

D. Fayvishenko

*Doctor of Sciences (Economics), Professor
Head of Department of Journalism and Advertising
e-mail: d.fayvishenko@knu.edu.ua, ORCID: 0000-0001-7880-9801
State University of Trade and Economics
Kyoto str., 19, Kyiv, Ukraine, 02156*

O. Kushchynska

*e-mail: o.kushchynska_ftm_5_22_b_d@knu.edu.ua
State University of Trade and Economics
Kyoto str., 19, Kyiv, Ukraine, 02156*

**VISUAL METAPHORS IN MEDIA DESIGN:
INFLUENCE ON INFORMATION PERCEPTION**

The aim of the study is to systematize visual metaphors as a media design tool, identify the mechanisms through which they influence the cognitive perception of information, and develop practical approaches for their effective use in digital communications.

***Research methodology.** The study employed a range of methods, namely: art-historical, system-structural, formalization, and comparative methods. The art-historical method was applied to analyze visual metaphors as artistic and communicative forms functioning within the media landscape, to examine the figurative-symbolic nature of visual solutions and their stylistic features, as well as to interpret metaphors through the lens of aesthetic categories (form, composition, color, and associativity). This ensured an accurate interpretation of visual metaphors not only as a communication tool but also as an element of contemporary visual culture. In turn, the system-structural method made it possible to identify the components of media design and classify visual metaphors as one of them. The study is based on verified empirical data, statistical materials (in particular, data from the Statista platform), as well as research contributions in the fields of media design, cognitive psychology, and communications, which made it possible to demonstrate the influence of visual metaphors on the perception of information, support theoretical claims with concrete examples, and ensure the validity of the conclusions drawn. The comparative method made it possible to trace the fields in which the term «visual metaphors» has also been studied, while the formalization method demonstrated how they may appear in contemporary media design.*

***Results.** The article presents an overview and analysis of visual metaphors, methods of their creation, and their types. It examines their modes of presentation and the platforms used for their dissemination. The article also analyzes case studies on the use of visual metaphors in contemporary media design. Examples of advertising and digital communications (including brand campaigns and visual solutions used by social media platforms) in which various types of visual metaphors are applied in practice are also examined. The rapid development of information technology drives the need to improve tools that facilitate the perception of information, which, in turn, contributes to a more effective understanding of news content, communicative messages, and advertising materials.*

***The novelty** lies in the systematization of visual metaphors as a structural element of media design, the refinement of approaches to their interpretation through the combination of art-historical and cognitive analysis, as well as in advancing the understanding of the mechanisms through which they influence the perception of information within the digital environment. Unlike existing studies, this research integrates media design, cognitive psychology, and digital communications, while also accounting for platform-specific features of content distribution and practical application.*

***Practical significance.** The findings contribute to a better understanding of the principles underlying the formation of effective visual-metaphorical solutions in media design and provide a foundation for further research in this field. The application of such approaches helps prevent information overload among the audience and increases the effectiveness of message comprehension, which, in turn, contributes to the improvement of communication and learning processes in the digital environment.*

***Key words:** media, metaphors, media design, visual metaphors, information, social media.*

I. Introduction

Under conditions of information overload, arriving in a continuous stream and becoming an integral part of every internet user's daily life, the search for means of optimizing the comprehension and interpretation of incoming data, news, and messages has become increasingly relevant. One such

effective means is the use of the stylistic device known as a «metaphor», which allows abstract or complex meanings to be transformed into comprehensible visual and figurative forms, thereby facilitating faster and more accurate perception of information.

A metaphor is a stylistic device that involves the figurative use of a word or phrase based on analogy, similarity, or comparison, as well as a word or phrase used in such a manner. As a literary device, metaphor is multifunctional, as it performs the following functions: communicative, cognitive, aesthetic, nominative, text-forming, emotional-evaluative, and genre-forming [6].

However, with the development of media and design – later brought together under the concept of «media design», understood as the process of creating a communicative environment and presenting information with consideration for the functional capabilities and aesthetics of visual forms [12] – it became possible to broaden the concept of metaphor from a literary device to an aesthetic and technical one, thus giving rise to the term «visual metaphor».

A visual metaphor is the representation of the essence of an object or topic through an indirect image, symbol, or visual scheme. In this way, the user comprehends the message through an associative chain, thereby reducing the cognitive and visual strain caused by large volumes of text [4].

Even logos of brands and social media platforms can be viewed as a form of visual metaphor, as they can evoke positive or negative associations and emotional responses in consumers when they interact with a product or service.

Similarly, stickers and emojis serve as visual representations of a range of feelings and emotions, making it possible to interpret the sender's mood and emotional experiences in digital communication.

Visual metaphors also include typographic choices in written messages, as they convey emotional tone and contextual meaning, facilitating comprehension and more effective cognitive processing of information.

Today, visual metaphors have a significant impact on the perception of information, as the rapid development of media design and the global influence of social media lead internet users to prefer more popular logos of brands and social media platforms, stickers, emojis, and memes.

Visual metaphors are an integral part of media design, which represents a promising research field and is undergoing rapid development.

A number of foreign practitioners and Ukrainian scholars analyzed the concept of «media design» as early as the beginning of the 21st century, namely Steven Heller and Seymour Chwast [8], Lev Manovich [10], and Richard Tadeusiewicz [5]. For example, R. Tadeusiewicz referred to this idea as «advertising cybernetics». However, in subsequent research on media design, the now widely accepted term was eventually established.

The concept of visual metaphor has been explored in the works of Roland Barthes [7], George Lakoff and Mark Johnson [9], and Scott McCloud [11], within the context of semiotics, cognitive linguistics, and visual communication.

Media design, as an interdisciplinary field, is actively evolving under the influence of rapid advances in information technology and is dynamic in nature, requiring further scholarly exploration. The ongoing transformation of the digital environment is giving rise to new forms of visual communication that outpace their systematic theoretical analysis.

A similar situation is observed with regard to visual metaphors. Despite the existence of individual studies, their impact on cognitive processes and consumer perception has not yet been clearly defined in academic discourse. This is due to the ongoing evolution of visual-metaphorical practices, which expand the range of known typological and functional characteristics.

Thus, it can be concluded that modern society and the academic community have not yet fully systematized all types of visual metaphors and the mechanisms through which they influence the perception of information. This highlights the need for further theoretical and empirical research in this field.

II. Research objectives and methods

The aim of the study is to systematize the impact of visual metaphors on users' perception of information and to develop approaches for their effective application in media design in order to optimize the comprehension of news, advertising, and communicative messages.

The study employed a range of methods, namely: art-historical, system-structural, formalization, and comparative methods. The art-historical method was applied to analyze visual metaphors as artistic and communicative forms functioning within the media landscape, to examine the figurative-symbolic nature of visual solutions and their stylistic features, as well as to interpret metaphors through the lens of aesthetic categories (form, composition, color, and associativity). This ensured an accurate interpretation of visual metaphors not only as a communication tool but also as an element of contemporary visual culture. In turn, the system-structural method made it possible to identify the components of media design and classify visual metaphors as one of them. The study is based on verified empirical data, statistical materials (in particular, data from the Statista platform), as well as research contributions in the fields of media design, cognitive psychology, and communications, which made it possible to demonstrate the influence of visual metaphors on the perception of information, support theoretical claims with concrete examples, and ensure the validity of the conclusions drawn. The comparative method made it possible to trace the fields in which the term

«visual metaphors» has also been studied, while the formalization method demonstrated how they may appear in contemporary media design.

III. Results

It is well established that the concept of «visual metaphors» is an integral part of «media design» and contributes to improving consumers' comprehension of information. This approach also addresses the challenge of cultural differences through various media channels and the universal nature of visual imagery [3]. In particular, it has been established that visual metaphors perform not only aesthetic but also cognitive, communicative, and emotional functions, which directly correlates with the effectiveness of the audience's perception of information.

To empirically validate the theoretical propositions, an analysis was conducted of case studies on the use of visual metaphors in contemporary media design. Examples of advertising and digital communications (including brand campaigns and visual solutions used by social media platforms) that employ various types of visual metaphors were analyzed.

The analysis was conducted based on the following criteria: type of visual metaphor; visualization method; emotional impact; clarity of the message.

The findings are generalizable to a broader range of media communications and demonstrate that metaphors based on users' everyday experience are the most effective; emotionally oriented metaphors ensure a higher level of audience engagement; and complex abstract metaphors require additional context for proper interpretation.

Visual metaphors are not limited to emojis, stickers, memes, logos of social media platforms and brands; advertising can also be considered part of this category. This is because advertisements are designed to be adaptable to different cultures and consumer mentalities in mind.

The application of the art-historical method made it possible to analyze visual metaphors as figurative-symbolic constructs and to identify organizational patterns in their composition through color, form, and chains of associations, thereby establishing that the effectiveness of a visual metaphor directly depends on the level of its cultural recognizability and emotional relevance to the audience.

The advertisement «Veggieburger, Kick the Trash» (Fig. 1), created for McDonald's Corporation by the advertising agency Neue Lgk, serves as an example. Here, the visual metaphor lies in the very way the product is presented. Specifically, the cow's body is visually constructed from potatoes, carrots, peppers, and greens. The metaphor functions as a figurative tool that, through the symbol of «trash», conveys the idea of cleansing – both physical (less waste) and metaphorical (a better choice for health and the environment) [1].



Fig. 1. Veggieburger, Kick the Trash

Source: <https://www.adsoftheworld.com/campaigns/veggieburger>

An analysis of this example confirms that visual metaphors can convey complex ideas through simple images, which significantly reduces the time required for the cognitive processing of information by users. It is also worth noting that, in this way, the company demonstrates its flexibility and willingness to adapt to societal trends.

The dissemination of visual metaphors depends on the platform on which they are posted and the audience's content consumption habits. This confirms the importance of adapting visual-metaphorical solutions to the specific characteristics of particular media channels.

When it comes to social media logos, it is worth noting that, in the context of the digitalization of society, their use has become an integral part of everyday communication. The rapid development of

information technology ensures continuous connectivity between users and shapes new models of interaction in the online environment. A striking example of the transformation of digital identity is Twitter's rebranding, in which its logo was changed to «X» (Fig. 2). This move demonstrates that the visual identity of digital platforms is a dynamic tool of strategic communications and reflects changes in brand positioning, corporate strategy, and the development concept of the media environment. Company owner Elon Musk commented on this rebranding as follows: «Soon we will say goodbye to the Twitter brand and, gradually, to all the birds». It should be noted that consumers reacted negatively to the changes in the logo and name, as they were reluctant to accept the transformation of their favorite social network [14]. This can be explained by the fact that, after many years of engaging with the platform, users had grown accustomed to the company's stable management approach and associated the social network with calmness and positive emotions resulting from its use.

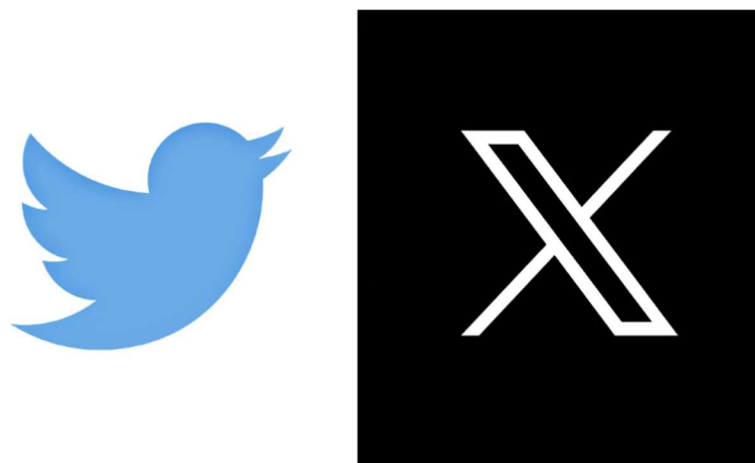


Fig. 2. Change of the Twitter logo to "X"

It is also important to consider the emotional focus of a visual metaphor through a clear understanding of the specific emotion it is intended to evoke in the audience. The choice of imagery is not random, as different types of metaphors can trigger different feelings: trust, anxiety, inspiration, empathy, or motivation. Thus, a visual metaphor in media design serves not only an aesthetic function but also a communicative and psychological one, as it is aimed at shaping a specific emotional experience in the recipient of the message.

In general, the main types of visual metaphors can be identified as follows:

- direct – a direct association with something easily remembered [12];
- humorous – jokes should be so spot-on and catchy that users feel compelled to share them widely [12];
- emotional – oriented toward the consumer's potential inner experiences and thoughts, so that upon seeing the metaphor, a person thinks: «This is about me». This helps foster emotional audience engagement and increase loyalty [12].

The creation of visual metaphors is a creative process based on the interpretation of various sources of meaning and imagery.

Thus, visual metaphors are a universal tool in media design, the effectiveness of which is determined by a combination of aesthetic, cognitive, and sociocultural factors.

At the same time, in the professional practice of media design, the following key resources can be identified as the most common foundations for the development of visual-metaphorical solutions:

- natural phenomena and biological imagery – the use of associations with nature;
- sociocultural codes – symbols with established meanings in a specific cultural context;
- artistic and literary sources – allusions to well-known works, styles, and art movements that deepen the semantic content of the message;
- everyday human experience – familiar objects and situations that, through reinterpretation, acquire new meaning in a communicative context;
- technological and digital imagery – interface elements, network symbols, and technical objects that reflect the modern information space;
- psychological and emotional associations – visual solutions based on color, form, and composition, designed to evoke specific emotional responses.

Valuable sources of inspiration include idiom and phraseological dictionaries, advertising posters and commercials, Google Images and Pinterest, as well as works of science fiction [12].

It is from these sources that ideas for creating visual metaphors are most easily generated, which may later, through gaining popularity, turn into memes that remain widely recognizable over a long period of time.

Visual metaphors are versatile in terms of the platforms on which they can be presented, as they exist in a wide variety of forms and styles. Therefore, it is essential to consider the popularity of

applications and social media platforms used by consumers. Based on these factors, it is possible to estimate expected views of a metaphor and audience reactions to it.

As of today, the global data and business analytics platform Statista has compiled statistics on the most popular social networks (Fig. 3) [13].

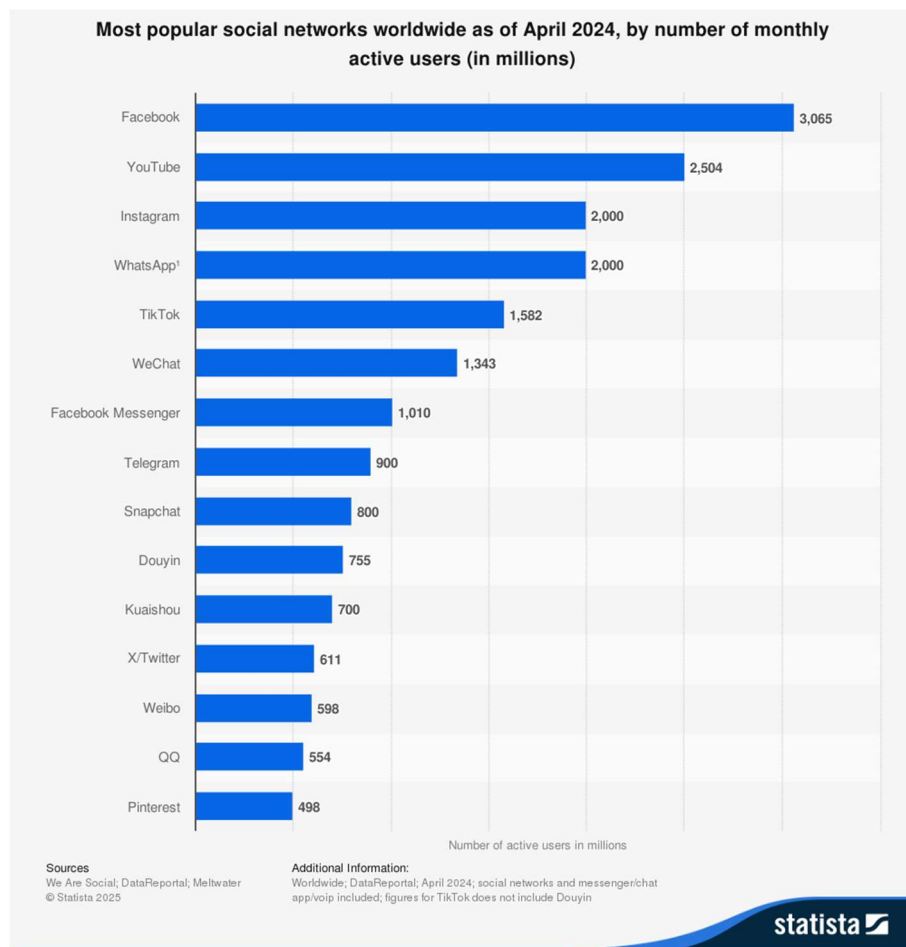


Fig. 3. The most popular social networks worldwide as of April 2025, by number of monthly active users (in millions)
Source: [8]

Every social media platform is important because each has its own distinct audience, enabling increasingly broad reach among segments of society across different countries and cultural contexts. Indeed, it is the unique features of each platform that enable the creation of visual metaphors of various types, forms, and styles, as well as those tailored to audiences united by specific themes. For example: Pinterest – step-by-step photo instructions and infographics; X/Twitter – microblog posts, news content, and GIFs; TikTok – short entertainment-focused videos; Instagram – stories, quotes, and high-quality images; YouTube – long-form video content on various topics, vlogs, and news broadcasts; Facebook – clear posts with organized photo and video content, accompanied by meaningful message descriptions [2].

Given the versatility of visual metaphors as a media design tool, their effectiveness depends largely on the specific characteristics of digital platforms and content consumption patterns. Taking into account the popularity of social networks, information presentation formats, and user behavior makes it possible to estimate the level of audience engagement and response to visual-metaphorical solutions. In this context, technological advancements, particularly in 3D graphics and animation [2], expand the possibilities for creating visual metaphors that appeal to multimodal perception (visual, auditory, and associative), thereby enhancing their communicative effectiveness.

Based on the analysis conducted, the following practical approaches to the effective use of visual metaphors in digital communications are established:

1. Audience-oriented approach – involves considering the sociocultural characteristics of the target audience, their level of awareness, and their associative experience when developing visual metaphors.
2. Emotional-cognitive approach – consists in the deliberate design of visual images aimed at evoking a specific emotional response in the user (trust, interest, empathy), thereby enhancing the effectiveness of information perception.

3. Platform-adaptive approach – is based on adapting visual-metaphorical solutions to the specifics of digital platforms (social networks, content formats, duration of interaction with a message).
4. Principle of semantic simplicity – involves the use of clear and easily decoded images that reduce cognitive load on the user.
5. principle of associative relevance – requires that a visual metaphor correspond to the cultural context and life experience of the audience in order to avoid misinterpretation.

At the same time, individual differences in perception and culturally determined associations shape the variability in interpreting visual images, which must be taken into account in the development of media content, advertising materials, and digital communication strategies.

IV. Conclusions

Visual metaphors are an effective tool for optimizing users' perception of information, as they enable the efficient decoding of complex conceptual structures through figurative associations. Empirical research on the impact of visual metaphors on perception of information has shown that this process is realized through various means of visual communication, ranging from typographic solutions (font, type size, text layout) to the transformation of a verbal message into a visual representation with clearly defined semantic load. The use of visual-metaphorical solutions contributes to increasing the audience's cognitive receptivity and the effectiveness of communicative messages.

In turn, the practical application of these findings involves the use of audience-oriented and platform-adaptive approaches to media content creation through the selection of visual metaphors in accordance with the sociocultural characteristics of the target audience, the specifics of digital platforms, and the desired emotional effect, thereby increasing audience engagement and the effectiveness of information perception.

At the same time, the development of visual metaphors is undergoing active transformation, driven by the rapid evolution of digital technologies and changes in media consumption patterns. The future potential of this field is determined by the growing role of visual content in the information environment and the need to enhance the effectiveness of communicative impact.

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Файвішенко Д. С., Кущинська О. І. Візуальні метафори в медіадизайні: вплив на сприйняття інформації

Мета дослідження полягає в систематизації візуальних метафор як інструменту медіадизайну, виявленні механізмів їх впливу на когнітивне сприйняття інформації та розробленні практичних підходів до їх ефективного застосування в цифрових комунікаціях.

Методологія дослідження. У ході дослідження використано комплекс методів, а саме: мистецтвознавчий, системно-структурний, формалізація, порівняння. Мистецтвознавчий метод застосовано для аналізу візуальних метафор як художніх і комунікативних форм, що функціонують у медіапросторі, осмислення образно-символічної природи візуальних рішень, їх стилістичних особливостей, а також інтерпретування метафори крізь призму естетичних категорій (форма, композиція, колір, асоціативність). Це забезпечило коректне трактування візуальних метафор не лише як інструменту комунікації, а і як елементу сучасної візуальної культури. У свою чергу, системно-структурний метод надав змогу розкрити складові медіадизайну та зарахувати до них візуальні метафори. Дослідження ґрунтується на перевірених емпіричних даних, статистичних матеріалах (зокрема, платформи Statista), а також напрацюваннях у галузі медіадизайну, когнітивної психології та комунікацій, що надало змогу обґрунтувати вплив візуальних метафор на сприйняття інформації, підтвердити теоретичні положення конкретними прикладами та забезпечити доказовість отриманих висновків. За допомогою порівняння простежено, в яких галузях термін «візуальні метафори» був досліджений також, а метод формалізації показав, як саме вони можуть виглядати в сучасному медіадизайні.

Результати. У статті здійснено огляд та аналіз візуальних метафор, їх способи створення та види. Проаналізовано їх спосіб демонстрації й платформи для цього. Здійснено аналіз кейсів використання візуальних метафор у сучасному медіадизайні. Проаналізовано приклади рекламних і цифрових комунікацій (зокрема кампанії брендів та візуальні рішення соціальних мереж), у яких застосовано різні типи візуальних метафор з практичним застосуванням. Активний розвиток інформаційних технологій стимулює потребу вдосконалювати засоби покращення сприйняття інформації, що, у свою чергу, сприяє більш ефективному розумінню змісту новин, комунікаційних повідомлень та рекламних матеріалів.

Новизна полягає в систематизації візуальних метафор як структурного елемента медіадизайну, удосконаленні підходів до їх інтерпретації через поєднання мистецтвознавчого та когнітивного аналізу, а також у розвитку уявлень про механізми їх впливу на сприйняття інформації в умовах цифрового середовища, що, на відміну від існуючих досліджень, передбачає інтеграцію медіадизайну, когнітивної психології та цифрових комунікацій, а також урахування платформної специфіки поширення контенту та практичного застосування.

Практичне значення. Отримані дані сприяють кращому розумінню принципів формування ефективних візуально-метафоричних рішень у медіадизайні та надають основу для подальших досліджень у цій сфері. Застосування таких підходів надає змогу запобігти інформаційному перевантаженню аудиторії та підвищити ефективність засвоєння повідомлень, що, у свою чергу, сприяє покращенню комунікаційних і навчальних процесів у цифровому середовищі.

Ключові слова: медіа, метафори, медіадизайн, візуальні метафори, інформація, соціальні мережі.