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## **Visual Rhetoric and Framing Strategies in Advertising Word-Based Product Categories**

**Abstract.** The power of visual elements to communicate specific meanings has been used by many specialists as an argument for seriously considering the need for a comprehensive theory of visual rhetoric. Many of them went as far as speaking about notions such as *visual literacy* or *visual grammar*. This stream of studies has undoubtedly influenced in a positive manner the depth and breath with which visuals are approached by contemporary scholars. But it has also left many courageous claims unbacked by proof. The need for *visual literacy* for a person to grasp the meaning of images is one of these claims. Many authors use data coming from disparate research directions to define sometimes too broadly the notion of *reading* images. Reading a line as shadow or a vector as action verb does not involve the same processes that underlie the activity of reading a visual metaphor or deciphering a visual pun. The former are based largely on unconscious and automatic inferential processing, with many of the premises being held largely unconsciously, in virtue of repeated exposure to similar stimuli and their denotative meanings in contemporary culture. The latter are based largely on conscious processing taking the form of an interpretation in which viewers use known conventions of a given area of discourse (such as figurative discourse, for example) to make sense of what they see, to resolve the cognitive paradox posed by the unusual combination of elements presented on the visual level. Apart from this, understanding the meaning of an image implies the application of known conventions of the genre to which the image belongs that are not confined to visual literacy but rather to knowledge of that genre. For example, advertising literacy would help a reader make sense of the anchoring function a visual-based logo plays on a given image. Sometimes the nature, scope and meaning-transfer involved of the *reading* process are influenced mainly by the context in which the image appears (defined by genre conventions, particularities of a communicative situation etc.). To illustrate this, we look at the reading process involved in understanding print advertisements for a word-based product category and show that much of the input variables in the inferential process of deriving their meaning are not a matter of visual

literacy, but rather require knowledge of genre conventions and general cultural competencies. The constitutive elements that give visuals the power to speak about words is also discussed in the light of a theoretical import from the field of Cognitive Linguistics.

**Keywords:** visual rhetoric, visual literacy, reading images, framing strategies in print advertisements, audiobook advertising, rhetorical blending, conceptual integration theory