

## **Exploring the use and evolution of figurative tropes in health and fitness brands' advertising prior to and during the COVID-19 crisis**

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The COVID-19 pandemic and national lockdowns have restricted people's mobility and health, having serious and long-term implications for the £8 billion health and fitness industry. I report findings from multiple studies that investigate the use of figurative tropes, specifically metaphor and metonymy, in health and fitness brands' advertising: in health and fitness smartphone app icons (2018), in respondents' written reactions to exercise and lifestyle before (2019) and during and after the UK national lockdown (2020), and in a multimodal corpus analysis of health and fitness brands' advertising from award-winning campaigns before and during the COVID-19 crisis (2020-2022).

In this talk, I track the use of figurative tropes in health and fitness advertising, exploring two research questions:

1. How do health and fitness brands use figurative tropes in their advertising?
2. Has the use of figurative tropes evolved during the COVID-19 crisis?

The 2018 study analysed the figurative use of colour and shape 50 health and fitness smartphone app icons from the *Google Play Store* using an adapted protocol from Beasley and Danesi (2010). The 2019 and 2020 studies were conducted in collaboration with Big Cat Advertising Agency as market research to understand how people ( $N = 75$ ,  $N = 68$  respectively) perceived exercise and their lifestyle before, during, and after the first UK national lockdown, using AntConc (Anthony, 2019) and WMatrix (Rayson, 2009) software for keyword and semantic domain analysis. The 2021-2022 study (in preparation) examines the use of metaphor in health and fitness brands' campaign videos that have been awarded a Grand Prix award at the Cannes Lions Festival of Creativity for their effectiveness, using a procedure adapted from FILMIP (Bort-Mir, 2019), C-MIPVA (Pan & Tay, 2020), and Bordwell et al.(2016). This study aims to establish how successful health and fitness brands use figurative tropes effectively, and to track how this usage may have evolved during the pandemic.

Findings show that people have physical and emotional reactions to health and fitness brands, and highlight the increasing importance of mental as well as physical strength before and during the pandemic, utilising metaphors that are embodied and symbolic. The finding from the studies presented in this talk will inform approaches for health and fitness brands (including gym, clothing, supplement, tech, and training) to appeal to their 'new normal' audience through the effective use of figurative tropes, and to support the nation's physical health and mental wellbeing during this time of crisis.

## References

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