

## Global Challenges Forum 2022

### **Taking responsibility: The power of figurative communication in sports advertising and its role in tackling social issues of equality and mental health**

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Over the course of the Coronavirus pandemic, our mental and physical health, and the intrinsic link between them, has become critical (Global Web Index, 2020; Shakespeare, 2020). Yet despite national lockdowns, people have taken up sport from home (Ford, 2020; Shakespeare, 2020; Wells & Ford, 2020). Increasingly, people are investing in a brand culture they trust and that shares their values, which means that popular sports brands have the power to advocate and advance the improvement of social issues including gender equality, and health and wellbeing in society. However, many brands still seem to perpetuate stereotypes that can be very damaging, especially to minority groups.

Advertisers frequently use figurative communication, such as metaphor, to directly engage and implicitly persuade audiences (Ford et al., 2021; Pérez-Sobrino et al., 2021). Metaphor can convey messages indirectly by comparing something to something else in a way that is vibrant and creative, but also poignant and thought-provoking (e.g. Ford et al., 2021; Pérez-Sobrino, 2016). Depending on how sports brands use figurative communication in their advertising, they can help or hinder the betterment of societal health. Thus, sports brands need to carefully consider what they communicate in their advertising and how they do so, and to take responsibility over their contribution to public attitudes toward social issues in sport.

In this talk, I will observe what values and attitudes sports brands are advocating in their TV commercials and how they use figurative communication to convey their message, and evaluate whether their approach is improving or hindering attitudes toward social issues. I analysed 20 commercials sampled from the adforum.com's (2021) archive of award-winning campaigns from the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity between the years 2015 and 2021.

Preliminary analysis of 17 commercials has identified some common themes are community, equality in sport (increasing the representation of women), and the challenge and fulfilment of doing sport (improving mental health). Metaphor is used to represent these values and relate them to sport, framing sport as art, a supernatural power, or a religion. Commercials released during 2020 and 2021 used figurative communication to refer to the pandemic indirectly and what sport can do for people during this time. Experiential metaphors were often used; for example, the experience of training or losing a

match was compared to other experiences, such as ‘fighting’ inequality in sport and COVID-19 restrictions. Further insights from this study will inform how we might use commercial advertising to tackle social issues to the benefit of all, as well as just business.

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