen out of favor with some rhetorical scholars. This paper aims to demonstrate that, despite any potential criticisms, they remain useful for the critical examination of contemporary rhetorical artifacts, especially when it comes to the training of students. Herein, I show how Lloyd Bitzer's "The Rhetorical Situation" (1968) can be applied to a pro-tobacco advertisement/multi-media campaign that appeared in print, video, and other formats in 2021. Said application demonstrates that there is still room in our expanding conception(s) of rhetoric(s) for older models to critique newer forms/types of rhetoric in useful ways. These models and their ease of use can be utilized in introductory, intermediate, and advanced classes on rhetorical theory and/or criticism at the university level. A traditional model need not be a curio relegated to the past. In the hands of an instructor mindful of rhetoric's history, it can garner appreciation and be embraced by a new generation of emergent scholars.

Tradycyjne modele retoryczne oparte na klasycznym lub neoklasycznym piśmiennictwie nie cieszą się zbyt szerokim zainteresowaniem badaczy. Niniejsze studium pokazuje jednak, że pomimo krytycznej recepcji, niektóre modele można z powodzeniem zastosować do wnikliwej analizy współczesnych komunikatów, szczególnie w kontekście edukacji retorycznej. Wykorzystując model sytuacji retorycznej Lloyda Bitzera, przeprowadzono analizę multimedialnej kampanii koncernu tytoniowego z 2021 roku. Wskazano jak rozszerzenie kategorii retorycznych w tradycyjnym modelu może posłużyć do krytyki retorycznej nowszych form/typów komunikatów. Dzięki prostocie zastosowania, model ten może być wykorzystany na zajęciach z teorii i/lub praktyki retoryki na różnych poziomach kształcenia uniwersyteckiego. Tradycyjny model nie musi być ciekawostką z przeszłości. W rękach dydaktyka świadomego historii retoryki może on być z powodzeniem adaptowany przez nowe generacje badaczy.

Key words

rhetorical situation, pragmatism, rhetorical criticism, advertising
sytuacja retoryczna, pragmatyzm, krytyka retoryczna, reklama

Received: 18 June 2024 | Accepted: 18 October 2024

DOI: https://doi.org/10.29107/rr2025.1.9

Res Rhetorica, ISSN 2392-3113, 12 (1) 2025, p. 150

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Same ol'situation (S.O.S)? Using traditional rhetorical methods to examine contemporary artifacts[1]

1. Introduction

A tendency to prefer the newest and nicest is understandable. Why stick with an iPhone that is two years old, when you can have the most recent iteration? Why would you visit that old chain restaurant when the newest place serving this-or-that sort of 'foodie' trend just opened up down the avenue? While not phone or food, rhetorical theories often suffer from similar fates. One generation's engaging theories can become, in the hands of the next, a historical curio meant to be examined, dismissed, and then moved past. I'd argue that tendency, understandable though it might be, ends up being short-sighted at best and foolhardy at worst. Reason being, it robs students of historical context that might still reverberate today, both as theory and critical method. In the first section of this paper, I want to go over the specifics of Bitzer's traditionally-minded "The Rhetorical Situation," while also briefly noting some of the responses it generated. In the next section, I want to turn to a specific contemporary artifact from Philip Morris International. In the final section, I want to demonstrate how applying the first to the second continues to yield insights, especially when one is working to train students at the college/university level. The goal is not to prove that Bitzer was right. That is not my place or my interest. Neither is it the case that I want to claim that newer theories of rhetoric are less productive and useful. Quite the opposite. My goal is to show that older theories are of value in examining new instances of rhetoric that occur in our world today.

1. With apologies to the memory of Lloyd Bitzer and Mötley Crüe. I want to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their insightful and humbling suggestions. I am also indebted to all the students who attended my Introduction to Rhetorical Theory course in 2021-2023. In particular, I thank Olivia Schultz and Simon Millsap for their feedback and support. This paper is dedicated to the memory of my father Sam and my mentor/friend Robert Iltis, both of whom instilled in me an appreciation of the importance of history and a pragmatic approach to the world.

2. *Not* a Rhetorical Question

The roots of Lloyd Bitzer's "The Rhetorical Situation" can be traced, at least in part, back to the first generation of Speech Communication rhetorical scholars. In 1925, Everett Lee Hunt observed that rhetoric's initial promise goes back farther into the past than Plato and Aristotle. Indeed, he suggested that the Sophists provide the first hints of what was to come. The basis for this conclusion? The more-contemporaneous musings of the now-forgotten British pragmatist F.C.S. Schiller.[2] Others have also noted that Bitzer was indebted to Schiller's peer, John Dewey. John H. Patton emphasized "the purposive and pragmatic orientation of the situational approach (1979, 49). James Mackin goes further, arguing that Bitzer treats "rhetoric pragmatically as a moral act" (1990, 286).

Independent of its origins, the arrival of Bitzer's theory was accorded pride of place: the first essay, in the first issue of the now venerated *Philosophy and Rhetoric* (1968). He lays out the groundwork by noting:

> Rhetorical situation may be defined as a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence (6).

Bitzer is nothing if not explicit in also arguing that "Rhetorical discourse . . . does obtain its character-as-rhetorical from the situation which generates it" (3). He is, however, equally clear that my musings about philosophical inspirations are not merely anecdotal: "rhetoric is pragmatic . . . is a mode of altering reality, not by the direct application of energy to objects, but by the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action" (3-4). So, for Bitzer, rhetoric is generated in response to a need. Said discourse is the rhetor's attempt to modify said need by engaging an audience that is equipped to respond. If the response works, the need is decreased or removed.

What, then, are the salient features of these rhetorical situations? The first is the *exigence*, or "an imperfection marked by urgency" (6). While there may be multiple imperfections present, he emphasizes that there will be one which will operate as a controlling exigence. Moreover, to be rhetorical it must also be able to be modified by way of speech. The second component is a *rhetorical audience*, or "those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change" (8). The third component are the *constraints*, those "persons, events, objects, and relations which are parts of situations" (8).

2. These observations appeared in: Hunt 1925. A few years prior, he was already sketching out this argument, suggesting that rhetoric predicated on Platonic interpretations was prone to error, in: Hunt 1920.

If the rhetor navigates these components successfully, they have created what Bitzer calls a *fitting response,* or “a response that fits the situation” (10). Later, Bitzer further clarified that there are two types of fitting responses: *complementary* and *corrective*. Taking a page from theorist Kenneth Burke, the former is successful “because the situation enables it to be well received” (Bitzer 1980, 36-37). The latter is of more import and can be framed in one of two ways: (a) rhetoric “will correct or positively modify” the exigence; and/or (b) rhetoric is required “for continued and successful situational activity” (37).

Full disclosure: as a long-time pragmatist, there is something persuasive about suggesting that our will to believe in change can translate into words that can modify, for the good, the world we live in. As a rhetorical scholar, trained with a certain amount of reverence for first- and second-generation rhetoricians coming from Speech Communication in the United States, there is equal amount deference to a theory that is rendered in a clearly worded and well-argued manner. Obviously, though, my reverence and deference are not the only words on the matter. An essay such as Bitzer’s was bound to attract attention both critical and constructive. The most well-known form of the latter remains Richard E. Vatz’s “The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation” (1973). What is fascinating about this reply is the persuasive trick that the author attempts. Like a first-year lawyer who just learned stasis theory, Vatz simply reverses all the main premises of Bitzer’s theory. If Bitzer says that rhetoric is situational, Vatz retorts: “situations are rhetorical” (159). And so it goes. He then compounds the problem by assuming that this reversal yields a treasure-trove of amazing results; the implication being that Bitzer’s theory is a wrong-headed deterministic framework. Most caustically, Vatz argues that the situational approach assigns “little responsibility” to the rhetor (158). Such a complaint would be damning if not for the fact that Bitzer carefully lays out all of the aspects of a situation that the rhetor must navigate should they wish to craft a successful, and fitting, response.[3]

There are, however, more constructive responses to Bitzer’s initial articulation, ones that often speak to the moments of their creation in teasing out other situational possibilities. Two snapshots from two different decades provide attempts to modify Bitzer’s theory in light of the postmodern turn. Barbara Biesecker, speaking to those who favor deconstruction, argues that she wishes:

> “. . . to suggest that a re-examination of symbolic action (the text) and the subject (audience) that proceeds from within Jacques Derrida's thematic of *différance* enables us to rethink the rhetorical

3. Several years prior, K.E. Wilkerson offered an equally critical, though more searching, critique of Bitzer’s theory. Therein, he argued that the situational perspective did not “establish the natural boundaries for the area of human activity it would comprehend” (1970, 83). That claim is curious given that both Wilkerson and Bitzer share a similar interest in considering the objective aspects of the world that give rise to the need for rhetoric.

> situation as articulation. Indeed, deconstructive practice enables us to read symbolic action in general and rhetorical discourse in particular as radical" (1989, 111).

What follows is a cogent explication of a new, postmodern, approach to situations. This approach, while it sympathizes with certain aspects of Vatz's critique, wishes to do away with a "presumption" that he shares with Bitzer: "a causal relation between the constituent elements comprising the event as a whole" (114). The rethought approach to situations bears little resemblance to either man's approach. Instead, Biesecker's goal is nothing less than "the deconstruction of the humanistic subject" and a wholesale revision to "traditional notions of audience and situation" (224). In the next decade, Craig Smith and Scott Lybarger note that we are still living in "the postmodern era" where there is a need to deal with "more and more fragmented texts" (1996, 197). Part theoretical reconstruction and part rhetorical criticism, they create an approach that is situational largely in name only, given that Bitzer's original theory is assumed incapable of grappling with "postmodern fragmentation of public discourse and audience" (209).

However, two final observations, and a brief coda, are necessary before we turn to the artifact that is the focus of this essay. First, these criticisms and revisions of "The Rhetorical Situation" remain a productive part of academic scholarship. That said, an obvious tension exists. Should one throw out one version as against another? In many cases, that seems to be the tendency, with one chronological shift serving to usher in a new way that implicates casting out the former one. Need that be the case? Or could it be that rhetoric – as a thing studied and a thing critiqued – is expansive enough to welcome in a range of options, even ones specific to a particular theory or method? My preference is to see that as the case. If one is dealing with a particularly problematic postmodernist (or *post*-postmodernist) artifact, using Biesecker might be appropriate. Perhaps one is inclined to push past Biesecker, or Smith and Lybarger? If so, one might turn towards a revised method that considers "rhetoric through the terministic lens of conglomerated elements," which provides "a framework of affective ecologies that recontextualizes rhetorics in their temporal, historical, and lived fluxes" (Edbauer 2005, 9). Is there a need to contend with rhetoric which extends beyond a predominately Western framework? If so, one might seek out a situational approach that is attentive to the role a "discourse tradition" plays in crafting a response (Garrett and Xiao 1993, 37). I would even argue that there is a place for Vatz in the mix, if someone eventually decides to develop an actual theory out of his attempt to simply reverse Bitzer's initial observations.

Second, there is the issue of intent. Bitzer, alongside many of his contemporaries, certainly balked at the notion that there was a place for 'the rhetoric of X' within the realms of both theory and criticism.[4] Rhetoric, in the traditional sense, was meant to deal with speeches of historical significance, delivered orally to audiences, in popular venues such as the public forum, the legislative chamber, or the courtroom. To some extent, that myopic viewpoint is understandable. The concept of *media* in the days of first- and second-generation rhetorical scholars (particularly those housed in departments of Speech Communication, which had relatively recently severed their ties with English departments) emphasized oral persuasion as opposed to written forms. It is also the case that the medium of radio was primary, with the advent of television following. Then came considerations of the internet, or the idea of the rapid dissemination of videos thereon. Such developments were not a concern for first- and second-generation scholars initially. But paradoxes exist in this emphasis on the oral. For one, the study of historically significant speeches often meant having to rely on second-hand, *written*, transcripts of those orations, no less on equally adjacent depictions of the events themselves. For another, the accurate assessment of the situational factors at play – the time of day, the location, the accompanying visual accents of previous – was often impossible or, to be fair, discounted.

It is also the case that the criticisms and revisions of "The Rhetorical Situation" come from the same geographical/contextual space from which his theory emerged: departments of Speech Communication/Communication Studies in the United States. That, too, is the place from where I offer these observations. Granted, there are others who share, like me, a certain degree of deference/reverence for the scholarship that came from this era. That said, it is equally true that there are those who treat said approaches as mere curios, ill-equipped to handle the heft of a multi-mediated age, no less the cues and clues and complications provided by the same. And, while I have found some comfort in attending European conferences on rhetoric, a sense that these scholarly traditions are also respected abroad, I have also noticed a similar shift in some quarters. If the artifact emphasizes imagery, why not turn to new approaches to visual rhetoric? If it is part of a coordinated campaign, one that stretches across media, why not engage a theory created in the here-and-now and not the there-and-then? Again, I have no quarrel with using the latest approach. My humble rejoinder is this: you can if you want; you don't have to do so either. Solid theory, then and now, transcends trends and continues to reward those wishing to train it upon the latest manifestations of rhetoric. As a result, the first observation that ends this section necessarily implicates the second: even as we grant multiple approaches to this thing we call rhetoric, we must necessarily grapple with how our contemporary world has moved beyond

4. Later in his career, Bitzer lamented the then-current state of rhetorical scholarship, criticizing "'the rhetoric of' anything persuasive" and arguing that "it is not surprising that few people know what the art of rhetoric once was and should be again" (1995, 15).

the artifacts and tendencies of those who initially wrote theories about studying/examining the same. What follows is a test case. How so? It seeks to show that a traditional theory can be used to examine rhetoric that is relevant to students today. In so doing, it brings our past history into contact with present moments of situational rhetoric.

3. Clouds of Persuasive Smoke?

The first issue to note is that this printed artifact was part of a far larger multi--media campaign on the part of Philip Morris International (PMI), the makers of cigarettes such as Marlboro and Parliament, as well as non-combustible products such as ZYN and IQOS[5]. The campaign, parts of which are still housed on the PMI website, is entitled *Embrace Dialogue to Disarm Hate* (Philip Morris International 2021). It includes links to whitepapers, as well as videos featuring prominent PMI employees such as Gregoire Verdeaux, Senior Vice President, External Affairs, Philip Morris International.

This specific artifact, "Let's Embrace Dialogue," was a unique extension of this overall campaign that appeared under the "paid advertisement" label in the December 27/January 3 double edition of the US-edition of *Time* magazine. A different version of the same advertisement—the exact same copy, though with different graphics and links to other parts of the campaign—appears on the *Embrace Dialogue to Disarm Hate* site. It is also a variation on a video that appears on the PMI campaign website, "Disagree with Me? Fine. But Before You Start Hating, Let's Talk." The video is a talk, and the texts are listed as being written, by Marian Salzman, Senior Vice President, Global Communications, Philip Morris International. As of 2024, she is listed as Senior Vice President & Chief Corporate Citizenship Officer on the campaign's website and her own personal website, *Marian Salzman: A Globally Recognized Thought Leader*).

The advertisement repeats several visual cues found on the PMI campaigns' website. It utilizes an understated and limited range of font types and sizes, in variations of black only or white against a muted-blue color bar. It is, however, also unique in several ways. Beneath the paid label, roughly the top-third of the advertisement is taken up with two components: a large picture of Salzman, her hands resting on her face, on the right; and the title and her credentials to the left. This section is separated by a narrow blue line. What follows beneath that line are two columns of text that are divided into: a quotation, six paragraphs, and the

5. As a matter of clarification, PMI "was spun out of Altria in 2008, a decade after the Tobacco Master Settlement [in the United States]" (Yakowicz 2024, 55). Altria, in turn, is the parent company of Phillip Morris USA, which oversees Altria's cigarette sales in the US.

facsimile of Salzman's signature that would make Derrida smile.[6] A brief summary of these components is instructive:

- Quotation (in bold): "We build too many walls and not enough bridges."
- Paragraph One: Here, Salzman announces that this quotation from Sir Issac Newton sadly remains true.[7] Moreover, our emotions blind us to ways we can together create solutions to hate.
- Paragraph Two: Next, a global survey is referenced, noting that seventy percent of the respondents agreed that "hate and hate speech" had "increased in the past two years."
- Paragraph Three: This increase is partially attributed to a "modern culture of news consumption" and "declining trust in institutions."
- Paragraph Four: The result is an increase in instability and "exclusionary practices and mindsets," which in turn hamper "diversity of thought and constructive dialogue."
- Paragraph Five: Salzman notes that, although she is a non-smoker, she works for "an industry that has long been reviled." In spite of that, she remains focused on "a future without combustible tobacco products" with PMI, even as "special interest groups" hamper this progress by "dismissing science and discounting measurable progress."
- Paragraph Six: The world needs to find solutions ranging from "the pandemic and climate change to tobacco harm reduction." The problem? A world where "we continue to demonize and exclude those with whom we disagree." The solution? For people to "stop fighting one another and focus instead on the advances we so desperately need."

Along the bottom of the page, taking up no more than five-percent of the overall advertisement, is a link to pmi.com/letstalk (which remains active) and the online survey information, both on the left side; and the crest and name of PMI written out on the right, with a smaller blue line running along the gutter underneath.

This talk of "hate and hate speech" raises the question: which instances? In the United States, one can clearly point to the events surrounding the election of President Joe Biden. Most notably, what occurred on January 6, 2021, when "a mob

6. Far from being a sarcastic aside, there is a theoretical basis for this observation. Jacques Derrida often emphasized the instability of meaning and questioned a deterministic approach to context. As he averred, "Is there a rigorous and scientific concept of *context*? Or does the notion of context not conceal, behind a certain confusion, philosophical presuppositions of a very determinate nature?" (Derrida 1988, 3).

7. What might also remain true is that Newton *never* actually uttered this feel-good quotation. As is far too common today with loosely attributed sloganeering, one suggestion of authorship is enough of an attribution (esp. to a famous person) for it to stick, true or not. Evidence suggests that the quotation is in fact attributable to Joseph Fort Newton's *Adventures of Faith* (1948). The cause of the authorship error? A Nobel Prize speech that referenced a version of this quote and mentioned "Newton" with no further explanation, leaving others to assume they *knew* the Newton in question (Mithikal 2017).

of supporters of former President Donald Trump's false claims of election fraud stormed the U.S. Capitol in an attempt to stop the certification of the presidential election" (American Oversight 2021). At the same time, there was also the rise of Black Lives Matter, in the States and abroad, spurred on by the police killing of George Floyd on May 21 of the previous year and the disproportionate deaths of other African Americans while in police custody (Rahman 2021).

Still, we must recall that PMI points to a specific international survey that they did. The full text is informative:

> Online survey conducted by Philip Morris International through Engine Insights Caravan International Omnibus Survey. A total of 5,026 interviews were conducted across Brazil, France, South Africa, Korea, and the United States between October 1 and 10, 2021.

It initially becomes clear that the survey occurred very near the time of the online launch of the media campaign of which this print advertisement is an extension. Finding information about the company that conducted the survey is a bit more challenging. It seems that Engine Insights was once "the research and analytics division of Engine, a global, full-service media and marketing services company" (Engine Group 2020). This company was itself a part of a larger corporation called "Opinion Research Corp." (ORC) that was eventually sold to another company called "Big Village," which eventually went bankrupt in April 2023 and then sold off the Engine division (which included Insights) to a company called "Bright Mountain Media" (Crowther and Thomas 2023). This information is of import given that it renders accurate information regarding the survey – collection method, response rate, and the like – impossible to access in a blur of mergers and acquisitions. Given that we now have a somewhat more complete handle on the advertisement, it is best to turn to how this artifact might be examined in light of the tools provided by Bitzer, but also in context of students who are studying rhetoric today.

4. An Unhealthy Puff-Piece?

As a general set-up, I remind students that a rhetorical theory provides an explanation for *why* rhetoric occurs, whereas rhetorical criticism provides an analysis of *if* that rhetoric was effective. I should add, by this point in the term, they have read traditional texts such as "The Rhetorical Situation." I next show the paid advertisement to the entire class with limited explanation. I then ask them to examine the advertisement individually or in small groups. After sufficient time to examine the document, I generally start a class discussion framed around several key features of Bitzer's essay.

Exigence: often, the question of urgent imperfection initially leads to a rather muddled discussion. Reason being, there are multiple exigencies listed in the advertisement. I often have to remind them that there is likely a 'controlling' one. As a result, and given the nature of the rhetor, most students decided that the main imperfection is the one that is most tied to the rhetor: claims against non-combustible tobacco. This is an important point of contact for many students. They see that the rhetoric is espousing a general argument against things like "hate and hate speech." As students, they agree that those are bad things. And they also agree that "the pandemic and climate change" deserve consideration, even if the latter is less of a concern than the former to most of them at present. But what of "tobacco harm reduction"? Many of them ask how this fits into the discussion of "hate speech" and "hate" more generally. Given that the rhetor is PMI, they often conclude that a bias predicated on their business makes PMI's main concern an imperfection relating to the products they sell, combustible or not. I should also point out that, on two occasions, students pointed out another issue (one I had not considered): what is the potential urgency related to an imperfection with these non-combustible products? ZYN and IQOS are already sold in the United States and elsewhere, so how has any counter-rhetoric hampered those products from being released or potentially stymied their continued sales across the globe?

Rhetor: there is an obvious ambiguity involved in the assignment of a rhetor, especially for new/emergent scholars of rhetorical theory and criticism. Initially, many students assume that Salzman is the rhetor. This assumption makes some sense, given that both this print advertisement and the related online document claim that it was written by her. Still, it pays to ask your students to consider the situation a touch more carefully. Putting aside controversies regarding ghost-writers in the 1970s and the legal recognition of corporate personhood in more recent decades, a closer review of this document suggests that PMI is the rhetor. So, how does Salzman function in terms of the advertisement? It might be helpful to turn students' attention to the observations of one of Bitzer's colleagues, Edwin Black, when he suggests that we must "keep continuously before us the possibility, and in some cases the probability, that the author implied by the discourse is an artificial creation: a persona, but not necessarily a person" (1970, 111).

Initially, this observation might be confusing to students. But, in this case, Salzman's placement functions to create a persona for PMI, one we must assume to have been carefully considered. Framed another way, she 'stands in' for the company for which she works and speaks. Salzman, as a person, thus functions to imbue PMI's rhetoric with both pathos and ethos functions. Audiences are more likely to draw positive connotations from what she says while, at the same time, seeing PMI as more credible given what she represents within the context of the advertisement or the larger media campaign. It is at this point, however, that students often note (or I sometimes mention) that this persona creates tensions related to both artistic proofs, tensions that relate back to the ambiguities found in the exigence. As regards pathos, Salzman may generate positive emotional responses given her life as a non-smoker. While these clearly link back to her observations about reducing or eliminating combustible tobacco, how well do they relate to decreasing hate and hate speech? Regarding ethos, and putting aside the Sir Issac and Joseph Fort conflation, it is much the same. It is easy to assume a life--long non-smoker would not want people to start smoking, which implies a certain degree of goodwill. What of non-combustible options? And what of hate and hate speech? More to the point, students often conclude that they are still having trouble seeing the link between the different parts of the exigence even after they better understand that Salzman, as a persona for PMI, operate more in the realm of logos (in this case, a form of proof/support) for PMI. These questions are then channeled into issues relating to the simple question: who is being addressed?

Rhetorical Audience: Here again, many students initially make a simple observation that the audience are those who saw this ad. Savvy students quickly note that this advertisement was in a print magazine, the readership of which has continued to drop over the recent decades. Others note that perhaps the online media campaign has more traction and attracts more people. This leads to an interesting discussion: is the demographic older or younger for print sources? The obvious answer is the former. In some cases, however, that leads to another discussion: since the advertisement provides a link to the online campaign, could that bolster engagement? At that point, I note an obvious problem: there is no information regarding 'stickiness' between the print ad and the online campaign. Even if there were, I then ask my students to consider the problems related to the exigence(s). Assuming that the readers of the print edition of *Time* did click that link, what then? How could they modify the controlling exigence, or even the other peripheral exigencies, or even protest against hate speech or advocate for non-combustible tobacco products?

Constraints: These are often treated as a symptom of the previous sections, regarding their positive and negative functions. While an isolated readership provides a focused message (obviously, PMI saw merits in printing this advertisement in *Time*), it also limits the range of potential audience members. Further, and given that the students assume (rightly, I think) that the demographic is older, that means even less potential for them to either adopt the attitudes and behaviors (pro-combustible tobacco) necessary to mitigate against the imperfection. If they already smoke, they might wish to quit. If they decide to quit, they might choose a product from PMI. But they might not. If they do not already smoke, this has no bearing on their lives save to the extent that they might advocate for others not to smoke or to switch to a non-combustible form of tobacco. Here again, the ability to show demonstrable changes to the exigence is limited. In at least one case, a student simply remarked: "they are just looking for customers."

Fitting Response: In most cases, students initially claim that the rhetoric fails insofar as it provides reasonable methods by which the audience could modify the exigencies listed, controlling or otherwise. I then pose a question related to Bitzer's 1980 addendum: was the response *complementary* or *corrective*? At that point, an interesting thing has occurred. If one focuses on the secondary exigencies like "hate and hate speech" and/or "the pandemic and climate change," some students argue that the advertisement attempts to craft a response that is complementary. This often leads to a class discussion where other students will respond that such a response is ineffective when compared to PMI's call to mitigate the controlling exigence of threats to PMI's goal of "tobacco harm reduction." Why so? In at least one case, a student suggested that the response to the controlling exigence was corrective. In another, several students argued that PMI provided no clear indication how one would modify the harms that they claimed they were facing in the status quo. A more general observation is that most students feel that PMI did a poor job of providing a clearly persuasive case that was directed to an equally clear imperfection. If focused exclusively on the controlling exigence, the question is not just *why*, but *how*? Even if one wished to act upon the secondary exigencies, the question of *how* remained.

5. Conclusion

There are obvious extensions to this class exercise. The PMI webpage still exists, and they continue to release whitepapers related to a variety of social causes. There are also obvious questions about the aims of these projects, especially in light of the very recent news that PMI "would suspend online sales on Swedish Match North America's ZYN.com nationwide as the Zyn nicotine pouch maker responds to a subpoena from the District of Columbia" (Reuters 2024). Obviously, both combustible and non-combustible tobacco use remains a heath concern the world over. That said, the general sense that I get from my students is that they actually care more about the rise in incidents of hate, or the lingering effects of the pandemic. More to the point, they see PMI's rhetoric as a craven attempt to link the situation relating to their products to issues that deserve more consideration and better solutions.

A contemporary print advertisement, regarding still-current issues, and linked to an ongoing media campaign, therefore provides fertile soil to till. More to the point, a rather staid approach to rhetoric, "The Rhetorical Situation," offered as it was by a second-generation Speech Communication rhetorical scholar, can help to examine this instance of attempted persuasion. The simple goal of this essay has been to suggest that the world of rhetorical theory and criticism is big enough to admit of a range of options and approaches. Moreover, my simple claim is that a traditional approach to rhetoric can still provide insights for students/emergent scholars who wish to understand rhetoric as it occurs in our/their time. To be clear, the world we live in is not comparable to the one when Bitzer wrote his essay. But his theory—or Edwin Black's, or Walter Fisher's, and so on—might still prove useful if we choose to use it and share it with our students.

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