

‘A picture is worth a thousand words’

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Abstract

The charity organization Børnefonden launched the campaign ‘Tænk sort’ (think black eng.) - Support Africa's young talent something is worth fighting for- in June 2012. The campaigns purpose is to change the perception of Africa as a continent of hopeless victims by presenting Africa’s young and talented generation to the audience. This article explores what the Tænk sort campaign website does to get the visitors to contribute to their cause and the use of emotional elements of persuasion to get the visitors to contribute to Børnefonden’s cause. There are similarities between the emotional outcome of pathos and visceral emotions. By using emotions as a mode of persuasion the website empowers the audience to change the perception of the situation in Africa verbally as well as visually. The Emotional reactions are based on biological patterns of recognition whereas visceral reactions are driven by biology and generally common across populations and cultures.

1. Introduction

The use of visual stimuli has become a central element in online communication. It is increasingly relevant to understand the communicative properties visual stimuli possess. Using images to communicate a message to an audience is not something new; long before written language our ancestors communicated messages on cave murals. Today the advancements achieved in regards to the technological platform related to the World Wide Web permits us to communicate using multi-cognitive methods influencing the perception and interpretation process. Most common today the content of websites is a combination of textual materiel with visual stimuli such as static pictures and videos with sound to communicate a message or to tell a story. Centered on the *Tænk sort* campaign website this article examines the relationship between the use of visual stimuli and textual material to achieve emotionality, namely the use of pictures and headers.

1.1. The problem statement

From a theoretical and empirical perspective I am going to analyze “børnefondens” campaign website Tænk.dk and I will discuss how the website use of pathos provokes a visceral reaction, characterized by or proceeding from instinct rather than intellect” and how does it affect the users? Furthermore I am going to reflect on how the discussion can be used in a wider context to understand the effect of visual stimuli in a digital context.

1.2. Research question

What does Børnefonden do to get the visitors to contribute to their cause?

1.3. Sub-questions

- What is the difference between an emotion caused by pathos and an emotional visceral reaction?
- What is the role textual material in a digital context?
- What is the role of visual stimuli in a digital context?

2. An overview of the article

I will briefly explain the overall rhetorical situation focusing on the context, the sender and the purpose of the rhetorical object. Furthermore based on Bitzers article I will explore the exigence, audience and constraints. Based on Engholm and Klasturps analysis model I will examine what the Tænk sort campaign website does to get the visitors to contribute to their cause. Inspired by Cicero’s definition of pathos I will attempt to apply the attributes of pathos in a digital context looking at the notion of visceral level design described by Normann. And finally I will analyze the visual stimuli and textual material namely the pictures and the headers.

3. The situation

The website suggests a different perception in regards to the African continent and its problems by presenting positive stories of average Africans and their daily lives. The goal of the campaign site is to support Africa's youth to a future in which they can support themselves and develop their communities, their country and their continent. The campaign website *Tænk sort* can be accessed from the bottom right corner of *Børnefondens*’s main site, *børnefondens.dk*. By clicking on the *Tænk sort* logo at the bottom right corner leads you to a sub page of the main site containing information about and a link to the *Tænk sort* campaign website. *Tænk sort* is not a part of *Børnefondens*’s main site. *Børnefonden* is the rhetor as a private sponsor based development organization that helps more than 70,000 sponsored children, their siblings and parents. The audience view on the organization is independent of the campaign. From the *Tænk sort* campaign website the visitors might get the impression that *Tænk sort* is an independent entity. The exigence is to disrupt and challenge the perception of Africa as a continent of victims. (Bitzer, 1968: 12)

3.1. The audience

According to Bitzer a rhetorical audience consists only of those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change. (ibid: 13) The campaign site is accessible to all with an internet connection. However it

would be safe to assume that the visitor is interested in the issues concerning the living conditions for the inhabitants on the African continent. Because the campaign website *Tænk sort* communicates through visual symbols we might assume that the target audience is young people. (Thorlacious, 2007: 66) From the *Tænk sort* campaign website there is a link to their Facebook page. Besides raising awareness through the social network Facebook, a physical advertisement campaign, with posters at bus stops and the handing out of free *Tænk sort* stickers adds to the campaigns visibility.

3.2. The constraints

One may assume that the audience almost certainly does not disagree with the rethors message consisting of changing the perception of Africa. But due to the controversial nature of the message the challenge rests in convincing the audience of the importance of the rethors message namely to change the perception of Africa. The constraint is constructed by the means of the principles of rhetoric; it is “artistic proofs”. (Bitzer, 1968: 8)

With Engholm and Klastups analysis model I will attempt to shed light on what the *Tænk sort* campaign website does to get the visitors to contribute to their cause, the above mentioned analysis model looks not only to what a website communicates, but also how it communicates and facilitates interaction.

4. A multi-dimensional artifact

From Engholm and Klastups point of view a website is a multi-dimensional artifact and they consider it as designed, situated and performative. It is a delimited unit consisting of pages and content created by a sender, situated through a specific location on the Internet. As the receiver’s interaction with the website creates the experience as a cohesive unit it is also performative. (Engholm & Klastup, 2010: 3). Engholm and Klastups model contribute to the analysis of the *Tænk sort* campaign website as it takes into account the receiver’s perception, which is particularly relevant in an online context. A classic text understanding with a traditional sender and receiver relationships are just no longer sufficient when 'text' is collaborative and mobile. Textual materiel as a digital content is described by Bogost (2007: 35) as *the least vivid information* whereas moving images with sound, static images and symbols is *the most vivid information*. According to Hoff-Clausen it is a *rhetorical medium of interaction*, which means shifting the focus from just text to a combination of tools supported in a technological environment. (2008: 18).

The analysis model is based on six independent parts; *purpose, technology, interaction, appearance, user-experience and the socio-cultural perspective*. The definitions of the six parts are as follows.

The *purpose* is aimed at a websites genre affiliation and the intention of the website. *Technology* describes the technological specifications relevant for the feeling and experience of the website including the navigation. *Interaction* relates to the interaction-based actions that the receiver is invited to, and may take advantage of, while the *appearance* looks at the websites graphical and sensual elements. *Experience* describes the receiver's overall experience with the website; it is the sum of the above characteristics uncovered by the previous four parts. Lastly, according

Engholm and Klastrup the web-experience cannot be discussed without reference to the context in which the recipients are in and therefore it is necessary to have an understanding of the subjective assumptions, the *socio-cultural perspective*. (Engholm & Klastrup, 2010: 3-6).

4.1. The purpose

The *Tænk sort* campaign site challenges the perception of Africa as a wild and hopeless continent. There are similarities with the recent Prada fall and winter collection 2012 advertisement where the exigence is to change the perception the audience may have in regards to supermodels as being good looking but not particularly intelligent. The video shows supermodels wearing the new Prada fall and winter collection and playing chess on a stylish chess board.¹The *Tænk sort* campaign website is aimed on the one hand to activate the receiver, by asking the receiver questions “*what do you think of paying tribute to Africa's youth?*” . On the other hand there is a sense of social-based community “*help spread the word!*” It is a community and social-based genre with elements of activism.

4.2. Technology

The website is programmed in HTML, the menus as well as the background texture and images material is positioned with CSS3. The information architecture is constructed around one page although there is a top menu containing five buttons. Each of the five buttons leads you to an area of the same page containing the information the topic the button represents. The top menu is programmed in JavaScript. When scrolling through the website an arrow appears onto the right of the website. The arrow is a return to the top button which is also programed in CSS3 and JavaScript.

4.3. Interaction-the use

Even though the website has a static expression the navigation on a single page website adds an animation feeling to the interaction. When clicking on one of the top menu buttons the site scrolls to the related chapter. When entering the campaign site the user gets introduced to a large Facebook ‘*like*’ button adding a social network element to, at first glance, a rather simple website in regards to interactivity. The campaign site is built up of five story blocks. Each block contains a part of the overall message. By clicking on the ‘*about the campaign*’ button on the top menu the user gets presented with a short description of the campaigns objective and a YouTube embedded viral campaign video.

4.4. The appearance

The background consists of a black header of 1342 x 560 pixels on a white background when viewed on a resolution of 1600 x 900 pixels. The headers color switches between the achromatic colors white and black. The typographical expression used for the text is in the Arial, Helvetica and sans-serif family all depending on the font type installed on the visitors computer. The standard font size for the main text is 0,9 em which is a bit less than 11 points while the headlines are 1.3 em which is 16points. The standard text is written in black and the headlines are

¹ http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=xJLfjSOCXus

red and in capital letters. The site is made up of building blocks placed in a loose grid not following the atom grid model.²The above mentioned building blocks are incorporated into the five topics related to the top menu. The five topics can be considered as individual frames/pages for the building blocks. The font size used for the headers is 18 points, the use of font color and header color varies depending on the frame/page. By using the attributes of the different elements and adding symbols onto the header the website manages to break away from a repetitive expression. Each frame/page has its own manifestation.

4.5. The user-experience

The website combines visual not verbal information and textual information. In an attempt to catch the visitor's attention the website uses iconic representations in the shape of symbols. Symbols are visually analogous to an action object, or concept. They are most effective at representing simple actions, objects, or concepts.

(Lidwell, Holden & Butler, 2003: 50) In terms of navigation there is an implicit wish to simplify the sites information architecture through thoughtful reduction. By using visual stimuli such as pictures of African children the site adds emotionality to the campaign, more emotions are better than less. By using the design principals behind simplicity the site succeeds in adding a sense of trustworthiness. Simplicity and complexity need each other. Because the design serves one purpose, a campaign, the contextual aspect of simplicity is achieved. By having the content on one page, navigating through the five menus is quicker and more responsive than having to go to a new webpage. (Maeda, 2006: iX)

4.6. The socio-cultural context

Obviously the user-experience depends on the preferences of the user visiting the site and, not least, the users' computer specification namely the screen resolution. Today in Denmark the most common resolution is 1366 x 768 pixels.³The site's socio-cultural context is the international humanitarian aiding campaign and the potential contributors willing to assist with a financial donation. The campaign website link to a Facebook-page is an obvious choice since there is approximately 3 million Danish user and 72% of the users visit their Facebook profile daily. The Danish users are diligent at sharing their 'likes' with over 4.8 million 'likes' daily.⁴ The campaign website calls on the visitors to have a different view on Africa, verbally and visually the campaign site ascribes the audience empowerment to change perception of the situation in Africa. To answer the following research question, how the use of pathos provokes a visceral reaction, "characterized by or proceeding from instinct rather than intellect" I am first going to shed light on what characterizes pathos and apply the characteristic onto digital context.

² <http://www.thewebmadeeasy.com/css/css3-design-principals-3-getting-on-the-grid-2/>

³ <http://fdim.dk/Statistik/teknik/skaermoploesning>

⁴ <http://atcore.dk/blog/danskerne-pa-facebook/>

5. Emotionality and visceral reactions

According to Cicero, if an individual is neutral about a subject, he is much more difficult to persuade. The rhetor must gain an insight into the audience's *'frame of mind'* to modify or achieve persuasion. If the rhetor gains insight into the audience's *'frame of mind'*, then the audience will be *'so affected as to be swayed by something resembling a mental impulse of emotion, rather than by judgment or deliberation. For men decide far more problems' by emotion 'than by reality'* (Olmsted, 2008: 31) To apply the above definition of pathos to a digital context I will introduce the three levels of processing that Donald A. Normann applies to a design context they are Reactive, Behavioral and Reflective. Translated to design terms they become Visceral Level Design, Behavioral Level Design and Reflective Level. (2004:3) Cicero's definition of pathos, causing a *'mental impulse of emotion'* and visceral level design share the same attributes namely an automatic and immediate evaluation of the stimuli. Emotional reactions are based on biological patterns of recognition determined exclusively by *'the here-and-now of perceivable features'* (ibid: 3) The visceral level is driven by biology and is generally common across populations and cultures. No comparison to the past or expectations to the future is made *'all that counts is the current state'*. It is a perceptually-induced state. (ibid: 3) In the case of the *Tænk sort* campaign website the emotional topic is to change the perception of Africa.

I will now analyze how the *Tænk sort* campaign website uses emotional elements of persuasion to get the visitors to contribute to *Børnefonden's* cause and examine the similarities between the emotional outcome of pathos and visceral emotions. Pathos in textual material is not characterized by a visceral reaction because written language is not biologically driven and requires decoding while evaluating iconic visual stimuli, resembling what it represents, happens on an automatic and immediate level and is common across populations and cultures and can therefore be described as a visceral emotion. Taking into account the difference between textual material and the specific properties of visual stimuli my analysis looks upon; on the one hand the style used in the textual material and on the other hand the visual stimuli.

5.1. The textual material

Arriving onto the campaign website the visitor is confronted with an anacoenosis which typically uses erotema or rhetorical question *'What do you think of paying tribute to Africa's young talents?'* A reply is not really sought or required, consequently softening what is really a statement. It is a persuasive mean to shift the visitors towards the rhetors view.⁵ The *Tænk sort* campaign site uses an argumentative metaphor in the header describing the campaigns purpose *'Something is worth fighting for'* the conceptual metaphor argument is war (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 32) and is followed up by a series of anacoenosis in the shape of rhetorical questions. By supplementing a conceptual metaphor argument with a modification of the term generally associated with contributing to a cause such as donate or help and instead using the term invest the *Tænk sort* campaign site adds an element of

⁵ <http://rhetoric.byu.edu/figures/R/rhetorical%20questions.htm>

activism. The definition of activism in this context is the attitude of taking an active part in events, especially in a social context.

5.2. The visual stimuli

According to Jens E. Kjeldsens it is only possible to gain a rhetorical understanding of a picture by relating the interpretation of each item to each other and to relate this to the utterance as a whole when analyzing. (2006: 181)

Pictures can contain representations of symbols that need decoding in the same way as textual material requires. Visual stimuli as mediated evidentiary possess at any rate four rhetorical qualities: presence, realism, simultaneousness as well as a rhetorical condensation. Images provide matters for the viewer's eyes; it is an explosion of meaning, rather than the step by step interpretation of verbal rhetoric. (Kjeldsen, 2006: 167) Under the header '*something is worth fighting for*' the visitor gets invited to view a viral video produced for the Tænk sort campaign. In the viral video which is called *resurrecting the youth center, Jagtvej 69*, the audience gets introduced to the notion of activism by bringing a sense of presence to the campaign's cause. Due to a strong correlation between proximity, urgency and action. The closer something is, the more important, it seems to be and the greater is the will to act. (ibid: 164)

TÆNK SORT

NOGET ER VÆRD AT KÆMPE FOR

Hvorfor ikke bare gå i sort? Hvorfor ikke tale sort? Hvorfor ikke se sort? Hvorfor ikke blive ved med at tænke på Afrika som mystisk, vildt og håbløst – og helt umuligt at forstå?

Fordi det er faktisk.

Afrika er ikke et kontinent af ofte. Afrika er fyldt med unge talenter – børn og unge – der er færdiguddannede på en bedre fremtid for deres selv, deres familier og deres lande. De arbejder for det hver dag. De kæmper for det. De ved, at Afrikas fremtid ligger i deres hænder.

Afrikas unge har modet og viljen, men ikke altid muligheden. Det er faktisk langt fra alle børn i Afrika, som deltager et grundskoleforløb, og færre endnu som får en ordentlig uddannelse. Afrikas unge talenter har nogle udfordringer, som ville så benene væk under de fleste af os.

Derfor: Bliv op om Afrikas unge talenter. Tænk sort.

Like os på [facebook.com/tænk.sort](https://www.facebook.com/tænk.sort) og hjælp os med at bakke op om Afrikas unge talenter. Spred budskabet og del det med alle dine venner. Tænk sort er BSRN&Ekonens kampagne til fordel for Afrikas unge talenter.

**SE TÆNK SORT
GENREJSE
UNGDOMSHUSET**

Illustration 1: 'something is worth fighting for'

Next to the header '*invest*' there are two pictures of African school children. The first picture is taking from higher angle causing the picture to look down on the African school children.

The pictures used under the header ‘stories’ are full of equations and realism thereby creating an empathic relationship between the audience and the cause of the campaign website. (Kjeldsen, 2006: 166) The pictures are of young Africans working in different sectors or industries. It is important to note that pictures can possess indexical and conventional signs. (ibid: 163)



Illustration 2: ‘The stories’

5.3. The relationship

The Tænk sort campaign website uses visual stimuli to draw the visitors’ attention to their message. The visitors’ attention gets drawn to the message on an unconscious level it happens automatically and instantly. There is no need to learn any rules to understand an iconic picture; we just need to open our eyes and see. In a rhetorical context pictures are characterized as being iconic and motivated representations, it is very different from verbal language. In verbal language every word is a sign and the connection between words and what they represent is not based on similarity. It requires conventions to decode the message which does not make the reception automatic and instant. Visual stimuli in the shape of iconic representations and textual material represented in the case of the Tænk sort analysis by headers serve different purposes. There is a coupling of information between visual stimuli and textual material. In the case of the Tænk sort campaign website the pictures are an Extension complementing the textual material. (Leeuwen, 2005: 230) The relationship between pictures and text can be various. Pictures serve generally specific purposes in relation to textual material for example they can be supporting by supplementing the textual material or expanding by commenting the textual material.

6. Conclusion

The analysis examines the overall rhetorical situation of the Tænk sort campaign site focusing on the context, the sender and the purpose of the rhetorical object. Additionally looking at the exigence, audience and constrains which according to Bitzer comprise everything relevant in a rhetorical situation. Using the Engholm and Klastrops analysis model I clarified what the Tænk sort campaign website does to get the visitors to contribute. The campaign website ascribes the audience empowerment to change perception of the situation in Africa verbally as well as visually. To answer

the question to how the Tænk sort campaign uses emotional elements of persuasion to get the visitors to contribute to *Børnefonden's* cause the analysis explores the similarities between the emotional outcome of pathos and visceral emotions, namely by looking at pictures and headers. Not all pictures possess visceral properties it all depends on the pictures representation. Pictures can contain representations of symbols that need decoding in the same way as textual material requires for example religious symbols. Textual material does not possess the properties of a visceral reaction because textual material requires culturally determined decoding. Emotional reactions are based on biological patterns of recognition whereas visceral reactions are driven by biology and are generally common across populations and cultures. Looking upon the relationships and the properties of visual stimuli and textual material is especially relevant today due to the increased available information on the World Wide Web and the abbreviated period visitors spend on decoding a website.

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- Statistics and illustration: <http://atcore.dk/blog/danskerne-pa-facebook/>
- Definition: <http://rhetoric.byu.edu/figures/R/rhetorical%20questions.htm> of rhetorical questions

