

Spiderman or devil horns? Exploring the reception of multimodal (polysemiotic) metonymies in advertising by global audiences

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Studies have shown the positive effect of multimodal metaphor (that is, a metaphorical mapping at the intersection of text and pictures (Forceville, 2009, p. 34) in raising positive attitudes towards advertised products or services (Ang & Lim, 2006; Chang & Yen, 2013; Forceville & Urios-Aparisi, 2009; Jeong, 2008; Pérez-Sobrino, 2017; Pérez-Sobrino, Littlemore, & Houghton, 2018; van Mulken, le Pair, & Forceville, 2010). However, there are virtually no studies to date that address the effect of multimodal metonymy - that is, a part-whole mapping at the intersection of words and pictures, (González-García, Cervel, & Hernández, 2013; Hidalgo-Downing & Kraljevic, 2011; Littlemore, 2015; Littlemore & Tagg, 2018) - in advertising. This comes as a surprise and a research need, given that both metaphor and metonymy have been attested to play a crucial role as creative and persuasive devices in advertising narratives (Pérez-Sobrino, 2016, 2017). Our study aims to fill this research gap by addressing two main research questions:

- 1) To what extent are advertisements based on metonymic mappings perceived as engaging and persuasive compared to those based on metaphor?

- 2) To what extent do individual and group variables, such as nationality, age, gender, and need for cognition explain the reception of multimodal metonymy in advertising compared to metaphor?

We set out a study to measure the impact of multimodal metonymy in people's perception of adverts engagement and persuasiveness in comparison with metaphor-based adverts. We were interested in two additional variables as mediators: (1) whether the choice of the graphic representation of the metonymic adverts (that can be rendered in schematic drawings or detailed pictures) accounted for the potential variation in the appreciation for multimodal metonymy, and (2) whether different exposure times to metonymic adverts were likely to change people's attitudes towards the adverts (either positively or negatively).

We collected a corpus of 24 adverts, randomly sampled from the advertising database Ads of the World, www.adsoftheworld.com, showing a balanced amount of metaphor and metonymy, and schematic and content-rich designs. 83 participants (20 Spanish males and 21 Spanish females, 21 British males, 21 British females,) were recruited via Prolific (<https://www.prolific.co/>) and directed to a Qualtrics survey (www.qualtrics.com) where they were shown all 24 adverts in a random order. We scheduled 2 viewings for each advert: the first time, the advert was shown for 2 seconds, and the second time for 7 seconds. After each viewing, participants were asked to rate how engaging and persuasive they found the advert, and to report their interpretation of its meaning.

Our preliminary results show that people generally found metonymy-based adverts more engaging and persuasive the second time they looked at them. Moreover, adverts with richer depictions of metonymic messages (e.g. in pictures) are perceived as more engaging than those with schematic designs (e.g. drawings), although both content-rich and schematic adverts are considered equally convincing, regardless of the design choice. Further implications regarding gender and nationality variation will be discussed with authentic examples extracted from participant's responses.

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