



## Use of Rhetorical Figures in Advertising on Search Engine Optimization: Meta Description of Tourism Company Websites

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### Abstract

COVID-19 has affected tourism industries around the world. Domestic tourism should be promoted online. Being on the first page of the Google Search Engine Result Page (SERP) is the first gate of building awareness of tourism companies to people. Meta descriptions, an explanation of content on a web page showed on Google SERP, are like the first door to invite audiences to enter the page. Therefore, persuasive language is important for writing a meta description. However, persuasive language is not educated by most online marketers. To fill the gap, the use of rhetorical figures in advertising, one of persuasive language, in meta description were studied in this research. Moreover, the opinions of online marketers about the importance of language use and rhetorical figures in advertising were examined. 10 meta descriptions on the Google search engine result page and 50 online marketers, the sampling groups, were selected by using purposive sampling. Those 10 meta descriptions were analyzed with rhetorical figures in the advertising framework by McQuarrie and Mick (McQuarrie & Mick). Regarding the importance of language use and rhetorical figures in advertising, a questionnaire was answered by 50 online marketers. The result showed applying rhetorical figures in advertising in 4 of 10 meta descriptions. Founded rhetorical figures in advertising were alliteration at 50% and anaphora, anadiplosis, and pun at 16.67% for each. The result of the questionnaire showed a mean score of 4.62 with a standard deviation of 0.41 for the importance of language use in meta descriptions, and a mean score of 4.04 with a standard deviation of 0.56 for the importance of rhetorical figures in advertising. Therefore, 50 online marketers expressed their opinion through the questionnaire that both language use and rhetorical figures in advertising are important. This study can expand new knowledge to online marketers. Using rhetorical figures in advertising in meta description might increase the number of visitors to web pages.

**Keywords:** *Rhetorical figures in advertising, meta description*

### 1. Introduction

COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the large decline in the tourism industry around the world. For example, the room revenue of hotels in the United State lost \$40 billion (Bryant, 2020). Because of travel restrictions, traveling across the world is more difficult. Some countries denied foreign nationals to enter their country. It has affected the economy of whole countries in the world because tourism is one of the world's major economic sectors. Moreover, over 20% of GPA in some countries come from tourism. The solutions to this problem are boosting the competitiveness of domestic and regional tourism All tourism industries should focus on promoting their business through online channels (UNWTO, 2020). Therefore, building awareness of the business through online channels is one way to promote the company. Google is a well-known website search tool that almost all people around the world use to search for information. However, Google returns 100 million results in maximum to a user on every search. Web pages on the first page of the search engine result page (SERP), the page after users search something on Google, have more opportunities to get several web page visitors. S. K. Patel, Patel, and Patel (2012) said that the first SERP has not been skipped by users. Users always read at least 1 to 2 web pages on the first SERP. It affects the competition in the online marketing industry. Most online marketers need web pages on their website being on the first Google SERP. Making a web page be on the first page of Google SERP need some tools such as Search Engine Optimization (SEO). SEO, a well-known tool among online marketers, was used for a long time because of the lower costs. Yalçın and Köse (2010) explained that on-page SEO tactics include keyword, title, and meta description. Keywords are the word users use to search in the search box to get the information they want. The title is a subject of content on a web page. A meta description is a short description of the

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content on the web page showed on SERP (Lowrance, 2015). An example of keyword, title, description on SERP was showed in Figure 1.



**Figure 1** example of SEO tactics

Among these 3 SEO tactics, most online marketers focus on a keyword, because a keyword is the main factor to make a web page go to the top web page on SERP. Therefore, there is much research about a keyword. However, a meta description is another factor that online marketers should focus on. As meta description will be shown on SERP, therefore; a meta description is like a door to invite users to click a web page. Additionally, the meta description is information, which Google and the audience obtain. N. Patel (2020b) explained more users will click a web page if a meta description is interesting and unique. Kumar (2013) claimed that the most important SEO tactic is a meta description. Most online marketers will use the same keywords on their web page. The number of page views is another factor that Google uses to rank web pages. Additionally, Jacques, Perry, and Kristensson (2015) claimed ranking on the top is not enough. Online marketers must attract audiences to enter their web page. Therefore, a meta description should be able to persuade users to click a web page. So that, a meta description can be used as an advertisement of a web page. Therefore, persuasive language and language use are important for writing a meta description.

The rhetorical figures, one of a persuasive language, were interested to apply with writing a meta description. The rhetorical figures in advertising by McQuarrie and Mick (McQuarrie & Mick) was the well-known framework among researchers who studied rhetorical figures in advertising. Rhetorical figures in this framework were grouped into scheme and trope. The pictures in Figure 2 showed the function of a Taxonomy of Rhetorical Figures in Advertising by McQuarrie and Mick (McQuarrie & Mick). The meaning of each rhetorical figure will be discussed.

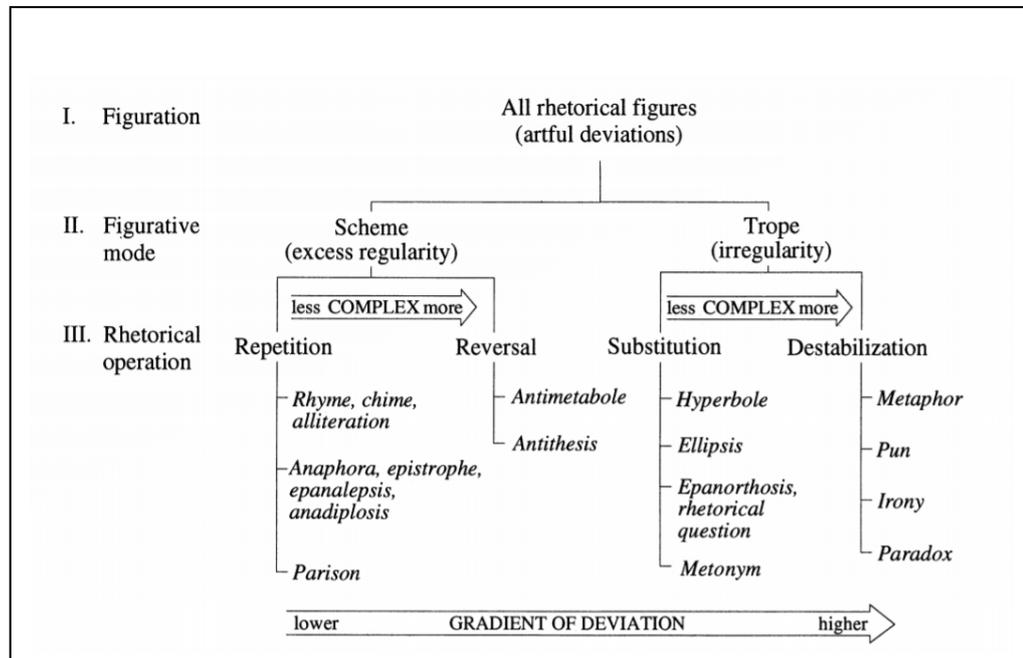


Figure 2 A Taxonomy of Rhetorical Figures in Advertising (McQuarrie & Mick, 1996)

From Figure 2, rhetorical figures in advertising were divided into scheme and trope. Rhetorical figures under scheme make content more attractive by playing with keywords or phrases. However, the meaning of the content is not changed. Rhetorical figures under trope can make the audience pay attention to content by deviating the meaning of content. (McQuarrie & Mick, 1999; Van Enschoot, Hoeken, & van Mulken, 2008)

Scheme mode is grouped into repetition and reversal. First, the Repetition group includes the rhetorical figures in the form of sound, word, and parison. The forms with sounds are rhyme, chime, and alliteration. Rhyme is playing with syllabi. Using the same sound and letter to begin each word of a phrase is called chime. The last form of sound is alliteration. Alliteration is using the same sound and letter of the initial alphabet many times in the sentences. The forms with words are anaphora, epistrophe, epanalepsis, and anadiplosis. Anaphora may be a reiteration of words at the starting of a phrase. Epistrophe could be a reiteration of words at the end of the phrase. Epanalepsis may be a reiteration of a word toward the starting and end of a phrase. Anadiplosis is using the final word of the first phrase to start the next phrases. The last scheme in the repetition group is parison. Parison is playing with parallelism of at least 2 sentences structure or 2-phrase structures. The second scheme is reversal. It is divided into antimetabole and antithesis. Antimetabole is bringing the order of the first phrase or sentence to reverse in the next phrase or sentence. Antithesis is using opposite words within the same phrase or sentence. A pun is using the same words that mean difference. The irony is expressing something as opposed to reality.

Trope comprises substitution and destabilization. Four types of substitution are hyperbole, epanorthosis or rhetorical question, ellipsis, and metonym. Hyperbole is expressing something more than the truth. The rhetorical question is making an assertion by inquiring a question. Destabilization includes metaphor, pun, irony, and paradox. The metaphor is a comparison of two different things with some similarity of those two things. The pun is using a word that has multiple meanings. The irony is a word that contrasts with reality. The paradox is using two words that contrast with each other.

From the reviewing of the rhetorical figures in advertising by McQuarrie and Mick (McQuarrie & Mick). It showed that there were many types in the framework that might be able to make a meta description more interesting. Therefore, the overall aim of this research is to analyze rhetorical figures in advertising for



writing meta descriptions. Ellipsis is omitting some words in the sentence. Metonym is a representation of something with features of another thing.

## 2. Objectives

- 1) To examine an application of rhetorical figures in advertising in meta descriptions of tourism company websites
- 2) To understand the opinion of online marketers regarding the importance of rhetorical figures in advertising for writing meta descriptions

## 3. Materials and Methods

### 3.1 Instrument

The questionnaire, as a research instrument, was designed by following steps. First, the purpose and the target group were set. The purpose of the questionnaire is to understand the opinion of online marketers regarding the importance of rhetorical figures in advertising for writing meta descriptions. The target group is 50 online marketers who have experience in writing meta descriptions. Second, the questionnaire was designed by using a 5-point Likert-type scale. The questions were separated into two sections, the importance of language used for writing a meta description and the importance of rhetorical figures in advertising for writing a meta description. Last, three specialists approved the questionnaire.

### 3.2 Sampling

The samplings of this research were selected by using the purposive sampling techniques. The first sampling, 50 online marketers, must work by people who have experience in writing meta descriptions. Because the first Google SERP mostly provides 10 web pages to users, 10 meta descriptions were collected from Google SERP as another sampling. The researcher used Top ten keywords in the tourism industry on Wordstream, [www.wordstream.com](http://www.wordstream.com), to search on Google. As of August 8, 2020, the top 10 tourism keywords were hotels, flights, Travelocity, airline tickets, vacation, trip, plane tickets, travel agency, airline, and cheap airline ticket.

### 3.3) Data Collection

Two parts of data collection were included in this research. First, the questionnaire was randomly conveyed through an online channel to 50 online marketers who have and experience in writing meta descriptions. Second, the top ten travel keywords on [www.wordstream.com](http://www.wordstream.com) were used to search on Google. After that, 10 meta descriptions that reached all criteria below were collected from Google SERPs.

- (i) The meta description must be on the first Google SERP.
- (ii) Incognito mode was used to collect data. All data were collected on the same day.
- (iii) The ad-purchased web pages that include the word “ad” or “sponsor” were out of scope.
- (iv) The first web page on Google SERP was considered firstly. However, these 10 meta descriptions must contain the form “<meta name= “meta description content”>” in HTML. This form of HTML proved a meta description was set by online marketers. Example of HTML in Figure 3.



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<meta name="description" content="Do you want people to click on your
search result? Learn how to write the best meta description. Including
7 characteristics and examples!" == $0
<meta name="robots" content="index, follow, max-snippet:-1, max-image-
preview:large, max-video-preview:-1">
<link rel="canonical" href="https://yoast.com/meta-descriptions/">
<meta property="og:locale" content="en_US">
<meta property="og:type" content="article">
<meta property="og:title" content="How to create the right meta descri
ption • Yoast">

```

**Figure 3** An example of HTML

### 3.4 Data Analysis

- (i) 10 meta descriptions were analyzed with Rhetorical figures in advertising by McQuarrie and Mick (McQuarrie & Mick).
- (ii) The meta description that applied the framework and rhetorical figures in advertising types used in the meta description was identified.
- (iii) The result of standard deviation and mean score of questionnaires were used to examine the opinions of online marketers about the importance of language use and rhetorical figures in advertising for writing a meta description.

## 4. Results and Discussion

The results and discussion of this research were separated into 2 parts to achieve 2 objectives of the research.

The first objective: To examine an application of rhetorical figures in advertising in meta descriptions of tourism company websites

The first objective of this research was to examine an application of rhetorical figures in advertising in meta descriptions of tourism company websites. Therefore, the sampling group of this research, 10 meta descriptions, was analyzed with rhetorical figures in advertising by McQuarrie and Mick (McQuarrie & Mick). The result and discussion of the first objective were below.

**Table 1** Analysis of 10 meta descriptions

Rhetorical Figures	Number	Percentage
Alliteration	3	50%
Anaphora	1	16.67%
Anadiplosis	1	16.67%
Pun	1	16.67%

The result showed 4 rhetorical figures in advertising types founded. From Table 1, alliteration was found at 50%. Anaphora, anadiplosis, and pun were found at 16.67%. It was 40% of meta descriptions that included rhetorical figures in advertising. Refer to rhetorical figures in advertising by McQuarrie and Mick (McQuarrie & Mick), the framework was included 2 groups of rhetorical figures, scheme, and trope. From Table 1, three founded rhetorical figures; alliteration, anaphora, and anadiplosis, were under the scheme. Founded rhetorical figures under trope are pun. It can be summarized that 83.34% of the founded rhetorical figures types are scheme, and only 16.67% are a trope. Therefore, using a scheme is more than a trope.



C Craven (2001) said, “the meta description is an abstract of content on the web page.” For this reason, meta descriptions should be short and easy to understand. However, it should be able to persuade audiences. This is why a researcher found using scheme more often than trope in the sampling group. Additionally, rhetorical figures under the scheme are playing with words or sentences while rhetorical figures under the trope are playing with the meaning of words or sentences, which might be one issue that scheme was used more than a trope. If online marketers used trope in a meta description, audiences must try to interpret the hidden meaning in a meta description. Some audiences might be able to understand the exact meaning of a meta description. On the other hand, audiences can understand a meta description with a scheme without interpretation. For the result, Van Enschoet et al. (2008) explained in their research that the audience has a positive attitude toward the scheme than the trope because the content with the scheme was easier to understand than the trope.

For example, the sentence “Find cheap flights and save money on airline tickets to every destination in the world at Cheapflights.com. Whether you already know where and when you want to travel, or are just seeking some inspiration, Cheapflights.com is the perfect place to search for airfares, hotels, and rental cars and to plan the best trip.” This sentence showed both scheme and trope. The rhetorical figure under the scheme in this sentence is alliteration. This sentence showed alliteration by playing with the sound /w/ and a letter w in a phrase “where and when you want.” An example of using alliteration showed audience can understand this phrase without interpretation. On the other hand, the audience must understand the hidden meaning of the word “cheap flight” in this meta description. The word “cheap flight” in this meta description showed using a pun, rhetorical figures under trope. The word “cheap flight” in this meta description has two meanings. The first meaning is flight ticket is cheap. Another meaning is the name of the website. The hidden meaning of the word “cheap flight” in this meta description is this website gives customers the lowest price of a flight ticket.

In conclusion, only 40% of the sampling group included rhetorical figures in advertising. Rhetorical figures under the scheme were used often than trope because the trope is too difficult to understand. The meta description should be able to persuade the audience, however; it should not be too complicated.

Second objective: To understand the opinion of online marketers regarding the importance of rhetorical figures in advertising in meta descriptions

The second objective of this research was to understand the opinion of online marketers regarding the importance of rhetorical figures in advertising for writing meta descriptions. Therefore, 9 questions in the questionnaire were answered by 50 online marketers. This questionnaire was designed with a 5-point Likert-type scale. The rate of the level of response began with extremely agree at 5 points, agree at 4 points, neutral at 3 points, disagree at 2 points, and extremely disagree at 1 point.

**Table 2** Questions about the importance of language for writing a meta description

Questions	Mean Score	Std.
1. The main factor of writing a meta description is the consideration of using appropriate language.	4.80	0.50
2. Persuading the audience to enter the web page is a goal of a good meta description.	4.82	0.44
3. Language use in advertising can be used with a meta description.	4.38	0.73
4. Language use is one of the main factors of writing a meta description.	4.46	0.79
Total	4.62	0.41

**Table 3** Questions about the importance of rhetorical figures in advertising for writing a meta description

Questions	Mean Score	Std.
1. A meta description can be applied in writing a meta description.	4.44	0.73
2. Rhetorical figures in advertising is the framework I know well.	3.36	1.06
3. Rhetorical figures in advertising should be applied in writing a meta description.	4.32	0.82
4. Meta descriptions can be more interesting by using rhetorical figures in advertising.	4.52	0.65
5. Rhetorical figures in advertising is the framework I mostly use in meta descriptions.	3.56	0.95
Total	4.04	0.56

Refer to Tables 2 and 3, there were two parts of the questionnaire. The first part was enquired 50 online marketers if language use was a major factor in writing a meta description. The second part was about the importance of applying rhetorical figures in advertising with writing a meta description. The first part got a mean score of 4.62 and a standard deviation of 0.41. For part 2, the result showed a mean score of 4.04 and a standard deviation of 0.56. From the result of both parts, it can be interpreted that 50 participants thought both language use and rhetorical figures in advertising were the main factors in writing a meta description.

From the questions in both parts, the answers to the 4 questions were interested. From Table 3, the first question was “Rhetorical figures in advertising is the framework I know well.” The second was “Rhetorical figures in advertising is the framework I mostly use in meta descriptions.” The mean score of these two questions is 3.36 and 3.56. Therefore, both questions were at the level of neutral. It showed that rhetorical figures in advertising are not widely known and used among online marketers. However, the result also showed participants’ opinion that rhetorical figures in advertising can make meta description more interesting as a good meta description should be. According to Gunjan, Kumari, Kumar, and Rao (2012), the audience mostly reads the meta description. It was proved with the result of the item “Persuading audience to enter the web page is a goal of a good meta description” in Table 2. The result of this item was at a mean score of 4.82 and a standard deviation of 0.44. If most internet users mostly read meta descriptions before getting into the web page, focusing on language use in meta descriptions is important. From Table 3, participants showed the highest mean scores on the item “Meta descriptions can be more interesting by using rhetorical figures in advertising.” It was proved that a meta description that contained interesting content can gain visitors to a webpage (Isca, 2019). Rhetorical figures, one of persuasive language, can make a meta description more interesting. According to (Turner & West, 2010); West and Turner (2013), rhetorical devices were used as part of the persuasive language by marketers for a long time.

In conclusion, language use and rhetorical figures in advertising were some of the main factors to write a meta description. Rhetorical figures in advertising were rarely used in meta descriptions because this framework is not widely studied among online marketers. However, they showed their opinion that rhetorical figures in advertising can improve the persuasive of a meta description.

## 5. Conclusion

The suggestion of writing a meta description is to use keywords in a meta description (Kumar, 2013; N. Patel, 2020a). From their suggestions, it showed that the knowledge about persuasive languages should be expanded in the online marketing field. Therefore, analysis of rhetorical figures in advertising was the purpose of this research.

The first objective of this research was to examine an application of rhetorical figures in advertising in meta descriptions of tourism company websites. The framework of this research was Rhetorical figures in advertising by McQuarrie and Mick (McQuarrie & Mick). The framework included two main groups of rhetorical figures, scheme, and trope. 10 rhetorical figure types were under scheme and 9 were under trope. The framework was used to analyze 10 meta descriptions. Only 4 meta descriptions showed using 4 types of rhetorical figures in advertising. There was alliteration, the rhetorical figures under the scheme, at 50%. Other



rhetorical figures under the scheme were anadiplosis and anaphora at 16.67%. Pun, rhetorical figures under trope, was founded at 16.67%. Alliteration. Anadiplosis. Anaphora.

The second objective of this research was to understand the opinion of online marketers regarding the importance of rhetorical figures for writing meta descriptions. The first part of the questionnaire was about the importance of language use in meta descriptions. The second part was for enquiring online marketers about the importance of rhetorical figures in advertising. The mean score of both parts of the questionnaire were 4.62 and 4.04. It showed that both language use and rhetorical figures should be considered as the main factor of writing a meta description. Additionally, both parts got a low standard deviation at 0.41 and 0.56. It meant the opinions of sampling groups were in the same direction.

In conclusion, rhetorical figures in advertising were used in 4 meta descriptions. There were alliteration, anadiplosis, anaphora, and pun. Regarding the importance of language use and rhetorical figures in advertising, both of them were important for writing a meta description.

## 6. Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincerely thanks to my advisor, Dr. Watthana Suksiripakonchai for his guidance. His suggestions were valuable for me. Next, I am most grateful for Assistant Professor Supaporn Yimwilai's teaching and advice. In addition, I am gratefully for Faculty of Humanities English Lecturer Department of Western Languages and The Graduate School of Srinakharinwirot University for supporting. Finally, I most gratefully acknowledge my family and my partner for their encouragement and their support.

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