

An Investigation on Figurative Language Employed in English Advertisements in In-flight Magazines

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Abstract

The main objectives of the study are: 1) to identify the types of figurative language employed in English ads in in-flight magazines; and 2) to analyze the roles played by different types of figurative language in certain categories of English ads found in in-flight magazines. Based on the main theoretical frameworks of McQuarrie and Mick (1996), Thorn (2008), and Wells, Moriarty, and Burnett (2006), content analysis (Berg, 2004; and Coffey and Atkinson, 1996) was mainly employed in this qualitative study. 172 ads with the employment of figurative language found in Sawasdee and Fah Thai in-flight magazines were analyzed.

The findings revealed that five common types of figurative language were alliteration, metaphor, parison, personification, and rhetorical questions. The most popular types of figurative language for writing headlines and body texts were alliteration and metaphor, whereas alliteration and parison seemed to be fashionable for creating slogans.

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Considering the employment of figurative language in connection with advertising components, these five common types in headlines could gain more attention from the readers. In body texts, they could make the readers know, understand, imagine about the selling points advertised, and stimulate decision making. Finally, they could make slogans more memorable. In addition, regarding the relation between the employment of these five common types and advertising categories, the most two popular types, namely alliteration and metaphor, were commonly found in three main types of products: 'travel/hotel', 'real estate/home', and 'airline/airline service and promotion'. These five types of figurative language were obviously seen to promote the themes of 'privacy', 'comfort, relaxation, and happiness', 'natural surroundings', and 'introducing/guaranteeing products'.

In sum, figurative language appeared to be an effective tool in advertising. To illustrate, these five common types shared similar roles to successfully convey the message objectives in advertising including creating perception, delivering/developing cognition, creating affection, and stimulating readers' behaviors in consuming the products.

บทคัดย่อ

จุดประสงค์หลักของการศึกษานี้คือ 1) ระบุประเภทของภาษาภาพพจน์ที่ถูกใช้ในโฆษณาภาษาอังกฤษในนิตยสารบันเครื่องบิน 2) วิเคราะห์บทบาทของภาษาภาพพจน์ประเภทต่างๆ ที่มีต่อการโฆษณาในนิตยสารบันเครื่องบิน ภายใต้กรอบทฤษฎีหลักของ แมคคาวร์ และมิเกิล (1996) ชอร์น (2008) และ เวลล์ส นอริอาร์ต์ และเบอร์เนท์ (2006) วิธีการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลเพื่อหาคำตอบเชิงคุณภาพของการศึกษานี้ใช้วิธีการวิเคราะห์เนื้อหา (เบิร์ก, 2004; คอฟฟี่ และแอตคินสัน, 1996) จำกจำนวนโฆษณา 172 ชิ้นที่พับการใช้ภาษาภาพพจน์ในนิตยสารสวัสดิ์และฟ้าไทย

ผลการศึกษาพบว่า ภาษาภาพพจน์ที่พบมากในโฆษณา 5 ประเภท ได้แก่ การใช้สัมผัสเสียงพยัญชนะ การใช้อุปลักษณ์ การใช้โครงสร้างขنان การใช้คำบุคลาธิชฐาน และการใช้คำถามเชิงวากศิลป์ การใช้สัมผัสเสียงพยัญชนะและการใช้อุปลักษณ์เป็นทางเลือกที่นิยมในการเขียนพาดหัวและเนื้อความโฆษณา ส่วนการใช้สัมผัสเสียงพยัญชนะและการใช้โครงสร้างขنانเป็นวิธีที่นิยมในการเขียนคำวัญโฆษณา

เมื่อเชื่อมโยงระหว่างองค์ประกอบของโฆษณาและการใช้ภาษาภาพพจน์ พบว่า การใช้ภาษาภาพพจน์ทั้ง 5 ประเภทในพาดหัวโฆษณา มีส่วนดึงดูดความสนใจของผู้อ่าน สำหรับเนื้อความโฆษณา การใช้สัมผัสเสียงพยัญชนะ การใช้โครงสร้างขنان การใช้อุปลักษณ์และการใช้คำบุคลาธิชฐานจะช่วยทำให้ผู้อ่านโฆษณา รู้ เข้าใจ จินตนาการต่อจุดขายของสินค้าที่โฆษณา และกระตุ้นการตัดสินใจของผู้อ่าน อีกทั้งภาษาภาพพจน์เหล่านี้ยังช่วยทำให้คำวัญโฆษณา่ง่าย ต่อการจดจำของผู้อ่านอีกด้วย นอกจากนี้เมื่อพิจารณาความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างการใช้ภาษาภาพพจน์และประเภทสินค้าที่ถูกโฆษณาพบว่า 2 จาก 5 ประเภทของภาษาภาพพจน์ได้แก่ การใช้สัมผัสเสียงพยัญชนะและการใช้อุปลักษณ์ พบมากใน 3 ประเภทสินค้า ได้แก่ การท่องเที่ยวและโรงแรม บ้านและอสังหาริมทรัพย์ และสายการบิน (รวมถึงการบริการและส่งเสริมการขาย) อย่างไรก็ตาม ภาษาภาพพจน์ทั้ง 5 ประเภทนี้ล้วนนำเสนอการโฆษณาภายใต้กรอบแนวคิดด้านความเป็นส่วนตัว, ความสวยงาม การผ่อนคลาย และความสุข, สิ่งแวดล้อมทางธรรมชาติ, การแนะนำ หรือการรับประทานคุณภาพสินค้า

ดังนั้นการใช้ภาษาภาพพจน์ในโฆษณาจึงเป็นเครื่องมือที่สำคัญในการโฆษณา กล่าวคือ กลวิธีเหล่านี้มีบทบาทที่คล้ายคลึงกันในการสื่อสารจุดประสงค์ หลักของงานโฆษณาแต่ละชิ้น ไปสู่ผู้อ่านอย่างมีประสิทธิผลโดยการสร้างการรับรู้ การสั่งหรือพัฒนาความคิด การสร้างอารมณ์ร่วม และการกระตุ้นให้ผู้อ่านบริโภคสินค้า

Rationale of the Study

An in-flight magazine is a common form of industrialized print media which the airlines mainly utilize for marketing, communicating, and entertaining passengers on board (Small, Harris, and Wilson, 2008). One important component of in-flight magazines is ads which present companies, goods, and brands from multi-countries to attract the target readers (e.g. middle-aged, business people, and professionals), reflecting their global interests and lifestyles (Thurlow and Jaworski, 2003). Interestingly, to produce effective ads, persuasive techniques are commonly employed to attract the readers' attention, and the employment of language is an important factor in ads which advertisers employ to add more persuasive power (Donnell and Todd, 1991). One of the frequent language devices employed for persuading readers to buy products or use services is figurative language (McQuarrie and Mick, 1996; Thorn, 2008; and Tom and Eves, 1999). However, there has been little research on the roles of different types of figurative language in ads appearing in the in-flight magazine—a forum in which ads are common features. Therefore, it would be more advantageous to extensively explore the employment of different types of figurative language and their roles in English ads in the in-flight magazine.

Research Questions

- 1) What types of figurative language are employed in English ads appearing in in-flight magazines?
- 2) How do different types of figurative language play roles in certain categories of English ads found in in-flight magazines?

Review of Literature

Ads in In-flight Magazines

In airline businesses, an in-flight magazine is one of the in-flight media, and generally offers interesting information about travelling. It also includes entertainment sections and various onboard matters, such as flight routes, and safety directions for passengers (Small *et al.*, 2008). Significantly, ad is a big area for promoting the airline's own well-recognized image with its impressive services as well as products from different brands and services intended for the target readers (De Mooij and Keegan, 1991). The advertised product and service themes are mostly those relevant to the privileges of wealth, stressing 'luxury', 'indulgence', and 'comfort' (Small *et al.*, 2008). To produce an ad which is effective at persuading the target readers to do something concerning the product/service in order to respond to their needs and/or solve their problems, an advertiser should take into consideration not only the locations/components of the message (e.g. a headline, a subhead, a body text, and a slogan) and other elements (e.g. layout, image, etc) but also the message objectives in advertising. Wells *et al.* (2006) suggested the accomplishments of the message objectives in ads can be observed in six facets, as presented in figure 1.

Figure 1 The Theoretical Framework of the Message Objectives in advertising

Message Objectives

1. Perception: create attention, awareness, interest, recognition and recall
2. Cognition: deliver information and understanding
3. Affection: touch emotions and create feelings
4. Persuasion: change attitudes, create conviction and preference
5. Transformation: establish brand identity and associations
6. Behaviors: stimulate trial, purchase, repurchase, or some other forms of action

Source: Wells *et al.* (2006: 334)

In brief, first, 'perception' aims to call the readers' attention, transfer the message, create impression, and linger on their memory. Second, 'cognition' involves delivering information and making something being presented clear. Third, 'affection' highlights psychological strategies to touch the feelings or emotions of the readers. Fourth, 'persuasion' changes attitudes, convictions, and preferences. Fifth, 'transformation' is associated with establishing brand identity and its associations. Finally, 'behaviors' involve stimulating the readers' action towards the product/service being advertised in some ways (Wells *et al.*, 2006).

Figurative Language

In general, there is a wide variety of language strategies that add up to special and creative writing styles of ad. Figurative language is one of the most effective devices for producing persuasive discourse which can achieve the ultimate goals of advertising—building readers' motivation and memorability (Kpolugbo and Masagbor, 2006). McQuarrie and Mick (1996) divided figurative language into two main figurative modes: schemes (devices based on phonological and syntactic features), and tropes (devices based on semantic features). Schemes are composed of two main styles of operations: repetition and reversal. Repetition includes alliteration, assonance, rhyme, chime, anaphora, epistrophe, epanalepsis, anadiplosis, and parison. Reversal consists of antimetabole and antithesis. For tropes, the rhetorical operations are divided into substitution and destabilization. Substitution includes hyperbole, ellipsis, epanorthosis, rhetorical questions, and metonymy. Destabilization is composed of metaphor, pun, irony, and paradox. In addition, as evidenced by the preliminary investigation of the data collected by this study, some other types of figurative language were also observed. Three relevant types of figurative language that were often found in

advertising, in accordance with the theoretical framework introduced by Thorn (2008), were additionally included in the theoretical framework for this study. These are 'synecdoche', 'simile', and 'personification'. Interestingly, these types of figurative language share similar roles with those classified in the tropes of substitution and destabilization, suggested by McQuarrie and Mick (1996). Figure 2 shows the theoretical framework of types of figurative language employed in this study.

Figure 2 The Theoretical Framework of Types of Figurative Language

Figuration		All Rhetorical Figures (artful deviations)			
Figurative mode		Scheme		Trope	
Rhetorical operation		Repetition	Reversal	Substitution	Destabilization
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - rhyme, chime, alliteration, assonance - anaphora, epistrophe, epanalepsis, anadiplosis - parison 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - antimetabole - antithesis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - hyperbole - ellipsis - epanorthosis, rhetorical question - metonym - synecdoche 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - metaphor - pun - irony - paradox - simile - personification

Source: McQuarrie and Mick (1996), and Thorn (2008)

For clarity, definitions and explanation of types of figurative language will be summarized. Nevertheless, due to the limited space here, the researcher will present definitions of the five types of figurative language commonly found in this study and discuss later on in the analysis.

'Alliteration' refers to the repetition of the consonant sound of many adjoining words. 'Parison' refers to the repetition of words, phrases, or

sentences that have the syntactical similarity. ‘Metaphor’ is describing something to the unlike thing, but they actually have something in common. ‘Personification’ is giving human qualities to non-living things, namely an object or idea. A ‘rhetorical question’ is a kind of asking a question to make an assertion.

Methodology

Research Design

This study was designed in a qualitative approach. To address the two research questions, the theoretical framework of figurative language classifications suggested by McQuarrie and Mick (1996), and Thorn (2008) and the theoretical framework of the message objectives in advertising introduced by Wells *et al.* (2006) were mainly employed to guide the analysis. Moreover, content analysis including the descriptive and interpretive methods, suggested by Berg (2004), and Coffey and Atkinson (1996), was applied for the investigation.

Procedures of Data Collection and Analysis

Data for this study derived from Sawasdee and Fah Thai in-flight magazines circulated in 2010. Only English ads with the use of figurative language (total of 172 ads) were purposively selected. The scope of the analysis covered only the texts in the headlines, subheads, body texts, and slogans. Next, the types of figurative language found in each English ad in the in-flight magazines were identified according to the theoretical framework suggested by McQuarrie and Mick (1996), and Thorn (2008). The frequencies of the occurrences of different types of figurative language were counted in the form of percentages. Then, the connection between the employment of different types and other advertising components as well as categories was

analyzed. And the final step was to analyze the roles of each type of the most commonly-used figurative language that fulfills the objectives of ad. To ensure the trustworthiness of the analysis, 30% of the data investigated by the researcher was validated by the experts. After gaining 83% of agreement (Miles and Huberman, 1994), the researcher continued to work with the remaining data and to conceptualize the final findings. Theoretical concepts derived from the overall findings were developed to provide a common picture of this phenomenon.

Results of the Study

Types of Figurative Language Employed in Ads in In-flight Magazines

The results revealed that five types of figurative language which were commonly employed (more frequently than 5%) in ads found in Sawasdee and Fah Thai in-flight magazines included alliteration (26.37%), followed by metaphor (22.73%), parison (10.91%), personification (8.79%), and rhetorical questions (6.36%).

Regarding the employment of these five types of figurative language in connection with advertising components, metaphor was mostly found in headlines (24.27%), followed by alliteration (22.33%), rhetorical questions (10.68%), parison (7.77%), and personification (5.82%). In subheads, rhetorical questions were mostly found (18.52%), followed by alliteration and metaphor (14.81%), personification (11.11%), and parison (7.40%). In body texts, alliteration was mostly found (30.12%), followed by metaphor (24.10%), personification (12.05%), parison (9.64%), and rhetorical questions (3.01%). In slogans, alliteration and parison were equally found (29.41%), followed by metaphor (17.65%), whereas personification and rhetorical questions did not appear in this advertising component.

Regarding the occurrences of these five types of figurative language and advertising categories, the results showed that three common advertising categories found in Sawasdee and Fah Thai in-flight magazines are: 1) 'travel/hotel' (54.87%); 2) 'real estate/home' (11.36%); and 3) 'airline/airline service and promotion' (11.04%). In 'travel/hotel' ads, alliteration was mostly found (30.00%), followed by metaphor (20.55%), personification (11.66%), parison (10.55%), and rhetorical questions (4.44%). In 'real estate/home' ads, metaphor was mostly found (33.33%), followed by alliteration (27.27%), parison (15.15%), rhetorical questions (9.09%), and personification (3.03%). Lastly, in 'airline/airline service and promotion' ads, metaphor was mostly found (28.85%), followed by alliteration (21.15%), parison (11.54%), rhetorical questions (9.61%), and personification (7.69%). Thus, the most preferable types of figurative language in these three advertising categories were alliteration and metaphor.

Roles of Figurative Language Employed in Ads in In-flight Magazines

Since alliteration, parison, metaphor, personification, and rhetorical questions are the most common types of figurative language found in ads in Sawasdee and Fah Thai in-flight magazines, the discussion of the roles of figurative language thus focuses on these types of figurative language only.

1) Alliteration

The results indicated that presenting selling points through the alliterative expression includes five main themes: 1) presenting 'privacy' for the customers (e.g. "Retreat resort where green matters"—a slogan by Bamboo Huts); 2) describing natural surroundings around the residence and accommodation (e.g. "Watch the sitting sun melt into the sparking sea...And discover the myriad charms of Pattaya"—a body text by Avalon Beach

Resort); 3) focusing on the convenience and comfort of airline passengers (e.g. “Experience the roominess, the refinements and the relaxation”—a body text by THAI Airways); 4) introducing the flight destinations/tourist attractions by the airline (e.g. “4,000 sacred stupas in view is not an ordinary sight to see, for this is an extraordinary land”—a body text by THAI Airways); and 5) focusing on guaranteeing the qualities of the real-estate property (e.g. “Prestigious living in the Prime location of Patong, Phuket”—a headline by The Privilege). The findings suggested that alliteration makes the text in headlines and slogans more eye-catching and memorable. Moreover, if alliteration is presented in a persuasive message in the body text, the readers may be influenced to conceptualize the selling points of something being advertised; in other words, the ads with figurative language incorporate their decision making.

2) Parison

The use of parison in ads seemed to promote product/service objectives in two ways: 1) highlighting the features of the residence and accommodation (e.g. “splash in the pool relax on the beach” and “The Food...The View...The RockPool”—a headline by Ramada and a slogan by The RockPool, respectively); and 2) promoting tourism of the country (e.g. “In this wonderful country where smiles seem to be the national language, where welcomes are always heartfelt, and where making friends is so easy”—a body text by Thailand Tourism). The findings suggested that parison employed in headlines and slogans could draw the readers’ attention and aid memorability with its balanced structure. Besides, it could lead the readers to the interesting messages and explanations of the products, which are contained in the body texts of the ads.

3) Metaphor

The results indicated that metaphors employed in ads can be classified into two main themes: 1) creating the impression with the advertised place through quality features similarly attributed to something else (e.g. “Welcome to paradise” and “Your own piece of Paradise”—a headline by Ko Tao Resort and a slogan by Arisara, respectively); and 2) describing the advertised products of the airlines, namely the flight destinations/tourist attractions (e.g. “Fly to Johannesburg - Gateway to Africa”—a headline by THAI Airways). The findings suggested that metaphors employed in headlines and slogans could enhance attention and recall of the readers. As a consequence, it could promote understanding, develop impressive feelings, and touch emotions of the products of which the detail-quality are presented in body texts.

4) Personification

The application of personification in ads can be divided into three major themes: 1) presenting a sense of closeness that is touchable (e.g. “A design resort immersing you in the beauty of nature.”—a body text by Indigo Pearl Phuket); 2) involving/engaging readers to perceive the selling point of the product (e.g. “67 superbly appointed rooms in spectacular setting await you.”—a body text by Dara Samui); and 3) building the reader’s imagination about accommodation (e.g. “Fresh seafood served on an elegant beachside terrace where land and water meet in the tropical embrace.”—a body text by Four Seasons Resort). As appearing in ads, the senses of ‘touch’, ‘closeness’ resulting from the employment of personification could promote the readers’ engagement and their positive imagination about the products. The findings showed that personification appears to be a persuasive technique to draw the readers’ attention to the selling points of the products, and this finally influences their decision to buy the products.

5) Rhetorical questions

The application of rhetorical questions in ads can be classified into two main themes: 1) attracting customers with the selling point (e.g. “Need finances to build your dream home?”—a headline by GFS@Australasia); and 2) encouraging the customer’s decision (e.g. “Our unique and delicious menus feature dishes which suit your palate and desires. From only 3,900 Baht net per couple, what could possibly be better?”—a body text by Bandara). The findings suggested that opening a headline with a question directed at the target readers’ problems/needs could draw attention and stimulate personal interest in the ad. Moreover, by asking a question, it is possible to stimulate the readers to take action after they have learned more information from the body text. Advertisers imply that their product/service is the best available, so the customers should decide to buy the product/service, rather than any other product/service.

In sum, the 14 themes derived from these five common types of figurative language, as evidenced in different products/services above, can be summarized into four main themes: ‘privacy’, ‘comfort, relaxation, and happiness’, ‘natural surroundings’, and ‘introducing/guaranteeing products’ (e.g. tourist attractions/real-estate property).

Discussion and Implications of the Study

Five common types of figurative language found in ads in Sawasdee and Fah Thai in-flight magazines were alliteration, metaphor, parison, personification, and rhetorical questions. The findings also showed that the most popular types of figurative language for writing headlines and body texts were found to be alliteration and metaphor, whereas alliteration and parison seemed to be preferred for creating slogans. From this evidence, it might be concluded that alliteration is the most favorable

figurative language to attract the readers' attention to headlines; convey key words in body texts to make them understand the messages more effectively; and make slogans easier to recall. Meanwhile, the employment of metaphors in headlines could make advertising texts more vivid, and help the readers to learn and establish impressions of the product presented in body texts. In addition, the application of parison in slogans could create a rhythm that enhances the memorability of the product.

Regarding the relation between the employment of these types of figurative language and advertising categories, this study revealed that, among these five types of figurative language, alliteration and metaphor were commonly found in three main types of products: 'travel/hotel', 'real estate/home', and 'airline/airline service and promotion'. In particular, these five types of figurative language were clearly seen to promote four major themes: 'privacy', 'comfort, relaxation, and happiness', 'natural surroundings', and 'introducing/guaranteeing products' (e.g. tourist attractions/real-estate property). These qualities are similar to those found by Small *et al.* (2008). Besides, these five types of figurative language shared similar roles/purposes to serve the objectives of the ads. These included creating 'perception', delivering/developing 'cognition', creating 'affection', and stimulating 'behaviors' of the readers in consuming the products.

Alliterative expressions tend to emphasize the selling points of the products/services via the repetition of the consonant sound of neighboring words (e.g. 'privacy' and 'beauty of nature' in 'travel/hotel' ads). It could be observed in two main aspects. It could, firstly, help to create perception of the readers of the ads by gaining their attention and recall with its use in headlines and slogans. Secondly, it may be used in the body texts to help establish the readers' cognition which could make them imagine and

understand the important features of the products/services, thus assisting decision-making about buying the products/services.

Secondly, parison is intended to emphasize the selling points and benefits of the products/services via its balanced structure. It tends to play two main roles in advertising. Firstly, it could create the readers' perception, when used in headlines and slogans, by attracting attention and aiding memorability. It could, secondly, help to deliver messages in the body text to the readers' cognition by leading them to the interesting messages and understand about the products/services.

Thirdly, the employment of metaphors seems to help in describing the selling points of products, by sharing the common background experiences of the advertisers and readers. These shared experiences could help to create an impression of the products via different themes: 'privacy', and 'comfort and happiness'. Metaphors tend to serve three main roles in ads. First, they could help to create perception within the readers by their use in headlines and slogans, attracting attention and helping to maintain recall. Second, metaphor use in body texts could help to develop the readers' cognition to understand about the attributes of the products. Last, metaphors could create affection towards the product by touching the readers' feelings and emotions.

Fourthly, personification tends to serve three possible roles/purposes in ads. First, it could create perception by involving/engaging the readers in the ads. Designing a product/service as if talking to the readers could get them involved and engage them to the important message of the ad. Secondly, personification could lead to cognition about the selling points of the products to create positive images in the readers' minds. Finally, it could create affection by touching the readers' feelings and emotions.

Lastly, the purposes of employing rhetorical questions seem to engage the customers by attracting them with the selling points of the product, and encourage their decision. These observations lead to identifying the two main roles of using rhetorical questions in ads. First, rhetorical questions could create the readers' perception. Attracting the target readers by a question about their problems/needs in the headline is likely to stimulate perception by arousing attention and interest to lead them into the important solution. This power of the figurative language has also been observed by Applegate (2005), Arens, Weigold, and Arens (2009), and Wells, Burnett, and Moriarty (2000). Second, the employment of a rhetorical question, especially at the end of message in the body text, possibly stimulates the readers' behaviors. That is, it encourages their prompt decisions making about buying the products/services.

From the findings of this study, the implications of the power of figurative language in advertising are as follows:

1) This study recommends that, to optimize the readers' attention to the headline, the employment of three rhetorical operations should be considered: 1) repetition (e.g. alliteration, parison); 2) substitution (e.g. rhetorical questions); and 3) destabilization (e.g. metaphor, personification). A rhetorical question can be employed in the subhead to appeal to the readers' curiosity, and lead them into the body text. Next, alliteration, parison, metaphor, and personification can make the readers know, understand, and imagine about the selling points advertised in the body text. Furthermore, the employment of a rhetorical question at the end of the body text can stimulate the readers' decision making. And finally, the employment of alliteration, parison, and metaphor can make the slogan more memorable.

2) Employed in the correct and appropriate way, figurative language can intensify the effects of advertising messages. Advertisers should realize that exploiting common experience/background knowledge between the advertiser and readers will promote the effective use of figurative language. Moreover, choosing a certain type of figurative language for a particular context will suit the particular purpose of advertising.

3) In common product ads in in-flight magazines, favorable themes include 'privacy', 'comfort, relaxation, and happiness', 'natural surroundings' and 'introducing/guaranteeing products', and the employment of different types of figurative language can empower these themes effectively.

4) All in all, figurative language can make an advertising text unique, interesting, understandable, and memorable. It can also convey the intended meanings effectively to fulfill a certain communicative purpose. Thus, it can be a creative device which can help advertisers to produce a powerful ad since it can enhance perception, cognition, affection, and stimulate behaviors of the readers to the product/service..

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