

HUMANIZING BRANDS THROUGH STORY-TELLING
IN MAGAZINE ADVERTISING

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Abstract

Within the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, where metaphor allows human beings to map structure from concrete realms of experience (based on sensory-motor experience) to other more abstract domains, the Source-Path-Goal schema stands as one of the central concepts in human conceptualization. Its importance lies in the way it unifies and gives structure to concepts of motion. In turn, this embodied notion shapes our understanding of a purposeful activity, in which some path is traversed in order to reach for a goal, and our understanding of story-telling where, based on the same notion of a path, there is a development of characters in quest of a goal. On this basis, our purpose in this paper is to analyze three magazine advertisements in an attempt to reveal

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how advertisers rely on the Source-Path-Goal schema in order to create a story for their brands.

Keywords: Conceptual Metaphor Theory, embodied cognition, image schemas, magazine advertising

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1. Introduction

Following the tenets of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, human beings rely on the device of metaphor as an indispensable tool in their conceptualizing system when understanding the world around them. That is to say, this theory suggests that human beings are only able to understand abstract issues via metaphor in terms of physical, more concrete phenomena, which they have access to thanks to sensory perception and bodily movement. This is why Conceptual Metaphor Theory is also known as the theory of embodiment.

Metaphor is considered as a cognitive device which pervades our use of language in all domains of discourse —advertising as well— and allows us to understand and experience one thing in terms of another (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 1999; Lakoff, 1987). This conceptual mechanism couples our bodies, which is the most concrete phenomenon we experience on a daily basis, with more abstract ideas, which seem to be rooted in the realm of reasoning and thinking. The metaphor which best captures this

process is MIND IS BODY (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999), which is motivated by mappings between our external, physical experience, and our internal cognitive states. By virtue of this metaphor, humans tend to borrow vocabulary from the more accessible physical and social world to refer to the less accessible worlds of reasoning.

After the publication of *Metaphors We Live By* (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), where metaphor was considered for the first time a conceptual instead of a verbal phenomenon, an avalanche of scholar papers have been written on this topic motivated by Conceptual Metaphor Theory. This in fact has given rise to one of the most influential schools in linguistics nowadays: cognitive linguistics. However, most of the work has focused almost exclusively on verbal manifestations of conceptual metaphors, as if this phenomenon were restricted to language. That is the reason why many scholars have claimed that if metaphor is truly a conceptual phenomenon, then, it should be present in other non-verbal or multimodal domains. Those domains can be a combination of gesture and spoken language (Cienki, 2005; McNeill, 1992, 2005), or pictures, whether or not in combination with other modalities (language, sound or music), as reflected in the work conducted by Carroll (1996), Forceville (1994, 1996, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2011), Koetsier & Forceville (2014), or Kromhout & Forceville (2013). Still, more work is felt to be necessary in order to either prove or refute Forceville's recurrent idea that conceptual metaphors are equally present in non-verbal modalities. This paper is thus framed in the perspective of offering more insight into combined modalities (visuals and verbal language) in order to check the functioning of metaphor in those less studied domains and see whether metaphor activation depends on verbal language.

The study has been organized as follows: after the introductory section, which frames the topic under discussion, we find the theoretical framework, which will support the analysis of the advertisements. Such analysis is conducted in the third section, which in turn is subdivided into three different subsections, each of them devoted to the analysis of one of the adverts. This leads us into the fourth and final section, where firstly a discussion of the different adverts takes places and, then, some conclusions are drawn.

2. The Source, Path, Goal schema

The concept of ‘image schema’ was invented in 1987 by Mark Johnson and George Lakoff in their respective books (Mandler, 2014), which marked an important step in the advancement of the theory of embodiment. This theory claims that “the mind is inherently embodied” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p. 5), which means that reasoning is shaped by what humans can see, hear or feel; that is to say, the body is taken as a mirror of how the mind works as reflected in the metaphor MIND IS BODY, mentioned above.

‘Image schema’ is thus a key concept as much of the structure inherent in our sensory motor experience is represented through those image schemas. Nevertheless, as pointed out by Gibbs (2005), schemas work as emergent properties of human language that are recreated with every new cognitive and perceptual activity rather than as pre-stored concepts. Drawing on Johnson (1987), Dodge and Lakoff (2005) highlight that image schemas can be characterized by a number of features: 1) they are recurring patterns of our perceptual interactions and motor programs across many different experiences, which shows that they are derived from perceptual and motor processes; 2) they can be decomposed into a small number of elements, which gives them a consistent structure; 3) they have internal structure that supports inferences. This is to say, image schemas provide a foundation for many of our basic concepts and are the foundation of many of our primary metaphors (Grady, 1999), which means that they are the “embodied roots of cognition and language” (Hampe, 2005, p. 9). This theory of embodied cognition is supplemented by more recent findings in the field of cognition which claim that knowledge about source domains comes not only from our interaction with the environment but is also influenced —beyond our personal experience— by culture, through interaction and communication with others (Forceville, 2011; Kövecses, 2005; Ritchie, 2003).

The source-path goal (SPG) is a fundamental schema in our daily life since we typically move forward, along a horizontal axis, from a starting point A to a destination, B following a trajectory. This is the path we follow in order to reach not only for physical targets, but also very often for the desire to achieve our goals. Hence, the scenario of pursuing a goal as a self-propelled movement is superimposed on the SPG schema, which takes us back onto the mind as body metaphor or theory of embodied cognition. This means that the SPG schema is present in the human understanding of physical

movement and underlies any purposeful activity, where humans are in quest of a desired result, be it physical, psychological, or a combination of both.

In this particular paper, immersed in the world of advertising, the goal to be reached in each advertisement is presented through the founding layer of traversing a path (a JOURNEY domain), which sets the stage to the narration of a story. This is made explicit by the well-known fact that stories, which are structured by means of the TIME IS SPACE metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Kövecses, 2010), follow a pattern with a beginning, a middle and an end, each part typically fulfilling a different purpose (Mandel, 1985). Hence, in the same fashion as Forceville (2006, 2011), we relate the PATH domain to the STORY domain. Since they both are purposeful activities—as can be seen in the fact that they share the SPG schema—as such they have a similar structure. In the case of “journey”, there is self-propelled movement towards the desired destination or, in a more abstract manner, towards the goal. On the other hand, in the case of “story”, there is a development in which the characters move along a virtual path, newly by means of the TIME IS SPACE metaphor, in pursuit of their own objective, closely linked and coherent with the metaphor THOUGHT IS MOTION (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999).

In line with the claim by Johnson (1987, pp. 44-45), we also believe that image-schematic structures arising out of our bodily experiences such as the SPG should be further explored to observe the extent to which they are elaborated into other domains of meaning not strictly tied to our body. This is the case with characters who progress along the different stages of a story in search of their dream. Such narration or development of a story based on the traveling of a path will be the common denominator to the different advertisements analyzed.

3. Telling stories to humanize brands

The three advertisements under analysis have been selected due to the heavy exploitation that they make of the SPG schema. Moreover, in the three advertisements the physical side of continually moving in search of something and the abstract side of being in search of a goal—through the stages of a story—are conflated and unified in such a way that their meaning possibilities are enhanced and enriched.

3.1. LIDL



In this two-sided advertisement, which was selected from the magazine *Men's Health* (Febrero 2016), the viewer is presented with two new lines of business in the field of sports that have just been opened: trekking, from the 8th of February, and fitness, from the 11th of the same month, in the upper-left and upper right corners, respectively. It also says that in the near future new lines will be introduced, and viewers are encouraged to follow the latest news at the given website at the bottom of the right page. Apart from that information, which constitutes the body of the verbal message, potential consumers can also differentiate the logo and name of the brand, in the lower right corner, and the headline, which reads: “Siempre hacia adelante” [always moving forward].

If we now turn to the pictorial side, there are two different images catching the reader's attention. On the left-hand side, just below the (piece of) news of the opening of trekking as a new business line, there are two hikers, roughly in their mid-thirties, equipped for a long walk on footpaths in a natural setting, in this case up a mountain, while wearing comfortable clothing, trainers, a rucksack and sticks for firm walking. On the right-hand side, there is a lady very likely in her mid-twenties training by pushing hard and forward on the resistance bands attached to the wall behind her.

The overarching idea connecting both pictures is the headline printed on the right-hand side part of the advert, mentioned above, “Siempre hacia Adelante”, which embraces the two layers of meaning making up the story. Firstly, the reading of such verbal message invokes the SPG schema in readers’ minds by focusing on just one of its components, in this case the path which needs to be traveled to keep progressing. Thus, even though the other two components, the starting point and the destination, have been left in the dark, they are part of the cognitive script invoked while making sense of the story.

This SPG schema, as the first layer of meaning, triggers, in turn, the well-known frame of feeling happy and satisfied when you are doing something that fully uses your physical abilities. The down-up direction followed in order to climb a hill is an activity that requires investing energy, time and effort, in order to make headway and achieve the goal of arriving at a destination. That is to say, through the pictorial signal of two hikers climbing a hill, where the path schema is self-evident, a story of self-fulfillment is narrated, as the second layer of meaning to the story. The unified potential of a schema which builds on a physical scenario but which clearly points to a psychological state of happiness through pursuing a goal —while moving forward— is thus maximized and enriched.

The lady on the right-hand side of the advert relies equally on the well-known scenario of a young lady working out, very likely in a gym, to keep fit. However, there is an interesting difference with the other side of the advert. Whereas the hikers are always moving forward in pursuit of their destination, located ahead, in the case of the lady, the path will be forwards, first, and then backwards, and forwards and backwards again, and so as many times as the person working out is willing to keep pushing the elastic bands. This means that only part of the trajectory she is following, when she is pushing forwards, is a good match for the headline “Siempre hacia adelante”, and that explains why that precise moment has been reproduced in the advertisement.

Even though physically speaking, there is this repetitive movement of going forwards and backwards, the SPG schema, in the manner of a story, can be superimposed onto the more abstract version of a purposeful and self-reliant activity such as keeping fit, where the TIME IS SPACE metaphor (Kövecses, 2010) helps in conceptualizing the time invested in the activity as a path traversed in pursuit of a particular objective (toning

your arm and forearms muscles), which will in turn make you satisfied. This means that there are, again, two layers of meaning, a more physical and a more abstract version, to the story told in the advert.

3.2. Women's running shoe (Nike Air Zoom Structure 19 Flash)



This second advertisement, taken from the magazine *Women's Health* (Enero-Febrero 2016), is about a new pair of Nike trainers "Air Zoom Structure 19 Flash". As will be seen next, different levels of meaning will again have to be activated to make full sense of the story behind this advert.

Firstly, the SPG schema is invoked by means of PART-WHOLE metonymy, where a female runner is suggested by just depicting part of her left leg and foot. We know it is a runner not only because of the sports gear she is wearing, including the new pair of trainers advertised, but because of the body posture portrayed, since she seems to be in the middle of a race. This is all presented against a black background, which highlights the picture even further. Elaborating on this path schema, by way of explaining what the most innovative feature of this type of trainers is, we learn in the subhead that supports the headline that they have a reflective upper in order to make runners visible if their running is done at night. This reads as follows: "¿Sólo puedes quemar zapatillas por la noche? Pues, seguridad ante todo. Lleva a la práctica nuestro grito de Guerra. ¡No sudamos, brillamos!, y deja que te vean con prendas reflectantes." [You can only burn

trainers at night? Well, safety first. Put into practice our war cry. We do not sweat, but rather shine!, and let others see you thanks to your reflective clothing.] Hence, the path schema is clearly pointed at, but it is an illuminated path as can be derived from the light shed by the reflective trainers and clothing worn by the runner, and the catchy headline “Vence al lado oscuro” [overcome the dark side]. This headline is closely connected to the path schema since it indicates what the objective of such self-propelled movement is: overcoming the dark side by bringing light to your night running. Nevertheless, such objective has some added connotations as will be seen next.

The mentioned headline, situated in the upper right corner, is both very engaging and contemporary to readers, and makes a clear reference to one of the most successful film series in history “Star Wars”, whose seventh installment was launched just last year (2015). In this epic film a distinction is made between the dark side, which leads to death and destruction, and the bright side, which leads to creativity and vitality. Hence, the headline is inviting readers to join the story of the film by placing themselves on the bright side. In order to have a clearer picture of what the bright side stands for, it is necessary to rely on the body of the message, which reads: “¿Cuánto quieres “lucirte” Fíjate en nuestro reflectómetro. ‘Air Zoom Structure 19 Flash’ de Nike. Durante el día nada hace sospechar de su versatilidad. Pero al caer la noche entenderás por qué la marca afirma que la colección Flash está inspirada en las auroras boreales.” [How much do you want to “show off” Look at our reflectometer. ‘Air Zoom Structure 19 Flash’ by Nike. During the day nothing lets you know about its versatility. But at nightfall you’ll understand why the brand claims that Flash collection is inspired by the aurora borealis.]

Now readers get the whole picture of the story narrated in this advert: while stepping ahead in your way forward (path schema) —as the image shown in the advertisement— you can join the story (as in *Star Wars*) of overcoming the dark side, as a piece of adventure and excitement added into your life. Hence, the potential offered by this new pair of trainers is that they let you maximize your opportunities to step forward and be on the move: either at daytime, wearing trainers which may just look ordinary to others, or when there is low light, wearing those apparently standard trainers which will develop magic features by shining in a similar way to the beautiful Northern lights,

which illustrates how vitality and creativity come to life and come to light by wearing such trainers.

To readers, it may sound unlikely that the real objective of wearing a pair of Nike trainers —whose slogan is “Impossible is nothing”— will be to overcome the darkness instead of bringing out runners’ best performance, with the help offered by the technology of Nike. Nevertheless, advertisers need to look for efficient ways to differentiate and give value to each product by highlighting specific features, and these trainers happen to be the only trainers in the market that will light up your path while doing your running in low light.

3.3. Ford Kuga

*Para encontrar los mejores hoteles,
necesitas al mejor guía.*

FORD KUGA
> SYNC 2 con Pantalla Táctil
Los mejores destinos al alcance de tus dedos gracias a la guía MICHELIN del sistema SYNC 2 con Pantalla Táctil de 8" del Kuga.
Para más información, visita ford.es
17.990€

Gamma Ford Kuga consumo medio combinado de 4,6 a 7,4 l/100km. Emisiones de CO₂ de 120 a 171 g/km. Motor EcoBoost 1.650 cc 102 CV. Incluye IVA, Impuesto de Matriculación, seguro Opcional de Transporte, que varía por Comunidad Autónoma, así como los impuestos de registro en cada estado. Más profesional. Mejor. Conectar y disfrutar con SYNC 2 con pantalla táctil de 8". Tendrá el Ford Credit, garantía más de 3 años, hasta a la aplicación del Plan FORD del comercio, visita en Ford y Más. Precio IVA incluido. No compatible con otros días. El modelo estacionado podría no coincidir con el observado.

Ford
Go Further

The third advertisement, selected from the magazine *Car* (nº 107 Febrero 2016), promotes a particular model (“Kuga”) by the American automobile manufacturer “Ford”. As in the two previous advertisements, two layers of meaning will have to be unfolded in order to have access to the full story displayed in the picture.

As the first and most basic layer, of this advert, the SPG schema is triggered by the very image of the car promoted, since the basic function of cars is precisely to allow human beings to be transported along a path, going further and in a much faster fashion than it would be possible on foot —as claimed by the slogan next to the logo “Go Further”. Hence, cars are possibly one of the best symbols for the schema under analysis. Furthermore, part of the verbal message, the headline, also points to the same schema: “Para encontrar los mejores hoteles, necesitas al mejor guía” [To be able to find the best hotels, you need the best guide]. Unlike in the first advertisement, where the focus was on the path being traversed (mainly, the side of the hikers), in this case the focus is on the destination that lies at the end of the path: finding the best hotels. However, a condition is set in order to arrive at the desired destination: to be able to rely on the best guide to show you the way.

By building on the cognitive device of personification (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) CARS ARE PEOPLE, where objects are attributed personal qualities, the car is thought of in terms of a person (“a guide”), having the capacity to know and, in turn, to guide other people the way to go places. This narration of a car in terms of a guide is explained further in the subhead of the headline, where we learn: “Ford Kuga Sync 2 con Pantalla Táctil. Los mejores destinos al alcance de tus dedos gracias a la guía MICHELIN del sistema SYNC 2 con Pantalla Táctil de 8” del Kuga. Para más información, visita ford.es. 17.900 €” [Ford Kuga Sync 2 with touchscreen. The best destinations at your fingertips thanks to the MICHELIN guide built into the system SYNC 2 with an 8” touchscreen. For more information, visit ford.es. 17,900 €]. This means that the car has been designed with the system SYNC 2, the latest version of Ford SYNC, which allows users, amongst other things, to search for Michelin rated places of interest *en route*. This feature makes the car particularly well-equipped to play the role of a very well-informed guide.

Secondly, beyond the path schema but inextricable intertwined with it, readers and potential buyers of this product are lured into watching the advert through the setting of a scenario which they can easily identify with: a journey scenario —as a more elaborated version of the path schema and acquired at a later stage. This scenario is hinted at by the picture of a car that will get them to the best hotels, which activates feelings of excitement due to the likely experience of new adventures. In other words,

not only is it that this car will get users to work and to the routine activities a car can be used for, in fact the focus of this advert is that this car will give travelers the chance to take them to their desired destinations as the best hotels. We all know that hotels, even more so “the best hotels”, are always an important component of a pleasant journey, which is one of the preferred activities —clearly for Westerners— for their leisure time. Hence, the overtones of pleasure, excitement and enjoyment are maximized through the wording chosen.

The combination of the two layers of meaning, the path schema and the journey scenario, highly exploit the goodness and benefits of the product by emphasizing elements which are very readily available in our conceptual structure. In fact, this combination points to the well-established metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), which recreates the story where people are represented as travelers who in their pursuit of happiness will look for new experiences. Thus, in the scenario portrayed this car inherits hedonistic features, which turn it into a much-desired object in our society.

4. Discussion and conclusions

We claimed at the beginning of this paper that the choice of metaphors and, in turn, schemas can be explained not only by relying on the embodied dimension, but also by making reference to the role culture plays in our society. That being the case, we would like to delve deeper into the learned and “accultured dimension” (Forceville, 2011) of the SPG schema, as that is what really humanizes our different adverts.

In fact, the schema discussed informs the three adverts. In all of them we can see different people moving towards a destination/goal in a sort of purposeful activity. Thus, the activity of moving, where the body changes locations, is already presented as an achievement since the wish to keep moving is highly valued in our Western society and perceived as a very positive approach to life (Lakoff & Turner, 1989). This seems to be a good reflection of how inhabitants of Western countries are characterized by the search of new experiences and adventures along the way to enhance the value of their lives, which illustrates well the interaction between the SPG schema and individuals’ making sense of their lives. To put it differently, the very essence of humans seems to be contained in the act of moving, as declared by the ancient philosopher Heraclitus in

one of his famous quotes “nothing remains still”, and that is why it resonates so strongly with the human brain.

However, there is a difference between the three adverts worth pointing out. In the first two, LIDL and Nike, ‘movers’ just rely on their own bodies for the motion, which means that a lot of physical work is required as this is a self-propelled activity. On the other hand, in the third advert, the vehicle used for the motion is a car. This means that the hard physical effort is no longer associated with movement, but travelers are still in control of where they go (direction of travel). This important difference will give travelers a distinct sense of the scope of their movement and, as a result, the effect upon travelers is expected to be more pervading.

Furthermore, in the three advertisements analyzed, the SPG schema works as the foundation layer for the other meanings constructed. In the first one, a story of personal achievement, which gives the sense of a satisfactory and fulfilling life, is narrated. In the second one, the focus is on having a new experience, with overtones of adventure, such as running at night while having the path lit up thanks to the reflective features of the new Nike trainers. Finally, in the third one, in the same manner as the path reaches further, thanks to the help of a car, the feelings of excitement and passion for life — even though it is not a self-reliant activity— seem to go further as well.

By way of conclusion, the characteristics that can be derived from the SPG schema after the analysis conducted are the following:

- 1) The length of the path to be traveled seems to correspond to the degree of excitement travelers are likely to experience. Hence, whereas the highest degree of enthusiasm is expected to come from the last advertisement, where the car can take travelers as far as they like in search of the best hotels (as the slogan “Go Further” reminds readers), the least excitement is likely to come from the lady pushing the elastic bands, where the physical path traversed is almost non-existent.
- 2) The component of familiarity of this movement schema, since it operates at the level of our pre-conceptual structures (Johnson, 1987), makes the stories told behind each advertisement highly credible and digestible. This works as a shortcut into addressees’ mind, which will have less resistance into accepting the advertiser’s message. Furthermore, as metaphors —and image schemas in turn— are not only descriptive but

have a performative force (Hidalgo-Downing & Kraljevic-Mujic, 2015), they invite the audience to action: buying the product advertised in each case.

3) The activation of the SPG schema does not require the use of the language. In each advert, the path schema was firstly triggered by the pictures portrayed, in the fashion claimed by Barthes when he says that the “image immediately yields a first message” (1977, p. 33). As a second step, the use of the language supports the meaning given by visuals.

4) The same time frame is part of the structure found behind each advertisement, as they all share a temporal ordering: a difference is clearly established between the setting of the stage, before audiences’ involvement, and the running of the adverts in readers’ minds, where the attributes of the product are unfolded in front of the readers via the story told, just as pointed out by Hidalgo-Downing, Martínez and Kraljevic-Mujic (2016).

5) The use of SPG schema in our adverts exemplifies well the fact that basic spatial concepts are at the base of much of the reasoning which happens in the advertising discourse. Since its main goal is to enhance the value of the products promoted, it is interesting to point out that the overarching strategy connecting the three adverts is the humanization of the brands advertised by presenting each of them as the generator of a storytelling experience for consumers. However, it is worth mentioning that the story can only be activated if the reader is willing to take part in this meaning creation. This means that no matter how hard the advertisers try to enhance their products, if the reader does not take part in this cognitive process of building up the necessary connections — in the manner claimed by Fauconnier (2002), nothing will have been achieved.

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