Metaphorical Thoughts in the Cognitive Domain of Cosmetics Advertising

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Abstract

The employment of advertisements is a contributing factor to the rapid development of economical business, and therefore, scholars pay attention to how to design a successful advertisement. Identifying metaphors applied in advertising can make it more persuasive and attractive. In addition, merchants need to take corresponding countermeasures to deal with the saturation of business market, so that they prefer metaphors in the promotion of products to help consumers better understand unfamiliar concepts. This article mainly studies metaphorical thoughts in business advertising. It selects Artistry cosmetics as the specific research object, uses conceptual metaphors, relevance theory and multimodal metaphors to analyze the formation process, with an attempt to explain how business advertisement conveys its advertising intention through different types of metaphors and how consumers can recognize unfamiliar concepts. The results show that the working mechanism of the three types of conceptual metaphors is the same despite of different frequency of occurrence in advertising texts, and conceptual metaphors facilitate the comprehension of abstract concepts and attributes of advertisements. The findings enable designers and manufacturers to be informed of what kind of metaphor facilitate the cognitive processing of metaphors in cosmetics advertising.

Keywords: metaphor; business advertising; multimodal metaphor; cognition

1. Introduction

Chinese companies already realize designing a great advertisement is an effective way for them to join the economic competition as China’s economy has developed rapidly in recent years, so that advertisers and manufactures employ charming and interesting advertisements to attract consumers’ notice, which encourages scholars to investigate how to design an effective advertising. According to McQuarrie and Mick (1993), advertising metaphor, particular in business advertising which is a critical means of product publicity, is widely recognized as "the best known example among consumer researchers". Thanks to “Metaphor We Lived by” by Lakoff & Johnson, metaphor was not treated as a rhetorical phenomenon any longer, but more as a way of thinking for people to understand the world, a central topic in linguistics, cognitive science, philosophy, psychology, pedagogy and other fields of research. By them, metaphor in advertising context began to receive attention at the end of the 20th century and has become more popular since the 21st century.

However, most scholars tend to categorize advertising metaphor into verbal and visual metaphor (McQuarrie & Mick, 2009; Chang & Yen, 2013; Shan et al., 2017). And the advertising metaphor study has been also at a virtual standstill, obtaining less concern in China because of different cultural background (Margariti et al., 2018) and individual differences (Seigneuric & Megherbi, 2016), which leads to divergent study results and a difficulty studying consumers’ minds. Hence, the present study, collecting China-made advertisements, analyzed the metaphorical thoughts in business advertisements from the perspective of cognitive linguistics.

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The purpose of the study is to explore how metaphor, as a kind of thinking, enables people to understand abstract concepts and influences people’s cognition based on a summary of Chinese business advertising. More important, this study provides a new perspective for enterprises to better use metaphor as a cognitive approach to carry out advertising and delves into the relationship between metaphorical thinking and language and cognition, so as to expand the relevant research on metaphorical thinking in the field of cognitive linguistics.

This study includes five parts. The introduction part of the research illustrates the research background, objectives and questions. The second mainly reviews relevant studies on cognitive metaphor and the development of metaphors in business advertising. The third mainly contains research methodology and process which describes the preparatory process before the data analysis. The fourth summarizes the characteristics of metaphors in business advertising for analysis. In addition, this part examines the way metaphors are generated in business advertising and the cognitive process of interpreting business advertising metaphors. Lastly a conclusion is made.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Cognition Metaphor

Metaphor, both a rhetorical device and a cognitive mode, widely exists in the daily life. The earliest development of metaphor in history can be traced back to the ancient Greece. Aristotle, the greatest pioneer of metaphor, supports metaphor as a rhetorical device. The research in his period regards metaphor as a tool to polish and modify language, defining it as “comparing something to another thing which is similar”. Ever since the book *Metaphor we Live by* appeared, which is known as the theory of "cognitive metaphor", metaphor is seen as the way of thinking to cognize the world and widely used in the language and life. Lakoff and Johnson put forward a conceptual metaphor framework, which regards metaphor as a mapping from source domain to target domain, a mechanism to support people in understanding abstract concepts.

Since then, many researchers have turned to explore the cognitive function of metaphor. I.A.Richards (1988) emphasized the cognitive value of metaphor by proposing the “interaction theory of metaphor” in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*. He suggested metaphor was generated by the interaction of two different thoughts subordinate to one word. Black (1962) further studied and improved the theory of metaphor interaction in his series of works. He believed that metaphor provided a new perspective for the study of cognitive metaphor by utilizing the similarity between two things. Besides, a large number of researchers have studied the interaction between linguistics, psychology, philosophy and other disciplines. For example, Littlemore (2001) used constructivism to explore the issue of metaphorical competence. Therefore, their views are all different from the traditional view of cognitive metaphor, bringing cognitive metaphor into a new field.

In the study of cognitive metaphor ontology, researchers analyzed the relationship between language, cognition and metaphor in the early stage. Hu Zhuanglin (1997) claimed that in expanding the cognitive depth and breadth of language and concepts, people’s cognition is the basis for understanding the world, using language and applying metaphor. There is an interactive relationship between the effort and influence of metaphor in cognitive comprehension (Gibbs & Tendahl, 2006).

In cross-cultural communication, researchers compared cognitive metaphors between English and Chinese bilinguals. In terms of neuroscience, Jiang and Li (2011) summarized previous studies and explored conceptual metaphor analysis of psychological realizability based on relevant concepts of cognition. Lv (2014) maintained that a relevant theoretical framework should be established in the cognitive analysis of metaphors to facilitate the analysis and comprehension of translation rules.

What's more, relevant scholars reviewed the development of cognitive metaphor in recent years. For example, Qu (2017) reconsidered cognitive metaphors and acknowledged that metaphor is a way of cognizing the world, rather than the only or the most important one. Metonymy is also an important way for human beings to recognize the world and concepts. Ji (2017) reviewed the research status, essence, classification and working mechanism of metaphors from the cognitive perspective through a meta-analysis of the research articles on cognitive metaphor in China in the past two decades.
2.2 Metaphor in Business advertising

If business advertisements want to achieve their expected effects, if merchants propagate or promote products in the way that uses a direct expression to elaborate the product characteristics or functions, consumers would feel insipid instead of being attracted. With the rise and development of advertising rhetoric, McQuarrie and Mick (1996) summarized the rhetoric typology and cognitive outcome in advertising Metaphor, as a typical representative of rhetoric, is often found to be popular in advertising rhetoric with the highest frequency (Leigh, 1994).

With the widespread application of metaphors in advertisements, researchers have begun to explore a new question: can consumers comprehend metaphors in advertisements? Subsequently, Morgan and Reichert (1999) confirmed that the use of metaphor could not only be comprehended by consumers, but also stimulate their curiosity, which contributes to the rise of metaphors in advertising (Phillips & McQuarrie, 2002). This finding provided a new perspective for the research in the field of consumer (Ward & Gaidis, 1990) and the research in the field of advertising and publicity (Leigh, 1994).

The success of an advertisement is closely related to the advertising discourse. Therefore, a number of linguistic researchers have analyzed the ways, effects and functions of rhetoric. In order to better present the advertising effect, researchers also study the ontology of language text, which mainly includes phonetics, vocabulary and grammar. In addition, some researches are carried out in light of principles and rules of discourse analysis, the business advertising discourse and business context combined. Most of them observed and analyzed the business discourse in two dimensions, text/context and semiotic mode (Bhatia, et al, 2008).

At the same time, the discourse study of commercial advertisements also appears in pragmatics, which mainly focuses on the study of the effect of creative rhetoric on the presentation of commercial advertisements, as well as the analysis of the cognitive and psychological responses of the audience. Cognitive linguists focus on the analysis of the cognitive effects, cognitive reactions and cognitive effects of massive advertising campaigns. Through investigation, it was found that the use of metaphor can reduce consumers’ resistance to advertisements, increase their cognitive enthusiasm to some extent and produce an indirect persuasion effect, that is, the advertisement will persuade consumers to believe the product is the same as it was advertised (Nelson et al, 1995). In addition, many scholars, from the cognitive perspective, analyzed the psychological cognition of advertising audiences and discussed the persuasion effect of advertising (Yang & Liu, 2002).

As a form of human cognitive activity, conceptual metaphors form a hidden connection line in advertising connecting merchants and audiences. The theory of conceptual integration was employed to study and analyze the cognitive process and psychology of consumers based on four-layer spatial structure, so that they can better create advertisements (Sui, 2016).

It is revealed that metaphors in advertisements exist not only in texts but also in pictures. Forceville (1996), one of the most prominent Scholars, explored in behavioral experiments the metaphorical images in ads and billboards to test consumers’ responses when they watch. He emphasized the creativity and freshness of metaphor similarity and the importance of image context in the identification and interpretation of metaphor. Forceville also associated the modes of human cognitive process with human senses, mainly in vision, hearing, smell, taste and touch. Therefore, the thinking nature of metaphor is the best to demonstrate, and the dynamic construction process of human cognition is highlighted, advancing the study of metaphor to a new height.

3. Methodology

The present study, taking advantage of corpus, picture advertising and video advertising, aims to analyze the cognitive process of consumers’ comprehension of the business ads, in hope of finding answers to the previous mentioned questions, specifically, how metaphor as a kind of thinking facilitates the comprehension of abstract concepts and influences the cognition.

3.1 Data collection

The study screened, collected, classified and summarized the text advertisements and picture advertisements on the official website and official Weibo of Artistry. There are two reasons for choosing this brand. Firstly, as an internationally well-known business company, Amway’s subsidiary Artistry’s beauty cosmetics brand, with its facial skin care products and cosmetics class leading brand of global sales, in 2011, ranked among the world’s top five
selling. Secondly, Artistry’s ads are often seen in people’s lives through television, familiar to consumers for its advertising brand and slogan: Artistry, born for beauty. Finally, this study selected 70 texts and 15 pictures ads about artistry on the official website of Amway. Through the data collection, it is found that a large number of pictures and texts contained metaphors.

Based on the complexity and diversity of metaphors, this paper selected 17 most representative examples as data analysis subjects. In examples of advertising texts and pictures, words and pictures contained typical conceptual metaphors will make it easy for consumers to recognize the presented product features and advantages advertisers want to deliver.

4 Analysis of Metaphor Use in Advertisements

4.1 Texts with the Use of Conceptual Metaphors in Business Advertisements

The collected advertising texts’ metaphors were classified, based on the metaphor classification proposed by Lakoff and Johnson, into orientation metaphor, ontological metaphor and structural metaphor.

4.1.1 Business Advertisements with Orientation Metaphors

When Lakoff and Johnson defined and analyzed the orientation metaphor, they divided it into 10 mapping types, such as: Happy is up; Sad is down. High status is up. Low status is down. Etc. Meanwhile, “up” and “down” usually correspond to “good things” and “bad things” to represent the metaphorical meaning. In the business advertisement text, there are 4 orientation metaphors, including the examples with the metaphorical meaning of “up” or “high”.

Example 1: Your skin will be radiant like the peak of beauty.

Example 2: Accelerate skin repair and renew muscle vitality.

Example 3: Straight through the bottom of the skin.

Example 4: Artistry® Essence with hyaluronic acid and vitamin C, the first ultra powerful antioxidant essence of Artistry.

Example 5: Selected from more than 200 kinds of rare herbs to give skin natural strength.

Example 6: Blend in the luxurious 24K gold, coagulating the skin and storing the gold energy.
融入奢华24K金，让肌肤凝蓄黄金能量。

Through the analysis, the advertising texts contain “herbs”, “gold” and a series of real things to illustrate the product compositions and the expected effect. Like the metaphor in example 5, “herb” is a pure natural grass in plants, which implies the non-additive and healthy ingredients of artistry's products. The substantial metaphor of “gold” in example 6 reflects the high value of the product on the one hand. It has good effect in medicine area.

Gold, as a kind of inert metal, has the effect in calming nerves and beauty treatment since ancient times, because it has a strong oxidation resistance. Therefore, the product in the slogan with the word “gold” can also be a metaphor for the high value of the product, up to the effect of treatment. Meanwhile, gold has the effect of preserving value, which reflects that the high price of the product will correspond to a relatively high effect.

(2) Container metaphor

Container metaphors use a container to define the abstract concepts. Through the analysis of Artistry cosmetics' advertisement texts, the human body is metaphorized as a container that can “coagulate and store”, “lock water” and “drink water”. As the container metaphor used in example 7.

Example 7: The light daub enables the skin to drink full water.
轻盈涂抹间让肌肤喝饱水。

With aging, the skin will be bothered with water shortage, therefore, the slogan expressed that the use of the product can help improve the state of the skin, so that the skin becomes moist and elastic, a metaphor for the good effect of the product. The use of container metaphor not only makes advertisements interesting, but also attracts consumers' attention to the cognitive process for an interpretation of metaphorical information.

(3) personification metaphor

As for personification metaphors, it endows products with human characteristics such as mankind’s unique motives, thoughts and emotions.

Example 8: Through the applying of the eye-moisturizer, the traces of time are gently petted out.
点抹间, 为您轻柔抚去岁月痕迹。  
The personification of metaphor in “gently pets out” does not directly illustrate the product as a person, but by this verbal phrase of "pets out" it indirectly shows the features of people. The word "stroke" gives a gentle feeling, and coupled with the use of the term “gently” at the same time, it also illustrates artistry products’ soft characteristic and soft effect.

4.1.3 Business Advertisements with Structural Metaphors

Structural metaphor is a way to construct another concept through one concept, and makes a relevant connection for understanding the abstract concepts. In these advertising texts, the target field is the skin, and some concepts are used to understand the effect of the product on the skin. Based on the analysis of the collected advertising texts, they can be divided into five types: war metaphors, journey metaphors, time metaphors, life metaphors and energy metaphors.

(1) War Metaphors

In these advertising texts, skin protection is viewed as a war of resistance, and consumers are inevitably influenced by skin problems including the aging. Daily environmental pollution or exposure to the sun would cause many effects on the skin. Therefore, to combat these problems is the purpose of Artistry products.

The texts used a series of words such as "protection, resistance, confrontation, repair, anti-aging" to describe the skin problems(See the whole examples in Appendix).

Example 9: Start 7 repair procedure.  
启动7重修护程序。

Just like the metaphor used in example 9, the skin protection is described as a war. Skin problems are overcome by using these skincare products, as figurative weapons in the war against them. At the same time, these words concerning the straightforward performance of the product say the effectiveness and positive role, so that the consumers can better perceive the cognitive process of skin protection as a war.

(2) Journey Metaphors
For the journey metaphors, the process of skin care is compared to a journey. Most of the journey is full of happiness or enjoyment, even though it is inevitable to meet the hardships. However, a journey will eventually yield some satisfaction and happiness or gain some experience. In the text example, the skincare process is described as “life”, which shows that it is an indispensable part of people’s life.

Example 10: Artistry, bloom “beauty and power”, open your “beauty and power life”.

“Meili life” is a life process with beauty and power. People’s yearning for beauty will never change from beginning to end. The text describes the skincare process as a life process with both beauty and power, leading consumers to realize that the skincare process is a journey of enjoyment or benefit.

(3) Time Metaphors

Time is a cognitive concept that people are most familiar with. People’s different cognition of time is usually based on different age, so the skin state is also different. Gradually, the skin will gradually show signs of aging or wrinkles. Therefore, many advertising language also uses the time metaphor to imply the existence of skin problems.

Example 11: Rejuvenate the fountain of youth.

Words, such as “youth”, reflect the efficacy of skin care products, leading people to realize that the use of products can effectively improve the related problems, smooth away the age traces, and rejuvenate the power of skin.

(4) Life Metaphors

Life metaphors is to compare products to a living thing and establish a connection between them. One of the most significant characteristics of life metaphor is “breathing”. Through the advertisements, the free breathing of the skin is the best interpretation. It compares the skin to a thing that can breathe and makes the skin full of vitality through the use of products.

Example 12: Rebirth of the skin’s source of power.

The word “rebirth” is used to describe the meaning of luster, which can only be produced through a living entity. Therefore, the description of essence can give a rebirth to the white and shine skin.

(5) Energy Metaphors

The term “energy” or “power” is often used to describe powerful thing in life. When applied to cosmetics, it can show a powerful effect.

Example 13: Open up the energy source of firming and luster for eye skin.

The use of energy metaphor enables these skin care products to have an energy characteristic endowed with a powerful force that can help improve the state of the skin. The use of this metaphor illustrates the powerful effect of skin care products and thus better attracts consumers to make a purchase.

4.2 Pictures with the Use of Conceptual Metaphors

When collecting the picture advertisements, the author found that most pictures matched with certain text descriptions, which showed that text played a key role in people's cognitive advertising metaphor effect. At the same time, from the perspective of relevance theory, the purpose of analyzing the association between text and pictures in advertisements is to establish the best association between the two and promote the process of consumer cognition through the context of multimodal metaphor.

According to Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphor, the selected pictures’ texts are classified into three types, which mainly include orientation metaphor, ontological metaphor and conceptual metaphor. Among the fifteen pictures, almost each has used the combination of structural metaphor and ontological metaphor for product promotion. Four pictures are selected as examples to analyze pictorial metaphors.

4.2.1 Metaphors in Four Pictures
The picture background of Figure 3.1 is black, and with the gold brand name, the large bold white font of product text introduction and a white product name “Artistry Mist-Lasting Liquid Foundation” are located on the left side of the whole picture, taking up two thirds of the whole picture. It serves as a contrast to highlight the text.

The image is located on the right side of the picture, with a beam of light above the diagonal left, highlighting the liquid foundation against the black background. At the same time, there are seven small particles with different liquid foundation colors around the main product image, which forms a clock image to symbolize its lasting characteristics that if consumers use the product, they could enjoy a whole day of wearing makeup.

The slogan of the product in the picture is “24 hours with strong makeup, light and hydrated”, which uses ontological metaphor and structural metaphor. The word “light” is used to modify the beautiful and light movement, supporting the product as a rich vitality. Consumers are likely to realize the effect of this product is light through the structural metaphor. At the same time “a strength” is a combination of the ontology metaphor’s personification metaphor and structural metaphor’s energy metaphor for product promotion. Firstly, “a strength” describes it as a powerful person; secondly, “a strength” highlights the product’s high capacity and the good effect. The word “mist” uses the entity metaphor to indicate that the makeup effect of the product is matte and hazy, which also echoes to the hazy effect of the product shown under the illumination of light as presented in Figure 3.1.

Therefore, the combination of text and image allows for a connection between the two domains in a short period and therefore, the perceived metaphorical meaning in advertisements is achieved.

The second selected picture presented with a black background, the product image is meat pink located in the center of Figure 3.2. The product image creates a golden splash from the bottom with circles of golden ripples in transition. The color of the picture text is light gold and white, conveying a sense of comfort instead of a strong contrast effect.

The picture’s text is “Advanced Softening Toner, pours into vitality for a beautiful new birth. Advanced Softening Toner contains four core functions: Hydrating and repairing, softening and moisturizing, weakening the wrinkle and dark spots.” The text uses the combination of ontological metaphor and structural metaphor.

The advertisement illustrates skin as a container that can be filled with sufficient water. At the same time, it is also a structural metaphor implying that by using the products, skin will have the energy to regain a beautiful new life.

By combining the image and text together, the product’s soft and moisturizing function correspond with its appearance and color, so that consumers can better understand the role of metaphorical thinking in the cognitive process.
In Figure 3.3, the background is decorated with blue with many small drops of water added on the background board, which shows a dynamic effect of water flow feeling. The picture is surrounded by flowers and fairy grass which are the main ingredients of the product. Packaged in green, the product echoes to the product’s slogan “Fairy grass locks water, becomes radiance and vitality”. Meanwhile, the choice of green packing also reflects the green natural ingredients of the mask.

In the picture, the text “Artistry Essential Hydrating Mask, contains rare Dendrobium nobile Lindl. Fairy grass locks water, becomes radiance and vitality.” uses the ontological metaphor and structural metaphor to symbolize the skin as a container that can “lock” moisture, showing the mask products’ good hydrating effect. At the same time, the advertisement uses the structure metaphor to convince consumers of the effect of making the skin full of vitality and recover the moist and shiny features.

Therefore, by responding to the advertisement’s text with the image, the cognitive process of product metaphor becomes more concise and easier to understand, which can attract the attention of consumers to explore the efficacy of the product and interpret the text information.

The background of the fourth picture is a soft pink tone and a texture of water waves at the bottom, giving consumer a gentle feeling. The text in the picture dresses in a gold gradient color. The image of the product arouses water spray with the bottom water wave, a metaphor for the moistening effect of this product. The whole text of the picture “Artistry Water-Air Cushion Foundation, the moisturizing star of the makeup industry, contains high moisturizing essence to build a nude look like porcelain lustre sensation and soft docile the skin.” has used three types of the conceptual metaphors.

In the advertising text, “moisturizing star” and “high moisturizing essence” are a kind of “top” and “high” orientation metaphor, “star” reflects the high status and the good effect of the product. “High” reflects the good moisturizing effect of the air cushion foundation, which directly shows the product effect of the air cushion. “Porcelain luster sensation” is to connect the glossiness of porcelain with the effect of using this foundation, which may facilitate mapping the cognition and feeling of porcelain into the product, so that consumers can feel the effect of using cushion foundation liquid as smooth and bright as porcelain. The combination of image and texts together fully present the product’s tender or gentle feeling, and the good moisturizing effect.
5 Conclusion

In this study, 70 texts and 15 pictures of Artistry advertisements were used as research objects to analyze the ways of metaphorical thinking in advertisements and consumers’ cognitive process. The study found that although the less frequent use of orientation metaphor in the advertising text than the ontological metaphor and structural metaphor in the collected advertisements, the working mechanism of the three types of conceptual metaphors is the same, that is, the mapping from the specific source domain to the abstract target domain. Conceptual metaphors endow some features, actions, concepts and effects of the source domain to the target domain, making it easier to understand abstract concept and product features, which is one way how new things are perceived.

Advertisers integrate metaphorical thought into business advertisements to help consumers realize new things through cross-domain mapping, so as to stimulate consumers’ interest in products and promote the acceptance of advertisements. Ontological metaphor shortens the psychological distance with unfamiliar products, stimulates the common cognition, feelings and experiences of consumers, and enables them to have specific and accurate cognition of products. By contrast, orientation metaphors directly reflect the characteristics of some advertising products through consumers’ experience in life and space, such as "up and down, near and far, high and low". Such advertisements are straightforward and easy to understand, but lack interest.

This study also uses relevance theory to analyze the combination of picture metaphor and text under the theoretical framework of multimodal metaphor. Its characteristics in the advertising of Artistry products are as follows: the image makes the advertisement vivid and the text interprets the image or advertisement. The combination of the image and text needs a minimal cognitive effort to obtain the best contextual effect. From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, the use of business advertising language can be regarded as a way of metaphorical thought, a thinking operation of the brain when people recognize abstract new concepts and new words through root metaphors accumulated by primitive experience in the process of cognizing the world. It can be seen that the process of metaphorical thinking presented in the form of language, leads to cognition, and the three are progressively and interactively influencing each other. Therefore, advertisers need to take different cognitive responses into account due to consumers’ different cognitive experiences in advertising design. Advertisers better add concepts close to life in advertisements or use some network buzzwords to narrow the cognitive distance between consumers and advertisements to increase their interest.

Acknowledgments

This work was supported by the National Social Science Foundation of China under Grant Number 19BYY088.

References


