

INDIRECT PERSUASION IN ADVERTISING

How Consumers Process Metaphors Presented in Pictures and Words

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ABSTRACT: Indirect persuasion attempts are common in magazine advertisements. Although the use of an indirect claim presumably offers some advantage to an advertiser, as yet, little is known about how consumers process different types of indirect claims. We develop the proposition that when consumers are presented with an indirect metaphorical claim, they become more receptive to multiple positive inferences about the advertised brand. In addition, when the indirect metaphorical claim takes the form of a picture, consumers are more likely to spontaneously generate such positive inferences at the time of ad exposure. These ideas are supported in an experiment using response latency data. Because many of the inferences examined in this study could be considered misleading if claimed directly, the paper concludes with a discussion of the public policy implications of the findings.

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