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Wordplay Persuades for Customer Reviews of Truffles, but Not Laundry Detergent



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Ads or consumer reviews that use metaphors and wordplay can be effective, but it depends on the product, according to a new study in the [Journal of Consumer Research](#).

“The use of figurative language in advertising (such as metaphor or word play) has a generally positive effect on attitudes toward the ad and the product,” write authors Ann Kronrod (Michigan State University) and Shai Danziger (Tel Aviv University). “But today, much of the information consumers get about a product comes from reviews written by other consumers. Does the effect of figurative language on attitudes remain generally positive when used in consumer reviews?”

Not always, according to the authors, who found that consumer reviews of products that relate to pleasure (hedonic products) are more likely to use figurative or emotional language than reviews that describe utilitarian products. So, for example, a consumer review of ice cream would use more figurative language than a review of a bank.

This is true even for products that have both hedonic and utilitarian uses. In one experiment, participants used liquid soap to either wash a dirty spoon (utilitarian use) or blow bubbles (hedonic use). The participants who blew bubbles used more figurative language when they described their experiences.

Other experiments found that responses to figurative language depend on the source. An experiment showed that consumer attitudes shifted depending on whether the language was used in a review or an ad. “When the same product description was defined as an ad and not as a review, figurative language in the description elevated the attitudes towards the product—for both hedonic and utilitarian products,” the authors write.

“Consumer word of mouth is one of the most important sources of influence on decisions,” the authors explain. So understanding how the use of language affects the reader can help reviewers know how the public reacts to their messages. “Figuratively speaking, this research is a flashlight focused on the deep waters of user-generated content that reveals complex forms of underwater life,” the authors conclude.

Ann Kronrod and Shai Danziger. “‘Wii Will Rock You!’ The Use and Effect of Figurative Language in Consumer Reviews of Hedonic and Utilitarian Consumption.” *Journal of Consumer Research*: December 2013. For more information, contact Ann Kronrod (kronrod@msu.edu) or visit <http://ejcr.org/>.

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