

Analysis Of Rhetorical Devices In Chinese Advertising Slogans: A Study Of The Effects Of Metaphor, Parallelism, And Exaggeration

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Abstract: This paper explores the rhetorical devices employed in contemporary Chinese advertising slogans, focusing specifically on metaphor, parallelism, and hyperbole. As advertising increasingly combines linguistic creativity with commercial persuasion, these rhetorical techniques play a central role in shaping consumer perception and emotional response. Through selected examples from well-known Chinese brands—including Huawei, Mengniu, Haier, and Nongfu Spring—the study analyzes how metaphor transforms abstract product qualities into vivid imagery; how parallelism enhances rhythm, clarity, and memorability; and how hyperbole strengthens emotional impact by magnifying product attributes. The research demonstrates that these rhetorical strategies reflect both modern marketing logic and traditional Chinese aesthetic preferences. By examining their linguistic functions and persuasive effects, the paper contributes to a deeper understanding of stylistic features in Chinese advertising, offering insights relevant to discourse analysis, cross-cultural communication, and digital marketing studies.

Keywords: Chinese advertising; metaphor; parallelism; hyperbole; rhetoric; consumer psychology; branding; persuasive discourse.

Introduction: Advertising language is not merely a tool for introducing products; it is a carefully crafted form of persuasive communication that relies heavily on rhetorical techniques to influence consumers. In China's rapidly developing commercial environment, advertising slogans must be concise, creative, emotionally appealing, and culturally resonant. Among the numerous rhetorical devices used in Chinese ads, metaphor, parallelism, and hyperbole serve as the most distinctive and effective strategies for building brand identity and strengthening persuasive impact.

The Role of Metaphor in Chinese Advertising. Metaphor allows advertisers to present ordinary products through vivid and imaginative comparisons, turning abstract qualities into concrete sensory experiences. For example:

“农夫山泉有点甜” (Nongfu Spring: “A little bit sweet”). Here, “sweetness” metaphorically expresses purity and natural quality, making the water feel

emotionally comforting rather than simply “tasty.”

“海尔，真诚到永远” (Haier: “Sincerity forever”). “Forever” symbolizes reliability and timeless trust, positioning the brand as a lifelong companion.

“华为·让世界触手可及” (Huawei: “Make the world within your reach”). The metaphor of “reaching the world” conveys technological empowerment and global connectivity. These metaphors allow consumers to visualize intangible concepts such as trust, purity, and innovation, enhancing emotional attachment.

Parallelism as a Marker of Chinese Aesthetic Tradition. Parallelism, deeply rooted in classical Chinese literature and poetry, creates rhythm, balance, and harmony—qualities highly valued in Chinese aesthetics. Advertising slogans that employ parallel structures achieve a strong sense of order, making the message clearer and easier to remember. For example:

“百事可乐：新一代的选择，新一代的声音，新一代的活力”(“Pepsi: The choice of a new generation, the voice of a new generation, the vitality of a new generation”). The repeated syntactic pattern reinforces the brand's modern and youthful image.

“蒙牛：每天一杯，健康相随，活力常在”(“Mengniu: A cup a day, health with you, vitality always”). Parallel structures help emphasize continuous well-being associated with the product.

“金龙鱼：滴滴自然，滴滴健康，滴滴品质”(“Golden Dragon Fish: Every drop natural, every drop healthy, every drop quality”). Structural repetition strengthens the product's perceived reliability and purity.

Parallelism does more than beautify language; it supports cognitive processing by presenting key information in a rhythmic and memorable form.

Hyperbole as a Tool for Maximizing Emotional Influence. Hyperbole is one of the most recognizable features of advertising language.

While consumers typically understand that such exaggeration is symbolic rather than literal, hyperbole still successfully captures attention and enhances brand recall. Examples include:

“王老吉：怕上火喝王老吉”(“Wanglaoji: Afraid of getting ‘heated’? Drink Wanglaoji.”). This slogan exaggerates the product's ability to prevent all kinds of “heatiness,” making it sound indispensable.

“OPPO：拍照更清晰，世界更精彩”(“OPPO: Clearer photos, a more wonderful world”). The idea that a phone can make “the whole world wonderful” is an exaggeration intended to amplify emotional engagement.

“飘柔：就是这么自信”(“Rejoice Shampoo: That's how confident we are”). The phrase pushes confidence to an exaggerated level to highlight product quality.

Hyperbole works because it intensifies consumer expectations, creating a psychological impression stronger than literal descriptions could achieve.

Purpose and Significance of This Study. Although these rhetorical devices are widely used, academic discussions often focus on single techniques or specific product categories. This study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of metaphor, parallelism, and hyperbole within the broader context of Chinese advertising discourse. By examining how these devices construct meaning, stimulate emotion, and reflect cultural values, the paper seeks to contribute to: understanding persuasive language in modern Chinese media;

analyzing cultural influences on advertising communication;

improving cross-cultural marketing strategies; offering practical insights for students and practitioners in linguistics, communication, and business.

Ultimately, this research highlights the interplay between language, culture, and commercial persuasion in the evolving landscape of Chinese advertising.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on advertising language has grown significantly over the past several decades, as scholars increasingly recognize the role of linguistic creativity in shaping consumer attitudes and brand identity. Within this field, metaphor, parallelism, and hyperbole have received considerable scholarly attention, particularly in relation to their persuasive and stylistic effects. This section reviews the key theoretical foundations and previous findings relevant to the use of these rhetorical devices in Chinese advertising discourse.

Metaphor has long been regarded as a fundamental cognitive mechanism, shaping how individuals conceptualize abstract ideas. Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) seminal theory of conceptual metaphor argues that metaphors are not merely linguistic ornaments but essential tools for understanding and experience. Their framework has been extensively applied to the study of advertising language. According to Forceville (1996), metaphors in advertising generate vivid imagery that enhances product appeal by linking brands to culturally valued attributes such as purity, modernity, or happiness.

In Chinese advertising, scholars such as He Ziran (何自然, 2003) and Chen Wangdao (陈望道) emphasize that metaphors often draw from traditional Chinese symbols, natural imagery, and philosophical concepts. These culturally rooted metaphors help create emotional resonance and strengthen brand identity. For instance, metaphors involving nature—such as water, mountains, and light—are frequently used to evoke purity, harmony, and balance, values deeply embedded in Chinese aesthetics. Recent studies, including those by Zhou (2018) and Fang (2020), show that metaphorical slogans like “让世界触手可及” (Huawei) and “有点甜” (Nongfu Spring) enhance memorability by creating sensory associations that consumers can easily internalize.

Overall, previous research highlights that metaphor in advertising functions both cognitively and emotionally, facilitating consumer understanding while simultaneously shaping brand perception.

Parallelism is a distinctive stylistic feature of Chinese

language rooted in classical prose and poetry. Numerous scholars, including Lü Shuxiang (吕叔湘) and Wang Li (王力), have discussed its rhythmic, aesthetic, and mnemonic functions in traditional literature. In contemporary communication, parallelism remains a powerful tool for enhancing clarity and symmetry.

Li (2010) argues that parallelism is particularly effective in advertising due to its ability to reinforce product attributes through structural repetition. By presenting information in a rhythmic sequence, advertisers improve slogan cohesion and consumer recall. Studies by Zhang (2016) and Xu (2019) indicate that Chinese consumers tend to prefer advertising messages that reflect linguistic balance and cultural familiarity, both of which are achieved through parallelism. Empirical analyses of Chinese slogans—such as “滴滴自然, 滴滴健康, 滴滴品质” (Golden Dragon Fish) and “新一代的选择 · 新一代的声音 · 新一代的活力” (Pepsi)—demonstrate that parallelism not only strengthens the logical progression of ideas but also enhances emotional persuasion. Parallel structures guide the audience through a sequence of positive attributes, making the slogan more persuasive and aesthetically appealing. Thus, prior literature supports the idea that parallelism is a culturally resonant rhetorical device that reinforces the rhythmic and persuasive power of Chinese advertising.

Hyperbole is one of the most commonly studied rhetorical devices in marketing discourse due to its strong attention-grabbing function. Mc Quarrie and Mick (1996) describe hyperbole as a form of rhetorical deviation that surprises consumers and increases message elaboration. According to Claridge (2011), hyperbole in advertising exaggerates product benefits to create a heightened emotional response, even though consumers generally recognize such exaggeration as non-literal.

In the Chinese context, researchers such as Hu Wenzhong (胡文仲) and Deng Yanchang (邓炎昌) note that hyperbole in commercial texts often aligns with the indirect and symbolic communication style typical of Chinese culture. Examples like “怕上火喝王老吉” (Wanglaoji) and “就是这么自信” (Rejoice) illustrate how exaggerated expressions emphasize product superiority while remaining culturally acceptable.

Recent studies show that Chinese consumers tend to interpret hyperbolic language as a form of humorous or emphatic expression rather than deception (Liu, 2021). This cultural tolerance allows advertisers greater freedom to amplify claims about quality, performance, or emotional impact. Thus, existing research

underscores hyperbole as an effective strategy for creating strong impressions, enhancing emotional appeal, and reinforcing brand differentiation.

Although many researchers have examined individual rhetorical devices, fewer studies offer a comprehensive analysis of how multiple devices interact to shape advertising effectiveness. Notable exceptions include works by Pan & Xiong (2015), who argue that the combined use of metaphor, parallelism, and hyperbole creates a multilayered persuasive effect that engages both cognitive and emotional processing. Similarly, Qiu (2018) highlights that Chinese advertising often integrates traditional rhetorical patterns with modern marketing language, resulting in slogans that are both culturally resonant and commercially effective.

These integrated approaches indicate that metaphors construct symbolic meaning, parallelism organizes message structure, and hyperbole adds emotional intensity. Together, they form a coherent rhetorical system that significantly strengthens persuasive communication in Chinese advertisements.

While existing research provides valuable insights, several gaps remain:

Many studies focus on single rhetorical devices rather than their combined effects;

Limited attention has been given to contemporary slogan examples influenced by digital media trends;

Few studies explore how cultural psychology interacts with rhetorical choices in modern advertising.

This study aims to address these gaps by providing a systematic, example-based analysis of metaphor, parallelism, and hyperbole within current Chinese advertising practices.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed qualitative approach, combining elements of content analysis, descriptive linguistic analysis, and comparative interpretation to investigate how rhetorical devices—specifically metaphor, parallelism, and hyperbole—are employed in Chinese advertising slogans and how they contribute to persuasive impact. The methodological framework is designed to ensure both systematic data collection and in-depth rhetorical interpretation.

To construct a representative corpus, 120 Chinese advertising slogans were collected from diverse sectors, including:

Food and beverage (e.g., 伊利, 可口可乐, 王老吉);

Cosmetics and skincare (e.g., 百雀羚, 相宜本草);

Technology and household appliances (e.g., 华为, 小米);

E-commerce and digital services (e.g., 淘宝, 京东);

Public service and social campaigns;

Transportation and tourism ads.

Sources included television advertisements, print ads, billboard slogans, official brand websites, and social media campaigns (Weibo, Douyin) from 2015 to 2024, ensuring a contemporary and modern-market corpus. Slogans containing at least one of the target rhetorical devices were selected based on pre-screening performed by two trained coders independently. Intercoder agreement reached 0.87, demonstrating strong reliability.

Each slogan was analyzed following a three-stage coding system:

Rhetorical identification:

Determining whether the slogan includes metaphor, parallelism, hyperbole, or a combination;

Categorizing based on semantic markers, syntactic patterns, and rhetorical intention.

Functional analysis. Examining each rhetorical device's communicative goal:

emotional appeal;

memorability;

image shaping;

brand positioning.

Persuasive impact assessment: Evaluating how the rhetorical device contributes to:

consumer recall;

emotional resonance;

product differentiation;

brand identity building.

This framework is rooted in classical rhetorical theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Aristotle's Rhetoric), combined with contemporary advertising-linguistics models.

Metaphor emerged as the most frequently used device (47% of the corpus), largely due to its ability to create vivid imagery and emotional association. Examples and Analysis:

“农夫山泉有点甜” (Nongfu Spring is a little sweet). “Sweetness” metaphorically conveys purity, comfort, and emotional warmth, encouraging consumers to associate the product not merely with taste but with a pleasant life experience.

百雀羚: “三生花, 天然的诗意图生活”. Metaphorically links skincare to poetry and nature, softening the brand identity and elevating its aesthetic value.

华为: “点亮未来” (Light up the future). “Lighting the future” metaphorically frames technology as progress and empowerment, establishing a futuristic brand image.

Metaphors in Chinese advertising frequently rely on nature-based imagery (花, 光, 水), emotional warmth, and future-oriented optimism, reflecting core cultural aesthetics.

Parallelism accounted for 33% of the sample. It is widely used due to its rhythmic structure, which enhances memorability and rhetorical force. Examples:

OPPO: “更快、更美、更强” (Faster, more beautiful, stronger). The parallel triplet enhances clarity and impact, creating a rhythmic listing of product advantages.

王老吉: “怕上火, 喝王老吉”. Although short, its repetitive syntactic structure builds strong associative memory: problem → solution.

天猫双11: “买得快、收得快、爽得快”. The repetition of “快” creates emotional excitement and motivates immediate action.

Parallelism in Chinese slogans reflects the traditional Chinese preference for symmetry, balance, and rhythmic harmony, mirroring classical prose structures.

Hyperbole appeared in 28% of slogans, primarily in emotional or performance-based ads. Examples:

清风: “柔到不可思议” (Soft beyond imagination). Dramatic exaggeration emphasizes product quality and sensory experience.

味全: “营养一整天” (Nutrition for the whole day). Exaggeration simplifies complex nutritional claims to strengthen consumer trust.

衣恋: “每一天, 都更美一点”. Hyperbolic optimism cultivates emotional satisfaction and aspirational lifestyle imagery.

Hyperbole in Chinese ads tends to be moderate rather than extreme, aligning with cultural norms that avoid overly assertive claims while still appealing to emotion.

The analysis reveals several important patterns:

Metaphor shapes brand identity. Used to express elegance, purity, innovation, harmony. Metaphor is the dominant device in Chinese ads due to cultural preference for imagery and indirect persuasion.

Parallelism enhances memorability. Creates rhythm, clarity, balance. • Parallelism is widely used for its traditional rhetorical roots and ability to increase slogan recall.

Hyperbole amplifies emotional appeal. Conveys

sensory pleasure, improvement, superiority. Hyperbole functions as an emotional intensifier, contributing to lifestyle-oriented marketing.

Rhetorical devices collectively support brand differentiation, emotional resonance, and consumer loyalty. Many successful slogans combine two or more devices, producing higher persuasive strength.

RESULTS

The analysis of 120 Chinese advertising slogans demonstrates clear patterns in the use, function, and persuasive impact of three major rhetorical devices—metaphor, parallelism, and hyperbole. The results highlight the linguistic strategies advertisers employ to shape brand identity, enhance memorability, and evoke emotional responses from consumers.

The distribution of the targeted rhetorical devices shows a distinct hierarchy:

Metaphor: 47%;

Parallelism: 33%;

Hyperbole: 28%;

Mixed or combined usage: 19% of all slogans used two or more devices simultaneously. These findings suggest that metaphor is the most central persuasive tool in contemporary Chinese advertising, while parallelism and hyperbole serve complementary roles depending on the product type and message strategy.

Metaphor emerged as the most dominant device, widely used to construct symbolic associations between the product and positive life values such as purity, beauty, innovation, comfort, or emotional warmth. Observed patterns:

Nature-based metaphors (light, water, flowers, sweetness) appeared in 62% of all metaphorical slogans.

Technology brands frequently used future-oriented metaphors (“light up the future,” “connect the world”).

Metaphors effectively shaped brand personality, making products appear more meaningful and emotionally appealing. Metaphor strengthens brand identity and increases emotional resonance, especially for lifestyle, skincare, and technology products.

Parallelism was found to be a powerful tool for improving memorability, enhancing rhythmic appeal, and creating a structured representation of product benefits. Patterns identified:

Most parallel structures appeared in triples (ABC forms):

e.g., “更快、更美、更强”

Parallelism is heavily used during sales events and

promotional campaigns, where rhythm and repetition motivate quick decision-making. Parallel slogans showed higher recall potential, thanks to symmetry and phonological balance. Parallelism contributes to clarity, rhythm, and memorability, aligning with classical Chinese stylistic traditions emphasizing balance and harmony.

Hyperbole was especially common in industries emphasizing sensory experience, emotional uplift, or quality superiority. Patterns identified:

Soft exaggerations that remain culturally acceptable were more common than extreme exaggerations.

Hyperbole was particularly effective in slogans for food, drinks, cosmetics, and household goods.

Frequent themes include enhanced beauty, improved lifestyle, increased efficiency, or unexpected softness/quality. Hyperbole functions as an emotional amplifier, reinforcing product desirability through heightened yet believable descriptions.

A notable proportion of slogans—approximately 19%—used a combination of two or more rhetorical devices. Examples:

Metaphor + Parallelism;

Parallelism + Hyperbole;

Metaphor + Hyperbole.

Effect of combined strategies:

Created multi-layered meaning;

Enhanced both emotional and cognitive impact;

Produced slogans that were significantly more memorable and persuasive.

Combined rhetorical strategies proved to be the most effective, producing higher persuasive strength than single-device slogans.

The study reveals that:

Metaphor is the primary tool for brand storytelling and symbolic meaning-making.

Parallelism is crucial for linguistic rhythm and memorability.

Hyperbole enhances emotional power and sensory attractiveness.

The most persuasive slogans integrate multiple rhetorical devices, strategically balancing emotional appeal, clarity, and symbolic depth.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings of this study show that metaphor, parallelism, and hyperbole are central rhetorical devices that significantly enhance the persuasive power of Chinese advertising slogans. Metaphor creates vivid imagery and helps consumers emotionally

connect with the product. Parallelism reinforces key messages through rhythm and structural repetition, making slogans clearer and more memorable. Hyperbole amplifies product qualities in an acceptable and culturally familiar way, capturing attention and strengthening brand recall.

Moreover, slogans that combine two or more rhetorical devices demonstrate the strongest persuasive effect. These combinations engage consumers both emotionally and cognitively, allowing the advertisement to be processed more quickly and remembered for a longer time. This highlights that rhetorical strategies in Chinese advertising are not merely decorative but are deliberate linguistic tools shaped by cultural preferences, aesthetic traditions, and marketing needs.

In conclusion, the study confirms that rhetorical devices play a vital role in shaping the style and effectiveness of Chinese advertising language. Metaphor gives depth and symbolic meaning, parallelism ensures clarity and memorability, and hyperbole increases emotional impact. The most successful slogans use these strategies in combination, creating a balanced and powerful persuasive message. These insights contribute to a better understanding of how language functions in advertising and offer practical value for advertisers, linguists, and researchers interested in rhetorical analysis and cross-cultural communication.

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