

Effects of Animal Metaphor on Consumer Response to Product Advertising

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Abstract : While advertisers often use animal metaphors to promote product performance, representing through the use of a product image together with an animal-like messenger to imply the undesirable health states of not using the product, the effect of such metaphors on persuasion remains unclear. The current research addresses this issue by investigating how consumers perceive and react to animal metaphor advertising in the context of product promotion. Three studies are carried out using field and experimental data. The findings demonstrate that animal metaphor ads are less persuasive than non-metaphor ads and that ads with animal-like messengers (as opposed to human messengers) activate stronger dehumanization perceptions, which in turn lead to lower product choice, product evaluation and purchase intention, regardless of whether the animal metaphors are presented visually in the picture or verbally in the headline. Furthermore, when the metaphorical pairing includes a more disliked animal, consumer reaction was less favorable. The implications of the findings for advertisers considering the use of animalized messengers are discussed.

Keywords : animal metaphor, dehumanization, product evaluation, health communication

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