

Introduction

Metaphor, where one entity is talked about in terms of another unrelated entity, is a powerful and widely used device in advertising. For example, cars are talked about as if they were animals. Household devices are presented as if they were people, and washing powders are talked about as if they were superheroes. Although metaphor sometimes works on its own in advertising, it is more common for it to operate in combination with other tropes, such as metonymy, irony, and hyperbole. Moreover, it rarely appears solely in a linguistic form but often manifests in other, non-linguistic forms of expression. This is particularly pertinent in advertisements that involve new media, such as internet fora, viral advertising campaigns, and social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter. Metaphor and other forms of figurative communication are inherently flexible, which makes them ideal for use in diverse cultural settings, as they can mean different things to different people. At the same time this carries an element of risk, as they are often open to misinterpretation.

There has been a substantial amount of research into the role played by metaphor in advertising and the reasons for its success, but there has been relatively little work on the ways in which it is used creatively in combination with other tropes, in different modes of expression, and across different cultures. The aim of our book is to fill this gap. We present a comprehensive analysis of the ways in which creative use is made of a range of tropes, including but not limited to metaphor, alone and in combination, in different modes of expression. We explore the impact this has on comprehension, effectiveness, appreciation and emotional arousal, and the ways in which these effects vary according to factors such as the age, gender and cultural background of the consumer.

The work in this book singles out and empirically tests different variables that influence the successful use of creative figurative communication in advertising. These include, but are not limited to, the types of figurative communication involved, the complexity of the communication, its positioning within the advertisement, and the characteristics of the reader or viewer. We look at the impact that factors such as these have on, for example, the appeal of

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the advertisement, the depth of comprehension, the time taken to understand it, the values that it conveys, and the types of emotions that it evokes. We explore the role of emotion in people's responses to the creative use of figurative communication in authentic advertisements. We contribute to metaphor theory by combining discourse analysis and experimental approaches to the study of the nature and the effectiveness of creative figurative communication in advertising. We hope that our book will be relevant to the world of advertising as it provides guidance on the ways in which figurative communication works best in advertisements and branding schemes. The studies that we report are motivated by questions that have been asked by advertising and communications specialists as well as by academics.

We report on a number of interdisciplinary investigations that we have conducted over the last five years, combining lab experiments, data analysis and qualitative research. We use these investigations to explore the ways in which figurative communication, in language, image and sound works as a means of persuasion. We are also interested in how this effectiveness varies according to the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the advertisements and the consumers. In addition to effectiveness, we are also interested in the ways in which people make sense of advertisements that exhibit figurative and visual complexity. We therefore use discourse and corpus-based techniques to identify patterns in the free-text responses that people produce when asked to describe what the advertisement is saying and what feelings it evokes. We focus on the three most widely spoken languages in the world: English, Spanish and Mandarin Chinese. Our research has been conducted in the UK, Spain, and China with native speakers of the three languages, although some of our studies also look at other languages. The ultimate aim of our research is to show how different types of figurative communication and the ways in which they combine affect consumer responses. We also aim to raise awareness of subtle linguistic and cultural differences in the ways figurative communication is understood, allowing advertisers, marketers, charities and non-government organisations (NGOs) to produce advertisements and branding schemes that are targeted more sensitively to the needs of different consumers, thus benefiting communities both locally and internationally.

In all of our studies, we use authentic advertisements. These are taken from a range of contexts, including international ones; they involve different modes of expression (e.g. verbal, visual), different forms (e.g. billboards, videos, app icons) and different participants (e.g. by age, gender). By testing the applicability of extant theories of figurative language to different modes of expression beyond the verbal dimension, we identify new questions that need to be addressed and extend the definitions of these figurative operations and the discussions that surround them. As well as studying metaphor and metonymy in isolation, we also explore the ways in which they combine with each other

and with other tropes, such as hyperbole, in multimodal contexts. In addition to traditional forms of advertising, we discuss different forms of branded content, such as viral marketing, and look at how metaphorical narratives are used to convey a brand's personality and values. In order to reflect the global nature of marketing, several of our studies include a cross-cultural component. In order to achieve the book's aims, we have adopted an interdisciplinary approach combining theoretical insights from psychology, linguistics and marketing. Our research methods combine approaches and techniques from cognitive linguistics, corpus linguistics, cognitive and social psychology, and marketing. Some of the studies have a theoretical focus, whilst others, which have been conducted on live campaigns in conjunction with advertising agencies, have a more practical focus.

The book is divided into two parts. In Part I, we provide a theoretical overview of the ways in which metaphor and metonymy are used in advertising and the ways in which they are perceived. We also touch on the use of other figurative tropes and techniques that constitute figurative communication in advertising. Then, in Part II, we outline a number of empirical studies that we have conducted in academic and professional settings exploring the effectiveness of different types of figurative language in advertising and branded content, and the impact they have on consumers.

Part I, which lays the groundwork for the book, comprises four chapters. Chapter 1 looks at the range of figurative language types that can be found in advertising, explores how and why they are used creatively and reports findings from studies that have explored the relative advantages of different combinations of metaphor and metonymy. Then, in Chapter 2, we consider aspects of visual design and discuss the importance of layout and explore the advantages and disadvantages of different forms of layout. We consider the ways in which advertisers make use of visual resources to represent metaphors and metonymies. We show how the same metaphor can be represented in multiple different ways leading to different processing or pragmatic effects. Taken together, Chapters 1 and 2 show how two key dimensions of creativity (meaning and form) work together in the production and reception of figurative meaning in the context of advertising. Having established our framework, in Chapter 3 we open out the discussion and consider more complex and sophisticated ways in which advertisers employ figurative messaging to involve the viewer in a campaign. The campaigns considered in this chapter are dynamic and interactive, with some of the more experiential campaigns inviting the viewer to 'act out' the metaphor. Then, in Chapter 4, we explore potential sources of audience variation in responses to figurative language, considering issues such as age, gender and cultural background, and investigate how they impact on the understanding and interpretation of figurative messaging.

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Part II, where we present our empirical studies, comprises six chapters. In Chapter 5 we report findings from a study in which we explored the impact of viewing time on people's responses to metaphor and metonymy when used alone and in combination, and when presented with varying degrees of visual complexity. In Chapter 6, we present findings from a study that we conducted into the figurative use of colour and shape in app icons, where we explored the values that are conveyed by different colours and shapes and examined how these were used to express the personalities of different brands and products. In Chapter 7, our focus on apps is extended to an international context where we compare the ways in which metaphor and metonymy are used in food app icons from the US and Japan. We show how the different colour-meaning associations that operate in these countries shape the ways in which colours are used to represent different products and services, all related to food. In Chapter 8, we turn to the role played by figurative language in marketing videos and explore the emotional impact of different kinds of figurative language and the effect this has on likeability and sharing intent. In Chapter 9, we report cross-cultural variation and gender variation in the responses given by participants to the videos explored in Chapter 8. Chapter 10 is slightly different in that we present findings from three practice-based studies that we conducted in collaboration with an advertising agency, all of which formed part of live advertising campaigns or rebranding exercises. We report on the impact of our work on the success of the campaigns and rebrands. We conclude in Chapter 11 with an outline of the key messages contained in the book and provide recommendations for marketing professionals who wish to incorporate figurative language effectively into their marketing and branding campaigns.

Please note, throughout this book, wherever possible, we show the original image of the advertisement. In cases where we were unable to obtain permission to reproduce an original image, we provide a QR code which links to the advertisement online.

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Excerpt
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Part I

Theoretical Perspectives

1 *The Temple of Heaven Is Not China*

The Creative Use of Figurative Communication in Advertising: What Does It Involve and Why Does It Work?

1.1 Introduction

In order to succeed in a global marketplace, companies need to develop sophisticated advertising strategies. This applies not only to the private sector but also to charities and non-government organisations (NGOs). To be effective, advertisements in all these sectors need to capture attention, and to be emotionally engaging and persuasive.

Research has shown that one way in which advertisements can achieve these aims is through the use of metaphor. Metaphor involves presenting one entity as if it were an entirely different entity, and can be used to highlight some aspects of a particular entity whilst downplaying others. In advertising, metaphor can be used to highlight the qualities of a product and hide its less desirable features. For example, if a car is presented as if it were a wild animal (as cars often are in advertising), this emphasises its strength and power, whilst downplaying its polluting characteristics.

The use of metaphor is not restricted to advertising. It pervades everyday communication, ranging from informal conversations to human-computer interactions, online exchanges, graphic novels, app design, and most importantly for this book: advertising. It is one of the primary tools for achieving economy of expression, clarity, persuasiveness, politeness, communication of evaluations and emotions, and other ends. While there is a widespread, if tacit, assumption that most communication is literal, in reality a great deal of communication is non-literal, with studies showing, for example, that over 15% of the language used in news and academic texts is figurative (Steen et al., 2010).

The use of metaphor is widespread across the marketing and communications sector. A retrospective study of the rhetorical features employed by US magazine advertisements from 1954 to 1999 showed that the incidence of

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visual metaphor increased over time (Phillips & McQuarrie, 2009). One reason for this is that metaphor can be used to frame messages in an indirect yet persuasive manner. In order to illustrate this point, let us look at an example of a metaphor in advertising.

In Figure 1.1, we see an air freshener spraying not just a pleasant smell, but a whole beach scene. It is as if by spraying the freshener the user can have access to an entire beach and all that is there. This metaphorical message is likely to be more memorable than its literal equivalent ‘it provides a nice smell’ or even to its verbal equivalent ‘it produces air that is as fresh as the seaside air’. This is because an image of a beach evokes not only the way a beach looks, but it also has the potential to evoke the smells that we associate with the beach, the way the sand feels between our toes, the taste of the sea air and so on. All of these pleasant, multimodal experiences are then implicitly associated with the product being advertised. This is a very straightforward example. Many advertisements are more complex than this, focusing not just on the attributes of a product or a brand, but on the values that it represents and the needs that can be fulfilled by purchasing it. The aim here is for the brand to build a relationship with the consumer. In later chapters we explore the contribution that metaphor and other types of figurative messaging make to different approaches to marketing.

Findings from experimental research studies indicate that advertisements containing metaphors are more effective than non-metaphorical advertisements (Chang & Yen, 2013; Morgan & Reichert, 1999). The use of metaphor in advertisements has been found to render them more memorable, more appealing (Gkiouzepas, 2015; Gkiouzepas & Hogg, 2011), and more effective, in that people are more likely to say they will buy the product if its advertisement contains a metaphor (Ang & Lim, 2006; Chang & Yen, 2013; Jeong, 2008; McQuarrie & Phillips, 2005; Morgan & Reichert, 1999; Phillips & McQuarrie, 2009). Metaphor is thought to be successful in advertising because of the



Figure 1.1 Advertisement for Poett air freshener involving metaphor¹

increased inferential work it provokes in the reader (as we have seen with the ‘beach’ example) which in turn leads to a stronger sense of ‘ownership’ of the message (Toncar & Munch, 2003). Indeed, various reasons have been proposed for the effectiveness of metaphor in advertising. These include: the satisfaction that is derived from working out the meaning of a metaphor; the stimulation of the consumer’s imagination; and the fact that positive attributes can be hinted at through metaphor (Dehay & Landwehr, 2019). Metaphor triggers positive affect and enjoyment (Gkiouzepas & Hogg, 2011) and, as we saw above, can lead the viewer to draw positive inferences about the product being advertised (Chang & Yen, 2013).

Pictorial and multimodal metaphors have been found to be more effective than verbal metaphors, insofar as they are more likely to trigger spontaneous inferences (McQuarrie & Phillips, 2005; Morgan & Reichert, 1999). They have also been shown to increase product and brand recognition and recall, and consumers’ intentions to buy the product (Kitchen, 2008; Mcquarrie & Mick, 1999; McQuarrie & Mick, 2003; Morgan & Reichert, 1999; Tynan, 2008).

Metaphor has been also found to serve as a persuasive device in areas outside advertising. Studies have shown for example that simply adding or changing one metaphorical word within a text can radically alter the way in which people understand the text. Thibodeau and Boroditsky (2011) showed participants the following text about the rising crime rate in the fictional city of Addison, and asked them to select solutions to the problem:

Five years ago Addison was in good shape, with no obvious vulnerabilities. Unfortunately, in the past five years the city’s defence systems have weakened, and the city has succumbed to crime. Today, there are more than 55,000 criminal incidents a year – up by more than 10,000 per year. There is a worry that if the city does not regain its strength soon, even more serious problems may start to develop. (2011, p. 3)

Before viewing the text, half the participants were shown the sentence:

Crime is a **beast** ravaging the city of Addison.

And the other half were shown the sentence:

Crime is a **virus** ravaging the city of Addison.

Those participants who had been shown the sentence in which crime was described as a beast were significantly more likely than those who had seen the sentence in which crime was described as a virus to propose solutions involving law enforcement and punishment. In contrast, those who had been shown the sentence in which crime was described as a virus were significantly more likely to propose solutions involving education and welfare. This study shows that the use of different metaphors can have a direct impact on people’s reasoning patterns.

A number of studies have investigated the factors that shape the persuasive strength of these so-called ‘metaphorical framing effects’. For example, Steen et al. (2014) found that metaphor works best as a persuasive framing device in written language if it appears at the beginning of the text, thus allowing for subsequent framing, and if the metaphor is re-enforced throughout the message. In a similar vein, Hendriks et al. (2018) looked at how the framing of ‘cancer’ as either a ‘journey’ or a ‘battle’ influenced types of inferences that people made about the sufferer’s emotional state. She found that participants who had been exposed to the battle metaphor inferred that the patient would feel more guilt if he or she did not recover, whilst participants who had been exposed to the journey metaphor inferred that cancer sufferers had a better chance of making peace with their situation. These findings suggest that the use of metaphor influences not only the way people reason, but also the ways in which they reflect on the mind sets of others.

There are two further reasons why metaphor serves as an effective persuasive device in the context of advertising, but also more generally. The first is that with a metaphor the message is delivered implicitly and it falls to the perceiver to make the final connection, thus giving them a degree of ‘ownership’ of the meaning-making process. It has been shown that when a reader or listener has to draw the conclusion for themselves, this leads to an increased sense of ownership of the message (Stayman & Kardes, 1992). This preference for things associated with oneself is known as the ‘instant endowment effect’ (Kahneman et al., 1991).

The second reason is that metaphor has been shown to provoke an emotional and at times sensorimotor response in the reader (Citron & Goldberg, 2014). In other words, metaphors have the capacity to be processed on a physical level, which means that they can be internalised and embodied. A number of factors have been found to affect the extent to which metaphor provokes emotional and/or sensorimotor responses. Metaphors that are most likely to evoke sensorimotor responses tend to be those that are: novel for the reader (Cacciari et al., 2011; Cardillo et al., 2012; Desai et al., 2011), aesthetically pleasing (Citron & Zervos, 2018), presented from the reader’s perspective (Blomberg & Zlatev, 2015), used in emotionally-charged contexts (Samur et al., 2015), and involving motion (Huettenlocher et al., 2014). In previous work, we have shown that each of these factors contributes in different ways to the extent to which a metaphor is ‘physically experienced’ (Littlemore, 2019).

In their meta-analysis of studies focusing on the use of metaphor in advertising, Sopory & Dillard (2002) found that the presence of metaphor has a positive effect on perceived levels of persuasiveness, particularly when the metaphor is novel, has a familiar target, and is used at the beginning of the advertisement. The reasons for the persuasiveness of metaphor in advertisements are explored in more depth by Ottati & Renstrom (2010), who

conclude from their meta-review of the literature that the two overarching reasons for the success of metaphor in advertising are: (1) that metaphor activates positive information about and attitudes towards the product, and (2) that people find the cognitive effort in working out the meaning of the metaphor to be rewarding.

The focus of this book is on the *creative* use of metaphor in advertising. The pervasiveness of creative metaphor in advertising is one thing that sets it apart from other forms of persuasive communication more generally. Optimally creative metaphors are likely to meet many of the criteria listed in the previous paragraph. In other words, they are likely to be novel to the reader (but not so novel that they are impossible to understand) and aesthetically pleasing. If they are to be successful, they may also need to be presented from the viewer's perspective, and to involve motion and emotion. Advertisers use metaphor creatively in many different ways. Our aim is to show how the effectiveness of metaphor in advertising is maximised through the use of different kinds of creativity, at the level of both meaning and form. Advertisers frequently propose new and creative metaphors, combine them in creative ways with other forms of figurative expression, and employ creative manipulations of conventional metaphors.

In the following sections, we introduce the three main tropes that will form the focus of this book: metaphor, metonymy, and hyperbole. We describe these tropes in detail and provide examples of some of the ways in which they are employed creatively in advertising. We then introduce several ways in which advertisers have been shown to make playful use of these tropes. Our aim is not to provide an exhaustive list of the ways in which they can be used creatively, but to give an idea of the range of options available. In the final sections of the chapter, we consider the role played by humour and irony, and discuss the different meanings of 'effectiveness' in advertising research. In subsequent chapters, we look at other ways in which they can be manipulated in creative ways, and explore the impact that this has on their effectiveness in the context of advertising campaigns and rebranding exercises.

1.2 Metaphor

We saw a definition of metaphor at the beginning of this chapter. At this point it is useful to look at some examples of the different ways in which advertisers make creative use of metaphor in their campaigns. Through these examples we hope to show what it means to use metaphor 'creatively' in the context of advertising.

The creative use of metaphor in advertising can take many forms. At its most basic level, it involves the use of a completely new, novel metaphor. In a novel metaphor, disparate entities *that are not normally associated with one another*