

## **Brand-level metaphors as a means towards strategic advantage in the nutritional supplement industry**

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This study, based on an article nearing completion, aims to chart the use of underlying metaphors and their surface manifestations to construe brand identity and optimize marketing communications. By performing a close reading of the websites and advertisements of four nutritional supplement brands, it is argued brands can strategically use 'brand-level' metaphors to anchor a desired brand identity and this metaphor is instantiated in various linguistic and broader semiotic choices in the brand's communication; e.g. 'LOSING FAT IS PHYSICAL WAR AGAINST FAT WHO IS A HUMAN ENEMY' with product- and ad-level instantiations such as grenade-shaped packaging, the brand slogan *declare war on fat!* and endorsers who are metaphorically represented as soldiers. The linguistic share of this research is approached from a cognitive perspective: the layered analysis of abstract brand-level metaphors with concrete semiotic manifestations in the brand's marketing mix is analyzed by means of Conceptual Metaphor Theory for two main reasons. Firstly, the layered structure is considered more or less analogous with how conceptual cross-domain mappings are manifested in language. Secondly, the communicated brand-level metaphors in the study were found to be compatible with existing conceptual metaphors and intuitions. The communicative-inferential side of the linguistic analysis will employ a Relevance-Theoretical framework: the metaphorical instantiations in the marketing mix will be analyzed as informative bundles of communicated product features, leading to inferences of the product's quality and potentially to positive product and brand attitudes. The inferential effects of brand-level metaphors will be linked to an extralinguistic framework of marketing communications and strategic brand management: quality inferences supported by a conveyed metaphor facilitate unique strategic differentiation from the competition in a relatively heterogeneous product sector. Further strategic positioning is made possible by using brand-level metaphors as a means to create a unique brand identity – e.g. a supplement brand profiling itself as a military organization providing equipment and moral support in 'the war on fat'. The underlying metaphor, its surface-level manifestations and the perceived brand identity are argued to be strongly interdependent to allow optimal quality inferences and brand attitude – for consumer segments compatible with the conveyed brand philosophy.

Basic references:

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