

A rhetorical history built over one hundred and eighty years on social memory and longevity. The case of *Acesur*

Una historia retórica construida durante ciento ochenta años sobre la memoria social y la antigüedad. El caso de Acesur

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ANALYTICAL SUMMARY

The article focuses on the rhetorical history that *Acesur*, one of the leading Spanish olive oil companies, has built over the years. In this sense, it must be taken into account that the present-day firm *Acesur* is the outcome of a long process of business acquisitions and mergers that started back in the mid-19th century. For more than 150 years, *Acesur* and the companies that preceded it have been actively engaged in building the rhetorical history that is analysed in this paper.

The article defines “rhetorical history” as a firm’s strategic use of the past in relation to manage the key stakeholders. The strategy is based on the idea that history is a narrative of the past and as such is highly subjective. The article explains how and when *Acesur* and its predecessors: a) configured a historical narrative addressed to their external agents and shaped around two key elements: the firms’ longevity and connection to their region of origin through olive oil; b) built Social Memory Assets (SMA) to identify themselves and their brands with elements of the region’s culture, thus catalysing the so-called “country of origin effect”; and c) adapted the historical narrative to their own internal changes, to those going on in their environment, and to their strategic decisions.

In what concerns the “how”, the firms have transmitted their rhetorical history using the means described in the literature, such as booklets, websites or the physical space in their facilities, as well as labels and publicity to which SMAs were incorporated to reinforce the firms’ relationship with their region of origin. The process was cumulative, and its components were progressively taken for granted and institutionalised.

The article also analyses “when” *Acesur* and its predecessors have rhetorically used their history. They did when the circumstances and the evolution of the market called for it, for instance, when the national market was dominated by low-quality olive oil and they needed to justify the higher price of their products; when they wanted to promote their exports using SMAs to reinforce the country-of-origin effect; or whenever they identified new interests or concerns among the consumers. On the other hand, the use of rhetorical history has often coincided with the founding of a new firm, the longevity and continuity of which could be questioned, or with an intergenerational transfer within the company.

The main source for this research were the documents generated by some of the companies that preceded *Acesur*, which are kept in the firm’s storeroom. Internal information, including informal interviews with the firm’s managers, was complemented with data collected from external sources, such as public and private archives, or newspapers. The historical project of the Oficina Española de Patentes y Marcas (Spanish Patent and Trademark Office) was essential for the study of the trademarks registered by *Acesur*’s predecessors.