

Metaphors and Body Copy in Online Advertising Effectiveness

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Abstract

The present study elaborates on the effect of visual and verbal metaphors in online advertising effectiveness. It suggests that the advertising copy execution (hard-sell vs. soft-sell) moderates the relationship between the metaphors used and consumers' ad and brand evaluations. One laboratory and two real-world experiments using Google Ads provide the empirical underpinnings of the study. The findings suggest that a metaphor, in the presence of a soft-sell rather than a hard-sell copy, leads to positive attitudes and increases click-through rate (CTR), while a literal advertisement improves attitudes and CTR when it incorporates a hard-sell rather than a soft-sell copy. Pertinent managerial implications with respect to the design of effective online advertisements are underlined.

Keywords: visual/ verbal metaphors, hard-/soft-sell copy, Google Ads

Introduction

Metaphors are one of the most popular rhetorical figures in advertising (Jeong 2008; Lagerwerf and Meijers 2008; Mohanty and Ratneshwar 2015; Myers et al. 2011). A metaphor is “an implied comparison between two dissimilar objects, such that the comparison results in aspects that normally apply to one object being transferred or carried over to the second object” (Sopory and Dillard 2002, p. 382). An illustration of a metaphor in advertising is the “Korean Airlines” ad that pictures a young woman holding a white dove, ready to fly. The ad compares two unlike objects, the dove and Korean’s Airlines, transferring the multiple global meanings of the dove (e.g., peacefulness, love, softness, purity, and safe flight) to the brand. The ad tagline states “Amsterdam-Madrid, 25 December, KE 925, from departure to arrival the world is my destination”.

Advertisements with metaphors seem to result in higher cognitive elaboration, greater source credibility, improved attitude toward the ad (Aad) and the brand (Abr) and greater purchase intention than do advertisements containing literal messages (Jeong 2008). The relationship between metaphors and consumers’ evaluations is affected by the degree of incongruity and the richness/openness of the metaphor, consumers’ gender, culture, need for cognition (NFC), self-regulatory focus, metaphoric thinking tendency, and type of processing, as well as the headline execution (Bok and Yeo 2019; Chang et al. 2018; Lagerwerf and Meijers 2008; Lee et al. 2019; Margariti et al. 2019; Mohanty and Ratneshwar 2015; Myers et al. 2011; Phillips 2000). Over the last couple of decades, two streams of research have emerged to address the effects of metaphors on consumers’ responses: While the first group of studies focused on the influence of metaphor complexity on its comprehension and appreciation (see Mohanty and Ratneshwar 2015; Van Mulken, Van Hooft, and Nederstigt 2014), the second one concentrated on the role of verbal anchoring on consumers’ evaluations of metaphors (Jeong 2008; Van Rompay and Velkamp 2014). The present study attempts to bridge these two streams of research and pinpoints four areas of research interest and potential contribution.

First, as the internet has evolved into a primary advertising medium, it attracts the main body of advertising expenditure in many developed and developing countries (including, for instance, the U.K. and China) (Kerr et al. 2015). Leading e-tailers, such as Groupon often use metaphors to instigate and stimulate consumer information-seeking behavior (Logan and Bright 2014). Despite this upsurge in online advertising activity, the main body of research associating metaphors to advertising effectiveness, focuses on print and TV advertising (Burgers et al. 2015; Toncar and Munch 2001; van Enschoot and Hoeken 2015). The present paper expands previous, fundamental literature in the context of promotion management in the online environment (Jiang 2009; Kim and Lee 2009), focusing on the impact of visual metaphors on consumers’ online responses.

Second, in the online environment, metaphoric appeals are often used in association with hard-sell advertising techniques (Okazaki 2004). The aforementioned “Korean Airlines” ad, for instance, employs a hard-sell copy fused with a visual

metaphor (dove). For instance, Google Ads platform often prompts users to incorporate hard-sell references such as “Buy now” in their ads displays. Even though the influence of verbal anchoring on the comprehension and appreciation of a metaphor has attracted attention (Lagerwerf and Meijers 2008), there seems to be a research void in the role of hard-sell (vs. soft-sell) body copy on the relationship between a metaphor and consumers’ evaluations. The present study postulates that hard-sell appeals could make the processing of metaphors too complex, leading to less favorable consumers’ attitudes. Studying the interaction effect between metaphors and body copy execution could, then, deepen understanding of how these creative advertising techniques work.

Third, in the internet advertising era, text-only advertisements are systematically used in both search engines and websites (Hervet et al. 2011) and are considered the primary form of profitable search advertising (Owens, Chaparro, and Palmer 2011). Therefore, research endeavors in the field of online marketing should focus on the role of verbal metaphors in text-only ads, so addressing the scarcity of knowledge on the effectiveness of verbal metaphors in online ads.

Fourth, despite the wide use of metaphors in real-world advertising campaigns, previous research papers have employed only laboratory experimental approaches. The external validity of laboratory research depends on the research topic and the effect size (Mitchell 2012). Field experiments, as an appropriate approach to address e-commerce issues (Parasuraman and Zinkhan 2002), could further test the hypothesized relationships in a real-world setting, moderating the limitations of laboratory research.

In the frame of the present study, a laboratory and a field experiment are combined to investigate the moderating role of body copy execution (hard-sell vs. soft-sell) on the effect of visual metaphors on attitude toward the online ad and the associated brand (experiment 1) as well as on CTR (field experiment). A third, (field) experiment examines the moderating effect of body copy execution on the relationship between verbal metaphors and CTR.

Given the gradually increasing emphasis on online communication over the last decade (Kerr et al. 2015), research on metaphors would improve interpretation of their effectiveness and could provide useful managerial and theoretical implications for the online advertising field.

Theoretical Background

Metaphors and Advertising

A metaphor advocates a comparison between two objects; the target and the source (or base), resulting in a transfer of properties from the source to the target (Van Mulken, Van Hooft, and Nederstigt 2014). For instance, in the classic business motto “the customer is the king” properties associated with a king (source) are transferred to the customer (target). The ground for this comparison is that both kings and customers are entitled to great services/amenities. The metaphorical comparison between kings

and customers, often used in organizations (e.g., Deluxe King Hotel calls its visitors to “Be a king again”, whereas a well-known fast-food Restaurant Company is called Dairy Queen), constitutes a typical example of a metaphor for the purposes of our study.

According to the “literal-primacy view”, (Beardsley 1962; 1967; MacCormac 1990) metaphors are semantic anomalies expressing literally false statements. While the interpreter of a metaphor tries to literally explain its meaning, he/she is detecting an anomaly or a violation of semantic rules and is seeking for an alternative metaphorical meaning (Sopory and Dillard 2002). The semantic anomaly of a metaphor increases both the interpreter’s cognitive tension and his/her desire to reduce it. Resolving the semantic anomaly by finding the non-literal meaning of the false statement increases the interpreter’s tension relief and perception of pleasure (MacCormac 1990). As for example, it is not possible all customers to be kings, this semantic anomaly generates cognitive tension and leads respondents to metaphorically interpret this motto.

The “structure mapping theory” (Gentner 1983) suggests that metaphors are cross-domain mappings that chart knowledge from a source domain into a target domain. Domains are systems of objects, object-attributes, and relations between objects. Metaphors are comparisons of relations between objects/attributes and tend to reveal that some relational structures of the source domain can be applied to the target domain (Sopory and Dillard 2002). For instance, the metaphor “the customer is the king” used by businesses does not signify that the customer wears a crown and holds a sword (overlap in attributes). Rather, it conveys the message that customers enjoy great services/amenities as kings do (overlap in relationships of attributes).

Visual or verbal metaphors are regularly used in advertising to attract consumers’ attention (Morgan and Reichert 1999) and increase ad and brand recall (Van Mulken, Le Pair, and Forceville 2010). Such positive outcomes might be attributed to the increased cognitive and affective elaboration (based on the literal primacy view) (MacCormac 1990), and the successful organization of advertising arguments (based on the structure mapping theory) (Gentner 1983) that are generated during the exposure to, and the elaboration of metaphors. Advertising metaphors have also been found to improve Aad and Abr and increase purchase intention (Ang and Lim 2006). A metaphor has a puzzle-solving character that allows multiple readings, an activity inherently pleasurable (Myers et al. 2011). The successful interpretation of a metaphor relieves cognitive tension and generates a sense of pleasure (based on the literal-primacy view) (MacCormac 1990). Prior studies on the effectiveness of metaphorical advertisements correspond to two streams of research focusing on either the complexity or the verbal anchoring of metaphors (Table 1).

[Place Table 1 about here]

Metaphor Complexity and Advertising Effectiveness

Complexity refers to the level of variety or diversity in a stimulus pattern (Berlyne 1958). A metaphor is a complex rhetorical figure that represents an artful deviation from ordinary expression. This element of artful deviation and irregularity increases complexity and has a significant effect on consumers' responses (McQuarrie and Mick 1996).

Metaphors in advertising elicit both cognitive and affective elaborations (Kim, Baek, and Choi 2012). Respondents to metaphors engage in cognitive elaboration in their attempt to comprehend the meaning of the figurative messages, and in affective elaboration through emotions such as metaphor-related pleasure and relief of tension. Individuals devote cognitive resources to identify relational structures between the source domain and the target domain, a process that invokes a rich set of associations in semantic memory according to structure mapping theory (Sopory and Dillard 2002). They, also, experience high levels of tension, and engage in a stimulating game of negotiation as they attempt to understand the metaphoric meaning(s) of the advertisement. By resolving the incongruous meaning of the metaphor, tension is reduced and positive feelings emerge (literal-primacy view) (MacCormac 1990). The pleasurable feelings and affective elaborations exerted by a metaphoric ad are attributed to its creative manifestation, the high aesthetics and the associated notions of novelty and complexity. Decoding novel and complex forms and patterns is a fundamental dimension of advertising creativity that generates arousal, surprise, and pleasure (Mercanti-Guérin 2008). Kim, Baek, and Choi (2012) imply a positive relationship between the complexity of the metaphor and advertising effectiveness. Metaphor-elicited cognitive elaborations affect attitude toward the advertiser, whereas metaphor-elicited affective elaborations influence ad perceptions and ad credibility.

On the contrary, Mohanty and Ratneshwar (2015) indicated that highly complex metaphorical advertisements require too much effort on the part of the consumer and limit subjective comprehension. Personal characteristics, such as "need for cognition" (Chang and Yen 2013; Mohanty and Ratneshwar 2015), processing style (Morgan and Reichert 1999; Myers et al. 2011) and the ability to process a metaphor (Phillips and McQuarrie 2009) appear to moderate the effect of metaphor complexity on consumer responses and hence validate the inverse relationship between subjective ad comprehension and metaphor complexity (Mohanty and Ratneshwar 2015). Consumers with high-need for cognition (Chang and Yen 2013), who use a relational (Mohanty and Ratneshwar 2015) or integrative processing style (Morgan and Reichert 1999) and have an increased ability to process metaphors, indicate higher levels of comprehension and appreciation of figurative ads. Hence, consumers with increased motivation and ability are more likely to successfully decipher the metaphor puzzle and appreciate the ad.

Recent studies (DeRosia 2008; Gkiouzepas and Hogg 2011; Van Mulken, Le Pair, and Forceville 2010; Van Mulken, Van Hooft, and Nederstigt 2014) propose a curvilinear (inverted U) relationship between metaphor complexity and consumers' responses based on the inverted U-curve pattern theories (Berlyne 1960; Sperber and Wilson 1995) with the hypothesis that moderate levels of complexity or incongruity can lead to optimal performance. Increased complexity is considered extreme and,

might lead to diminishing returns (Haans, Pieters, and He 2016). Hence, a metaphoric ad of moderate complexity could prove to be highly effective, induce maximum levels of comprehension (Van Mulken, Le Pair, and Forceville 2010) and exert appreciation and pleasure (Van Mulken, Van Hooft, and Nederstigt 2014).

Verbal Anchoring and the Effectiveness of Metaphorical Ads

The role of verbal anchoring on the effectiveness of metaphorical advertisements has been the focus of research endeavors (Jeong 2008; Lagerwerf, Van Hooijdonk, and Korenberg 2012; Myers et al. 2011), but they result in somewhat contradicting findings. One approach suggests a negative relationship between the presence of an explanatory headline and consumers' evaluations. A headline that explains a metaphor decreases a recipient's enjoyment and sense of achievement for solving the puzzle. Instead, the absence of verbal anchoring in a metaphorical advertisement can lead to increased ad liking, higher product belief and greater purchase intentions (Jeong 2008). The absence of verbal anchoring allows consumers to resolve visual ambiguity on their own and overcome the challenge of the metaphor (Phillips 2000).

Another group of studies proposes a positive relationship between the level of a headline's completeness and the comprehension and appreciation of a metaphor. Thoroughly anchored metaphorical advertisements are better understood (Lagerwerf, Van Hooijdonk, and Korenberg 2012) and lead to stronger brand beliefs about the key benefit conveyed by the visual metaphor, which in turn leads to a more positive Abr (Bergkvist et al. 2012). Hence, a complete headline helps recipients comprehend the metaphor, understand its meaning and experience a sense of pleasure.

There are, however, studies in which results seem to stand in between the two approaches (Van Rompay and Veltkamp 2014). According to Phillips (2000), a headline that provides a clue to the meaning of a pictorial metaphor increases both comprehension and ad liking, whereas a headline that completely explains the image puzzle increases comprehension but decreases ad liking since it reduces the pleasure of resolving the metaphor. In product packaging, also, explanatory information increases consumers' appreciation and positively affects brand excitement only in highly ambiguous metaphorical ads (Van Rompay and Veltkamp 2014). Myers et al. (2011), suggest that an explanatory headline induces less positive thoughts when information on product attributes is included in the body copy of the ad.

Although body copy is often used in real-world advertisements (An 2007), its role in the effectiveness of metaphorical advertisements has only been addressed by a single study (Myers et al. 2011). Metaphoric advertisements usually contain both anchoring headlines and a body copy that articulates key product attributes and relevant sale prompts. For instance, both Google Ads text and display ads (except for the pictorial part) deploy in three parts: a headline text, a display URL, and a description text (body copy). Hard-sell and soft-sell copy are the two most prominent types of advertising body copy (Applegate 2015). An advertisement without body copy although easily manipulated in an experimental setting, does not provide a realistic illustration (Myers et al. 2011). The present study intends to fill this research

gap, by investigating the role of hard-sell (vs. soft-sell) copy on metaphorical advertising effectiveness.

Hard-sell copy is designed to induce rational thinking by explicitly presenting a product's characteristics and its competitive advantage emphasizing at the same time a sales orientation. It is informative, of an urgent nature and motivates customers to make rapid purchase decisions. Soft-sell copy is transformative and is used in gentle, indirect, subtle messages that can lead to semantic expansion and/or the multiplication of meaning. Soft-sell copy induces emotional responses to the advertising stimuli (Mueller 1987). Hence, hard-sell copy induces more elaborate thinking through explicit and direct, fact-oriented messages, whereas soft-sell copy tries to evoke feelings, through implicit and image-oriented messages (Okazaki, Mueller, and Taylor 2010).

Both soft-sell and hard-sell appeals have an impact on ad believability and attitude. Soft-sell appeals lead to higher Aad and more favorable impressions, but lower believability and purchase intentions compared to hard-sell copy. Hard sell appeals are considered more irritating than soft-sell appeals, but none of them has been associated with high ad irritation (Okazaki, Mueller, and Taylor 2010).

Experiment 1

Hard-sell vs. Soft-sell Copy: moderating the relationship between Visual Metaphors and Consumers' Attitudes

The seminal study of Srull, Lichtenstein, and Rothbart (1985) suggests a theory on the organization and storage of information in memory. It emphasizes the role of a prior expectancy in the processing of information that is congruent or incongruent, relevant or irrelevant with the expectancy. "Expectancy refers to the degree to which an item or a piece of information falls into some predetermined pattern or structure evoked by an ad", whereas "relevancy refers to the degree to which an item or a piece of information contributes to the identification of the primary message communicated by the ad" (Lee and Mason 1999, p. 156). Unexpected-relevant information is processed longer in working memory, is linked to both congruent and other incongruent items and is better recalled than the other types of information (Srull, Lichtenstein, and Rothbart 1985). On the contrary, expected-relevant information is linked only to incongruent items, whereas irrelevant information receives little processing effort and is more poorly recalled than all other types of information.

Prior studies (Heckler and Childers 1992; Kellaris and Cline 2007) applying this theory in advertising highlight the outperformance of unexpected-relevant information compared to expected-relevant and irrelevant information, in recall and recognition measures. In the same vein, Lee and Mason (1999) indicate that advertising content with unexpected and relevant information generates more positive attitudes than that with expected and relevant information which in turn is more effective than that with irrelevant information. Unexpected information elicits greater primarily favorable cognitive elaboration that improves consumers' attitudes toward the ad and the brand.

Based on the above, it could be argued that a (unexpected) metaphor leads to more positive attitudes when it is combined with relevant rather than irrelevant information. A soft-sell copy, similarly to visual metaphors, tries to evoke feelings and thoughts, through emotion- and image-oriented messages (Okazaki, Mueller, and Taylor 2010). Thus, soft-sell copy seems relevant to visual metaphors. The implicitness and gentleness of soft-sell copy, consistent with the smartness and artfulness of metaphorical figures contribute to the development of a consolidated, appealing entity. Soft-sell copy is in accordance with visual metaphors that aim to subject consumers into an appealing experience. Hence, increased aesthetic pleasure is created from the “mood and atmosphere through a beautiful scene or the development of an emotional story” (Mueller 1987, p.53).

On the contrary, a hard-sell copy (operating as irrelevant information to the metaphorical ad's content) might restrict positive responses toward the advertisement as it diminishes the aesthetic experience and the successful comprehension of the metaphoric ambiguity. Since hard-sell appeals induce rational thinking and drive consumers' attention directly to product attributes and sales promotion information (Mueller 1987), it is likely that they will offset the metaphors' “stopping power” (Cutler, Thomas, and Rao 2000), and prevent them from attracting attention and narrating their story (Moriarty 1987). A hard-sell copy is expected to be highly relevant to literal advertising content. The informative nature of hard-sell copy aims to provide quantitative and factual arguments and benefits to persuade consumers to buy the product. Taking into consideration the long-established relationship between attitude toward the advertisement and attitude toward the brand (Eisend 2011; Gardner 1985) it is expected that the pleasure consumers experience when they are exposed to and process the message of a metaphoric advertisement might also be attributed to the advertised brand (Van Mulken, Van Hooft, and Nederstigt 2014). Thus, the following hypothesis is advanced:

H1: There is an interaction effect between the use of hard-sell (vs. soft-sell) copy and visual metaphors (vs. literal visuals) on Aad and the Abr, such that: Visual metaphors have a more positive effect on **(a)** Aad and **(b)** Abr when the ad contains a soft-sell rather than a hard-sell copy. On the contrary, literal visuals have a more positive effect on **(c)** Aad and **(d)** Abr when the ad contains a hard-sell rather than a soft-sell copy.

Methodology

Materials

A 2 (visual metaphor/literal image) x 2 (hard/soft-sell copy) experimental design was employed to explore the interaction effect of visual metaphors and copy execution on a) Aad and on b) Abr. A hotel's banner in two different visual versions was designed. The first version showed a contemporary woman in modern attire waiting in the hotel's lobby. The second version incorporated a visual metaphor with a woman

dressed as a princess from a past era, waiting in the same reception area. The objective of the second version was to lead consumers to interpret that “the hotel is as luxurious as a palace”. Both ads used the same anchoring headline: “Red Cliff Hotel for a high standard stay!”. With respect to the advertising copy, a hard-sell and a soft-sell were incorporated in the two ads. The hard-sell copy stated: “Elati, with a discount of 20% only for Ash Monday”. The soft-sell copy indicated: “Elati the most charming destination”. The combination of execution-style and type of copy resulted in four distinct treatment groups: (1) Literal image (contemporary woman) with hard-sell copy, (2) literal image (contemporary woman) with soft-sell copy, (3) metaphorical image (princess) with hard-sell copy and (4) metaphorical image (princess) with soft-sell copy.

Pretest

Greece was used as the reference country, since it is a high-context society where communication tends to be indirect, ambiguous, and figurative (Hall 1989; Margariti et al. 2019). Also, prior research on visual metaphors has been carried out in Greece (Gkiouzepas and Hogg 2011), offering a reference point for the analysis of the impact of metaphors on advertising effectiveness. An online sample of 95 participants in Greece was used to pretest the manipulation of both the visual metaphor and the advertising copy. Participants stated their perception of the advertising character on a 4-point Likert-scale [1 (very literal) to 4 (very metaphorical)]. They rated visual metaphor (princess) above 2 ($M=2.71$), while the literal image (contemporary woman) ranked below 2 ($M=1.68$) ($t=5.394$, $p<.001$). Participants also evaluated the advertising copy for the hard ($\alpha=.87$) or soft-sell appeals ($\alpha=.76$) on a 7-point Likert-scale (Okazaki, Mueller, and Taylor 2010). Hard-sell copy was perceived by participants as more hard-sell than the soft-sell copy ($M_{\text{HardSell}}= 5.85$ vs. $M_{\text{SoftSell}} = 4.17$; $t_{\text{HardSell}}(93) = 30.803$, $p < .001$). Similarly, the soft-sell copy was perceived as more soft-sell compared to the hard-sell ($M_{\text{HardSell}}= 4.63$ vs. $M_{\text{SoftSell}} = 5.98$; $t_{\text{SoftSell}}(93) = 27.388$, $p < .001$).

Participants and Procedure

An online experiment with 169 participants (86 women) aged between 18 and 40 years old, was conducted. Four treatment groups were exposed to the same questionnaire and one of the four experimental conditions. Translation and back-translation were applied to ready the questionnaire for the Greek participants who were asked to evaluate a novel ad for a new, actual service.

Measures

Attitude toward the ad and brand were evaluated for each commercial, based on a 5-point Likert scale, [(1) “strongly disagree” to (5) “strongly agree”] (Table 2). Participants assessed the degree to which they considered the commercials to be

likable, interesting, convincing, pleasant, easy to recall, and effective (adopted from Baker and Kennedy 1994) ($\alpha=.89$). Abr was measured by a 6-item scale (e.g., “Do you like the advertised brand?”; “Do you think this is a good brand?”; “Do you feel favorably toward this brand?”; “Would you recommend the advertised brand to others?”) adopted from Geuens and De Pelsmacker (1998) ($\alpha=.9$). Internal consistency for both multi-item scales satisfied Nunnally's (1978) criterion.

[Place Table 2 about here]

Results

The perceived metaphor turned out to be higher for the princess character ($M=3.01$) when compared to the contemporary woman ($M=1.87$) ($t(167)=13.29$, $p<.001$). Participants further perceived the difference between the hard-sell and soft-sell copy ($M_{HardSell}= 5.4$ vs. $M_{SoftSell}= 4.65$; $t_{HardSell}(138)= 4.93$, $p <.001$) ($M_{HardSell}= 4.6$ vs. $M_{SoftSell}= 5.48$; $t_{SoftSell} (135) = 4.98$, $p <.001$) indicating a successful manipulation.

Two ANOVAs with visual metaphor (vs. literal image) and copy execution (hard-sell vs. soft-sell) as independent variables and Aad and Abr as dependent variables were conducted for the purposes of experiment 1. As H1 posited, a statistically significant interaction effect of the hard-sell/soft-sell variable and the visual metaphor on Aad ($F(1, 165)=36.42$, $p<.001$), and Abr ($F(1, 165)=38.25$, $p<.001$) (Table 3) was evident. Planned contrasts on the nature of the above interaction, indicated a statistically significant difference between metaphoric ads with a hard-sell and soft-sell copy, in terms of Aad ($M_{MHardSell}=2.51$, $M_{MSoftSell}=3.5$, $F(1, 165)=16.67$, $p<.001$) (Figure 1). Hence, H1a is accepted. A statistically significant difference was also recorded between metaphoric ads that contain a hard-sell and a soft-sell copy, with respect to Abr ($M_{MHardSell}=2.44$, $M_{MSoftSell}=3.54$, $F(1, 165)=25.12$, $p<.001$) (Figure 2). Thus, H1b is also supported.

[Place Table 3 about here]

[Place Figure 1 about here]

[Place Figure 2 about here]

Planned contrast analysis also reveals that a literal visual message enhances Aad, when it includes a hard-sell rather than a soft-sell copy ($M_{LHardSell}=3.22$, $M_{LSoftSell}=2.17$, $F(1, 165)=19.88$, $p<.001$) (Figure 1). Thus, H1c is supported. In addition, there is a statistically significant difference in Abr between a literal visual with a hard-sell and a literal visual with a soft-sell copy ($M_{LHardSell}=3.2$, $M_{LSoftSell}=2.52$, $F(1, 165)=13.92$, $p<.001$) (Figure 2). Therefore, H1d is also accepted.

Discussion

The findings shed light on the interaction effect of visual metaphors and soft-sell copy on Aad and Abr. Favorable attitudes are documented when a visual metaphor is combined with a soft-sell copy, as through this harmonious coexistence (Anderson 1994; Lee and Schumann 2004), it becomes easier for consumers to grasp the information about the ad and the brand. In other words, the image and the text complement and enhance one another, creating an entity of moderate complexity that arouses pleasurable feelings also attributed to the advertised brand.

Moreover, in accordance with our hypotheses, the coexistence of hard-sell copy and literal visuals exerts positive effects on Aad and Abr. Being straightforward and informative, hard-sell copy leads to rational thinking (Okazaki, Mueller, and Taylor 2010). Its aesthetic style and semantic value seem relevant to the explicitness of literal visuals. Based on the argument that the dissimilarity of elements increases complexity (Mercanti-Guerin 2008), the existence of similar elements (i.e., hard-sell copy and literal visuals) reduces cognitive effort and increases ad and brand appreciation.

Even though the findings in experiment 1 support the research hypotheses, the laboratory setting used in the experimental process reduces the applicability of these findings in a broader range of conditions. Hence, a real-world follow-up experiment was designed.

Experiment 2

Laboratory and Real-World Experiments

Laboratory experiments are commonly used in advertising, permitting control over conditions such as the sample, the time of the act, the rewards and the manipulation of the variables under examination. Lab experiments enable researchers to obtain information on participants, effectively communicate the instructions and get instant feedback (Horton, Rand, and Zeckhauser 2011).

The main shortcoming of lab experiments centers on the pragmatism and generalizability of findings and leads to a significant limitation on external validity (Campbell and Stanley 2015). Lab experiments often fail to copy a real-life scenario and exclude the investigation of contexts that allow a deep understanding of consumer behavior. Participants in an experiment can get confused leading to false conclusions that pertain to the actual consumer behavior (Kingstone et al. 2003; Lynch 1999). Lab experiments unlike real-world ones, are based on convenient samples and lack population variety. Samples with reduced diversity cannot unveil different treatment effects apparent when stimuli materials from an experimental condition resonate differently among various demographic subpopulations (Cassese et al. 2013). Lab experiments in comparison to real-world ones are subject to the Hawthorne effect; that is participants feel they are observed during the experimental process and may thus produce biased responses (Falk and Heckman 2009). Real-world experiments tend to be more realistic, even though they are conducted under reduced control settings.

Laboratory and real-world experiments seem to vary in significant dimensions, such as subject characteristics, settings, and context (Lynch 1999). Apparently, there is skepticism on the suitability of both approaches. Hence, as Falk and Heckman (2009) suggest, researchers should take advantage of the complementing forces of both lab and real-world experiments to gain a deeper understanding of the way consumers form responses. Google Ads platform is an exceptional advertising vehicle that allows for real life experiments to be conducted (Guerini, Strapparava and Stock 2010).

Google Ads

Google Ads platform, owned and promoted by Google, offers a number of advertising types (i.e., text, image/display, video, app-promotion, call-only ads, etc.) (Google 2020a), and different ways of targeting (i.e., audience and content targeting) (Google 2020b). Text ads are the most popular type of pay-per-click advertising. Text ads include at least a headline, a short descriptive text, and a URL that leads users to the advertiser's website. Advertisers can choose a plethora of relevant keywords for their advertising campaign in order to reach their target audiences. On the other hand, display/image Google ads are displayed on many commercial websites across the internet and reach people while they are browsing their favorite websites through their PC, laptop, tablet, or mobile device.

Google Ads adopts an ad auction model, and hence there is no particular set cost for a single ad. Advertisers bid an amount for a click or for ad impressions. Cost per click or per impression is determined by the bid amount, the quality of the ad, and the expected impact from ad extensions and other ad formats (Google 2020c). Keywords' cost ranges from a few cents to a couple of hundred dollars. If an advertiser targets keywords that have high commercial intent and high value, the charge may be substantial.

Google Ads has a protection mechanism against potential unethical competition activities, the "invalid clicks" (Google 2020d) as the system can identify the user's IP, cookies, and the frequency of clicks. Also, it provides the ability to launch an advertising campaign very quickly. Users are reached at exact moment of their search increasing potential responses.

The Impact of Visual Metaphors and Copy Execution on Click-through Rate

Online communication strategies have gained considerable attention from both academics and practitioners, due to their global resonance, one-to-one and many-to-many targeting (Drèze and Hussherr 2003). There is ample evidence that a brand's online advertising boosts its image, increases awareness of and enhances purchase intention (Lohtia, Donthu and Hershberger 2003). Thus, as people increasingly immerse themselves in the internet (Hoffman, Novak, and Venkatesh 2004), the online industry puts great emphasis on unveiling the relationship between online advertising and consumers' web experiences (Hoffman and Novak 2009).

Click-through rate (CTR) reveals consumers' level of interest in online advertisements and operates as a metric for evaluating advertising effectiveness (Chandon, Chtourou, and Fortin 2003; Lohtia, Donthu and Hershberger 2003). It refers to the rate at which consumers click on advertisements and redirect to another online location. CTR is the percentage ratio of the number of times an ad is clicked to the number of ad's impressions (Lohtia, Donthu and Hershberger 2003, p.411). Factors such as users' motives and involvement with the product category (Cho 2003), the successful targeting of online advertisements (Chandon, Chtourou, and Fortin 2003), the relevance of the ad to the site (Cho 2003), and the ad's size as a dimension of advertising creativity (Baltas 2003) have been found to influence CTR effectiveness.

Similarly to the first experiment, it is expected that soft-sell copy will be preferred to hard-sell copy in online advertisements that incorporate a visual metaphor. A soft-sell copy builds on the metaphor's semantic expansion and stimulates consumers' interest and responses (Mueller 1987; Okazaki, Mueller, and Taylor 2010). Hard-sell copy will be more effective in terms of CTR when combined with literal visuals, as such stimuli provide consumers with a harmonious and consistent narrative, in a more factual and informative manner that does not confuse and leads to positive online responses. Therefore, it is suggested that:

H2: There is an interaction effect between the use of hard-sell (vs. soft-sell) copy and visual metaphors (vs. literal visuals) on CTR, such that: **(a)** Visual metaphors have a more positive effect on CTR when the ad contains a soft-sell rather than a hard-sell copy, whereas **(b)** literal visuals have a more positive effect on CTR when the ad contains a hard-sell rather than a soft-sell copy.

Methodology

Stimulus Materials

A modified banner ad for the aforementioned hotel, in four different versions, was adapted for the purpose of the second experiment. Two advertising copies, a hard-sell "Elati, with a 20% discount only for Christmas", and a soft-sell "Elati, the most charming destination" were used. Participants were accordingly divided into four treatment groups.

Participants and Process

A display advertising campaign with Google Ads was used, given that the platform enables real-life experiments to be conducted (Guerini, Strapparava, and Stock 2012). There was no researcher-respondent interaction, and the participants had the same probability with every other internet user of being selected (i.e., random sampling). Moreover, the subjects were unaware, and unbiased, as they took part in the experimental process during their regular web activity. A drawback of using Google

Ads, for research purposes, is that it does not provide personalized information per user, i.e., demographic, behavioral, and purchasing data. Instead, Google Ads offers general demographic reports for the group of users who interact with the ads. Overall, 804,685 internet users viewed the ads during their regular web browsing over a month resulting in 1,103 clicks. All four ads were almost equally disseminated; (199,147 metaphorical ads with hard-sell copy, 201,911 metaphorical ads with soft-sell copy, 213,148 literal ads with hard-sell copy and 190,478 literal ads with soft-sell copy), based on the “rotate ads indefinitely without optimization” option. CTR, a popular online measure of advertising effectiveness, that indicates consumers’ interest, was the dependent variable of the study. The experiment run at an approximate cost of 150€.

Results

ANOVA of mean percentages was conducted with visual metaphor (vs. literal visual) and copy execution (hard-sell vs. soft-sell) as the independent variables and CTR (percentage) as the dependent variable (Appendix 2). Planned contrasts supported H2a, indicating a statistically significant interaction between the hard-sell/soft-sell copy and the visual metaphor ($F=14.408$, $p<.001$). The visual metaphor advertisement lead to more clicks (CTR) in the presence of a soft-sell rather than a hard-sell copy ($M_{MHardSell}=0.13\%$, $M_{MSoftSell}=0.16\%$; $F(1, 804,681)=4.191$, $p<.05$). Literal ads resulted in higher CTR, when they contain a hard-sell rather than a soft-sell copy ($M_{LHardSell}=0.15\%$, $M_{LSoftSell}=0.11\%$; $F(1, 804,681)=11.036$, $p<.001$), thus supporting H2b (Figure 3).

[Place Figure 3 about here]

Discussion

Falk and Heckman (2009), suggest that the synergy between lab and real-world experiments could lead to fruitful conclusions about consumers’ responses even in the case of divergent outcomes. In the present study, Experiment 2 complements and expands the findings of Experiment 1 by looking into consumers’ online behavior (CTR) toward advertising that incorporates visual metaphors (vs. literal visuals) and hard-sell (vs. soft-sell) copy, in a real-world scenario. Metaphoric ads with soft-sell copy seem to be more effective and attain higher CTR. Contemplating prior research (Lee and Mason 1999) we showed that when a metaphoric ad includes a soft-sell copy, consumers appreciate a homogenous, creative advertising whole. Similarly, a literal ad with a hard-sell copy has a positive effect on CTR, due to its consistent, informative nature.

Although the outcome of the second experiment clearly indicates the effectiveness of metaphoric ads with soft-sell copy, it is not evident whether the effectiveness originates from the metaphorical stimulus itself or the visual part of the ad. Hence, a third experiment was designed to examine the interaction effect between

the use of verbal metaphors (vs. literal verbal language) and copy execution (hard vs. soft-sell copy).

Experiment 3

Verbal Metaphors and Copy Execution in Online Advertising

Verbal metaphors are rhetorical arrangements and amalgamations of words and signs that conceptually deviate from their expected use and operate as smart devices persuading consumers, and generating positive attitudes (Stathakopoulos, Theodorakis, and Mastoridou 2008). Rhetorical, verbal figures, such as tropes and schemes, attract readers not only by their meaning but also by their wording. Verbal metaphors, although not as polysemic as the visual ones, manage to operate by generating ambiguities and incongruities that trigger consumer actions (McQuarrie and Mick 1992). Therefore, in line with hypothesis 2, it is expected that:

H3: There is an interaction effect between the use of hard-sell (vs. soft-sell) copy and verbal metaphors (vs. literal verbal language) on CTR, such that: **(a)** Verbal metaphors have a more positive effect on CTR when the ad contains a soft-sell rather than a hard-sell copy, while **(b)** literal verbal language has a more positive effect on CTR when the ad contains a hard-sell rather than a soft-sell copy.

Methodology

Stimulus Materials

Three text ads in four, different versions, about an actual hotel “Monodendri” in Zagorochoria, Greece, were designed for the purpose of the third experiment. Each text ad contained the same headline (i.e., “Monodendri” in Zagorochoria, Greece), a small description and a body copy. The small description in the two versions of the first text ad stated: “High altitude, high ratings” (literal) or “High altitude, high values” (metaphoric). One of the versions of this second text ad cited “Big rooms and big food portions” (literal) while the other stated “Big rooms, big dreams” (metaphoric), and the two versions of the third text ad “Warm rooms, warm bed” (literal) or “Warm rooms, warm heart” (metaphoric). The hard-sell copy pointed “Monodendri, in March with a 30% discount” and the soft-sell stated, “Monodendri, it mesmerizes you”. Therefore, in each of the three text ads, there were four (4) treatment scenarios with respect to literal verbal language (references to ratings, portions of food and bed) with (1) hard-sell and (2) soft-sell copy, versus verbal metaphors (references to values, dreams, and heart) with (3) hard-sell and (4) soft-sell copy.

Participants and Process

Google Ads platform was used for the purposes of the third experiment. The sampling frame referred to the whole internet population. Participants were unaware of their contribution to the survey. All versions of the ads were equally disseminated based on the “rotate ads indefinitely without optimization” option. Out of 31,753 views (8,024 views of the literal ad with hard-sell copy, 7,789 of the metaphorical ad with hard-sell copy, 7,982 of the literal ad with soft-sell copy and 7,958 of the metaphorical ad with soft-sell copy), 438 clicks on the ads were logged in both Greece and Cyprus. The approximate cost of the experiment was 150€.

Measures and Pretest

CTR was the dependent variable under study. A pretest of the stimuli indicated that the three metaphoric headlines ($M=3.1$) were perceived as more figurative than the literal headlines ($M=1.86$) ($t=7.022$, $p<.001$). Participants also realized a difference between the hard-sell and soft-sell copy ($M_{\text{HardSell}}= 5.26$ vs. $M_{\text{SoftSell}} = 4.04$; $t_{\text{HardSell}}(69) = 7.21$, $p < .001$) ($M_{\text{HardSell}}= 4.45$ vs. $M_{\text{SoftSell}} = 5.52$; $t_{\text{SoftSell}}(61) = 6.17$, $p < .001$).

Results

Verbal metaphor (vs. literal verbal language) and copy execution (hard-sell vs. soft-sell) served as the independent variables and CTR as the dependent variable in an ANOVA of mean percentages (Appendix 2). The findings designated a statistically significant interaction between hard/soft-sell copy and the verbal metaphor ($F(1, 31,749)=16.863$, $p<.001$). Planned contrast analysis indicated that the advertisement with a verbal metaphor and a soft-sell copy leads to higher levels of CTR compared to the ad with a verbal metaphor and a hard-sell copy ($M_{\text{MSoftSell}}=1.7\%$, $M_{\text{MHardSell}}=1.0\%$; $F(1, 31,749)=13.983$, $p<.001$) in support of H3a. The advertisement with literal verbal language and a hard-sell copy also resulted in higher levels of CTR compared to the literal verbal language and soft-sell copy ad ($M_{\text{LHardSell}}=1.6\%$, $M_{\text{LSoftSell}}=1.2\%$, $F(1, 31,749)=4.249$, $p=.039$) supporting H3b (Figure 4).

[Place Figure 4 about here]

Discussion

Experiment 3 elaborates on the long-neglected interaction of verbal metaphors and copy execution in online advertising and its effect on CTR. This real-world, online experiment underlines two distinct scenarios: the interplay of a verbal metaphor with soft-sell copy, and the coexistence of literal verbal language with hard-sell copy have a significant positive effect on CTR.

Discussion and Managerial Implications

Visual metaphors represent a predominant creative advertising tool that increases attention (Morgan and Reichert 1999) and generates favorable attitudes (Ang and Lim 2006). Visual metaphors have been extensively scrutinized in advertising research (Lagerwerf and Meijers 2008; Mohanty and Ratneshwar 2015; Myers et al. 2011; Van Mulken, Le Pair, and Forceville 2010), but not so much with respect to the role of body execution and its impact on metaphorical ad effectiveness (Myers et al. 2011). As such, the conjunction of visual metaphors and copy execution (soft vs. hard-sell) creates new avenues for research.

Concentrating on the interaction effect of copy execution (soft vs. hard-sell) and visual metaphors on attitudes in an online lab environment, experiment 1 postulates that visual metaphors generate more favorable Aad and Abr when the ad incorporates a soft rather than a hard-sell copy. Literal visuals lead to more favorable Aad and Abr when they are combined with a hard rather than a soft-sell copy.

Experiment 2 prioritized the ability for experimental study 1 to operate in a more general frame in order to further explain consumer behavior. Transcending from lab to a real-world environment, experiment 2 divulges that CTR increases for ads combining a visual metaphor with a soft rather than a hard-sell copy. Literal visuals with a hard-sell copy create a less intriguing albeit relevant, informative advertising stimulus that respectively increases CTR.

Experiment 3 focused on the interplay of verbal metaphors (vs. literal verbal language) with hard-sell/soft-sell copy in prompting CTR. Text ads, as in Google Ads, have recently surpassed display ads in terms of CTR effectiveness and have thus increased in popularity among advertising practitioners. Correspondingly this transcends academic interest from visual to verbal elements. Experiment 3 evidences that higher CTR is prompted when the ad incorporates a verbal metaphor with a soft-sell copy or literal language with a hard-sell copy.

Visual metaphor ads with a soft-sell copy or literal visuals with a hard-sell copy are aesthetically and semantically relevant advertising stimuli that induce favorable attitudes and increase CTR. Both types of ads require moderate levels of cognitive effort as their semantic anomalies (in metaphoric ads with a soft-sell copy) or their literal accuracy (in literal ads with a hard-sell copy) aid message comprehension and enable consumers to experience an aesthetically harmonious, gratifying stimulus that positively affects their attitude. Instead, metaphorical ads with a hard-sell copy or literal ads with a soft-sell copy provide an irrelevant, contradictory stimulus to resolve, diminish pleasure and negatively affect Aad, Abr, and CTR.

The present study broadens our understanding of visual metaphors in several ways. The originality of the current study lies on the fact that it extends previous studies in the context of promotion management (Jiang 2009; Kim and Lee 2009; Hu, Lin and Zhang 2003) that, from 1992 until 2019, principally focus on themes such as online marketing, electronic markets and internet services (Kumar et al. 2020). More specifically, the present study elaborates on the role of metaphors in the online milieu. Web pages as highly competitive environments contain a multiplicity of messages for numerous brands striving to capture consumers' attention. Considering the abundance of information on the internet, advertisers seek to launch smart, innovative and

creative advertising campaigns, such as the ones incorporating metaphors. The concurrence of metaphors (visual or verbal) with a soft-sell copy and that of literal visuals with a hard-sell copy create a highly aesthetic advertising profile, complete any semantic inferences and lead to more favorable attitudes and increased CTR.

The present paper further expands our understanding of verbal anchoring (Table 1), body copy and their impact on advertising effectiveness. Although the role of verbal anchoring on consumers' attitudes toward figurative advertisements (Lagerwerf, Van Hooijdonk, and Korenberg 2012; Myers et al. 2011; Phillips 2000) has been extensively discussed, the effect of body-copy on a metaphorical ad's effectiveness (Myers et al. 2011) remains rather unclear. Based on three experimental studies, this paper deciphers the moderating effect of hard and soft-sell copy on the relationship between metaphors, consumers' attitudes, and online responses, and underlines new avenues for research.

We also expand prior research on the effects of metaphor complexity on consumers' responses (Table 1) (Chang and Yen 2013; Mohanty and Ratneshwar 2015; Morgan and Reichert 1999; Phillips and McQuarrie 2009). Metaphors with a soft-sell copy and literal approaches with a hard-sell copy represent messages of moderate complexity. Instead, metaphors with a hard-sell copy and literal approaches with a soft-sell copy are messages of high irrelevancy and increased complexity that results in less favorable Aad, Abr and lower CTR.

Moreover, two experimental studies (2 and 3) examined figurative advertisements in an actual, less controlled and manipulated setting, that allowed participants the freedom to click on their areas of interest at their own pace. Given that consumers are increasingly internet-hooked (Hoffman, Novak, and Venkatesh 2004), comprehending their actual attitude and behavior toward online ads and the associated brands is topical and relevant.

Given the increased popularity of text ads (as in Google Ads), it is timely to direct academic interest from visual to verbal elements. This study expands the pertinent literature by looking into the influence of verbal metaphors on CTR. It attempts to unveil the origin (impact of visual element or metaphor) of the positive interaction effect of copy execution and visual metaphors on CTR (as recorded in study 2). Our third experiment indicates that the transformative nature of verbal metaphors and soft-sell copy enhances positive online reactions (CTR), whereas literal ads lead to higher CTR when they include a hard rather than a soft-sell copy.

Recollecting the above discussion, several managerial implications arise. In today's highly competitive business environment, companies are on the lookout for aesthetic, smart and innovative forms of advertising that stand out from the crowd. The online environment is particularly demanding on companies wishing to break through the clutter, grasp consumers' attention, stimulate both cognition and affection and eventually influence Aad and Abr. Our findings suggest that marketing managers should design advertising stimuli with aesthetically and semantically relevant visual and verbal elements that form part of consistent storytelling to create favorable attitudes. An advertisement with a visual metaphor and a soft-sell copy provides a balanced, relevant advertising content that captures consumer attention. Soft-sell copy

can operate as an aesthetic and semantic "extension" or even as explanation to the imaginative nature and incongruity, of the visual metaphor. As consumers strive for message consistency and uniformity, they prefer congruent messages in the form of metaphoric ads with a soft-sell copy or even literal ads with hard-sell appeals.

Limitations and Further Research

Like most experimental studies, all three experiments reported in this paper are context-specific in terms of the audience and the industry used. The first study focuses on Greek respondents while experiments 2 and 3 were addressed to Greek and Cypriot participants. Considering that there lie cross-cultural differences between high (such as Greek and Cypriot societies) and low context societies with respect to the use and role of visual metaphors (Margariti et al. 2019), it is suggested that future research could focus on other culturally diverse populations to enhance the generalizability of findings. It would be interesting also if researchers examine whether the "princess" metaphor ad version incorporated in the current study have different responses between cultures with monarchy and anti-monarchy sentiments. Moreover, all experiments focus on the hotel industry, due to its widespread presence in Google Ads and its significance for the Greek and Cypriot economies. Future research endeavors could target alternative product categories or services, at different levels of involvement. Provided that visual (and verbal) metaphors and soft-sell copy are characterized by a highly transformative nature, advertisements combining such elements might be more apt for products and brands with an imaginative profile, as in the fashion or holiday sectors. Instead, for advertisers aiming to communicate more factual data about a product or a brand, as in the insurance and health industries, such advertisements are deemed less appropriate. On a final note, future researchers could further examine the relationships discussed in this study by considering the mediating role of different variables such as ad complexity and comprehension or aesthetic pleasure.

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Figures

Figure 1. Moderating Effect of a Hard-sell (vs. Soft-sell) Copy on the Relationship between Visual Metaphor and Aad (H1a and H1c)

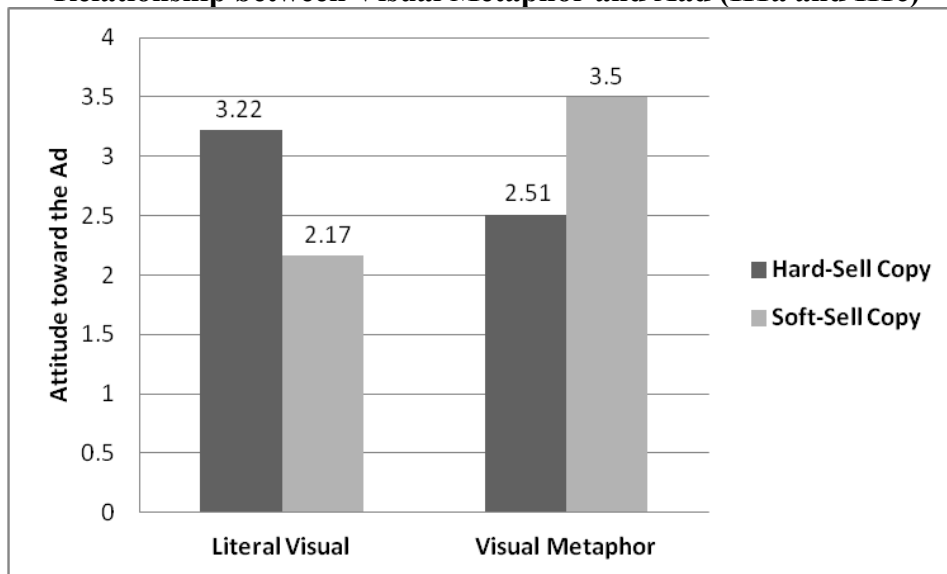


Figure 2. Moderating Effect of a Hard-sell (vs. Soft-sell) Copy on the Relationship between Visual Metaphor and Abr (H1b and H1d)

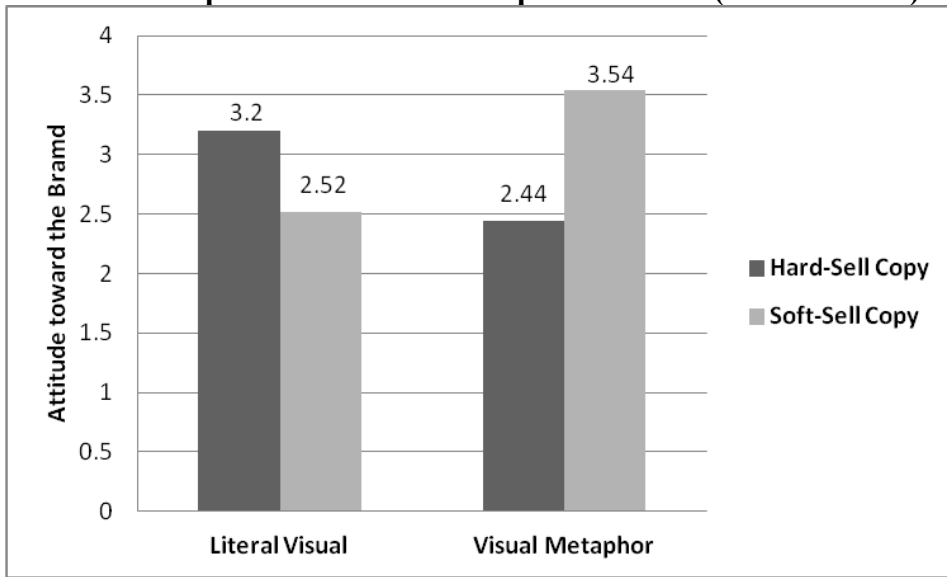


Figure 3. Moderating Effect of a Hard-sell (vs. Soft-sell) Copy on the Relationship between Visual Metaphor and CTR (H2a and H2b)

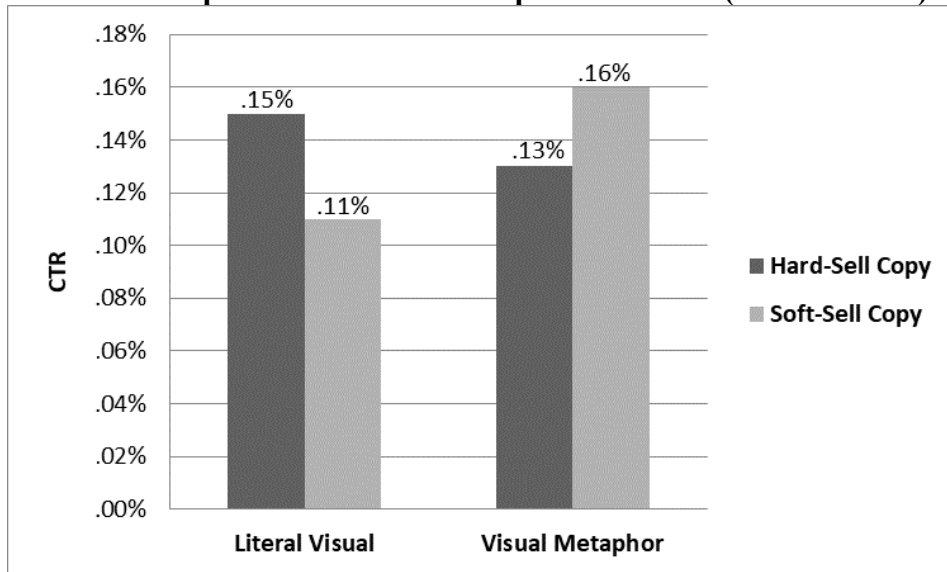
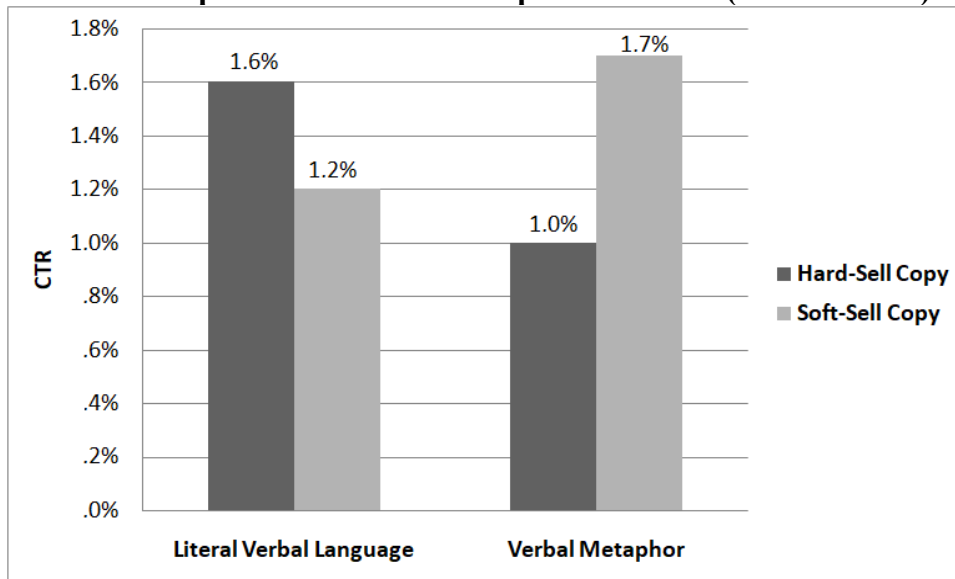


Figure 4. Moderating Effect of a Hard-sell (vs. Soft-sell) Copy on the Relationship between Verbal Metaphor and CTR (H3a and H3b)



Tables

Table 1. Studies on the role of message complexity and verbal anchoring on the appreciation of metaphors in advertising

Studies on Complexity					
	Study	Year of publication	Reference Country	Sample/ Method	Main Findings
1	Mohanty and Ratneshwar	2015	U.S.A	Study 1: 268 participants, online experiment Qualtrics software Study 2: 219 students / Experiment Study 3: 473 participants / Experiment	Visual Metaphor (VM) ads subjective comprehension is poorer in higher Need for Cognition. Consumers with high-Need for Cognition demonstrate higher levels of comprehension. NFC and type of processing are key variables in resolving the incongruity of visual metaphors.
2	van Mulken Van Hooft, and Nederstigt	2014	France, Spain Germany, Netherlands.	647 participants / Experiment	Metaphoric ads exert greater appreciation, and comprehension. Moderate visual metaphors have a greater effect on appreciation than simpler or more complex metaphors. Comparable sources and targets in metaphors reduce appreciation.
3	Gkiouzepas and Hogg	2011	Greece	Study 1: 247 undergraduate students / Experiment Study 2: 110 students / Experiment	Aad and Abr was greater in visual metaphors with synthesis than with juxtaposition in low-tension conditions.
4	Toncar and Munch	2001	U.S.A	108 students / Experiment	In low involvement conditions, subjects process the ad information more deeply, liked the ad more, thought more favorably of the product and remembered the ad better. Tropes were more deeply processed but they appear to circumvent the cognitive defenses of viewers.
5	Chang and Yen	2013	Taiwan	Study 1: 414 undergraduate students /Experiment Study 2: 312 undergraduate and graduate students / Experiment	In high NFC, metaphors induce deeper processing and generate more positive attitude and PI. Consumers with high NFC have positive attitude and higher PI in response to an explicit metaphor. More positive Abr and PI are exerted by implicit and explicit metaphors than non-metaphoric ads. For consumers with high NFC, PI and positive Abr are higher for hedonic products with implicit metaphors and for utilitarian with explicit metaphors.
6	Kim, Baek, and Choi	2012	U.S.A	Study 1: 208 participants / Experiment Study 2: 166 participants / Experiment	Metaphoric ads generate more cognitive and affective elaborations than literal ads. Metaphor-elicited affective elaboration positively affects ad perceptions and ad credibility. Metaphor-elicited cognitive elaboration positively affects attitude toward the advertiser. In high involvement, utilitarian products, the total effect of cognitive elaborations on Aad, is greater than the total effect of affective elaborations. In low involvement, hedonic products, the total effect of affective elaborations on Aad, is greater than the total effect of

					cognitive elaborations.
7	Phillips and McQuarrie	2009	U.S.A	344 undergraduate students / Experiment	There is no significance on whether advertising headline uses a pun, metaphor or rhyme. Artful deviation is significant in headline, regardless of the rhetoric scheme. A metaphor can reshape consumers' beliefs only if it is perceived artfully deviant from what is generally expected.
8	Morgan and Reichert	1999	U.S.A	103 undergraduate students / Experiment	Concrete metaphors are easier to comprehend than the abstract ones. Visual metaphors have a higher comprehension rate than verbal metaphors. A metaphorical comparison supported by a visual image enhances the comprehensibility of the metaphor.
9	Pawlowski, Badzinski, and Mitchell	1998	U.S.A	62 children / Experiment	Metaphors are most likely to enhance recall when they are linked to the advertised product. Young audiences cannot easily interpret visual metaphors.
10	He, Chen, and Alden	2010	U.S.A	3 Experiments (extended abstract)	Concrete metaphors induce greater levels of imagery processing and enhance message effectiveness. Congruency between metaphor format and processing goals facilitates processing fluency and enhances message effectiveness.
11	DeRosia	2008	U.S.A	190 undergraduate students / Experiment	Consumers with low /high motivation, demonstrate fewer positive responses toward nonverbal symbolic signs and metaphors as opposed to consumers with moderate motivation. A minimum level of cognitive effort is demanded to comprehend nonverbal symbolic signs and metaphors.
12	Phillips and McQuarrie	2004	U.S.A	Content analysis	A new typology of visual rhetoric in advertising.
13	McQuarrie and Mick	2003	U.S.A	242 undergraduate students / Experiment	Rhetorical figures can have a positive impact on consumer response. Enhanced ad recall and Aad are generated by rhetorical figures. Rhetorical figures motivate additional elaboration of ads.
14	van Mulken Le Paie, and Forceville	2010	Dutch, French and Spanish audience	75 Dutch, 68 French, 69 Spanish / Experiment	Hybrids are more preferred than any other type of visual metaphor. Deviation from expectation and comprehension have a positive impact on appreciation. Perceived complexity negatively correlates with appreciation. Minimal differences were found among the three countries (Netherlands, France and Spain).
15	Burgers et al.	2015	Netherlands	165 participants / Experiment	Metaphors with reduced complexity and increased creativity are more persuasive and lead to ad appreciation.
Studies on Verbal Anchoring					
	Study	Year of publication	Reference Country	Sample/ Method	Main Findings

16	Phillips	2000	U.S.A	96 undergraduate students / experiment	Short headlines with a brief reference to the image enhance comprehension and ad liking as opposed to detailed headlines that divulge the message and generate decreased ad liking in metaphoric ads.
17	Lagerwerf and Meijers	2008	Netherlands	160 respondents / Experiment	Open literal ads are preferred to open or closed metaphors.
18	Jeong	2008	Korea	261 undergraduate students / Experiment	Aad varies by the use of metaphoric or literal messages. Product beliefs and PI are subject to the presence of verbal anchoring. Visual metaphors void of verbal anchoring improve attitude, product beliefs and PI as opposed to visual metaphors with verbal anchoring.
19	Myers et al.	2011	U.S.A	121 undergraduate students / Experiment	Product attribute information in the body copy of visual metaphoric ads improves Aad only in the absence of a supporting headline.
20	Bergkvist, Eiderbäck, and Palombo	2012	Sweden	Web-based data collection / Experiment	An extended headline results in more positive brand communication effects (comprehension, brand beliefs and Abr) than a moderate headline or no headline.
Studies on Verbal Anchoring and Complexity					
	Study	Year of publication	Reference Country	Sample/ Method	Main Findings
21	Lagerwerf, van Hooijdonk, and Korenberg	2012	Denmark	Study 1: 115 respondents / experiment Study 2: 83 students / Experiment with eye-tracking	Fully anchored ads are better comprehended than the ads without text. Verbal anchoring enhances comprehension of connection rather than similarity. Higher levels of cognitive elaboration are generated for similarity rather than connection, for cascades and image fixation duration.
22	van Rompay and Veltkamp	2014	Netherlands	Study 1: 69 undergraduate students / Experiment Study 2: 29 undergraduate students / Experiment	An incongruous metaphor with explanatory information enhances consumer appreciation and positively affects perceptions of brand excitement. Consumers with reduced metaphor processing ability appreciate explanatory information and visual cues highlighting packaging design.

Table 2. The questionnaire of experiment 1

Demographics

Sex

Age

Indicate the level of your agreement to the following statements regarding your attitude toward the ad: [(1) “strongly disagree” to (5)

“strongly agree”]

I like this ad a lot

I don't think this ad is interesting

I think this ad is very convincing

This ad is very appealing

This ad is easy to forget

This ad is not effective

Indicate the level of your agreement to the following statements regarding your attitude toward the advertised brand: [(1) “strongly disagree” to (5)

“strongly agree”]

Do you like the advertised brand?

Do you think this is a good brand?

Do you feel favorably towards this brand?

Would you recommend the advertised brand to others?

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics

	Literal visual / Hard-sell copy Means (SD)	Literal visual / Soft-sell copy Means (SD)	Visual metaphor / Hard-sell copy Means (SD)	Visual metaphor / Soft-sell copy Means (SD)
Experiment 1				
Attitude toward the ad	3.22 (1.23)	2.17 (0.8)	2.51 (0.74)	3.5 (1.46)
Attitude toward the brand	3.2 (1.07)	2.52 (0.74)	2.44 (0.79)	3.54 (1.09)
Experiment 2				
CTR	.15% (3.82%)	.11% (3.28%)	.13% (3.66%)	.16% (3.97%)
Experiment 3				
CTR	1.6% (10.96%)	1.2% (12.53%)	1.0% (12.91%)	1.7% (9.96%)