FRAME SEMANTICS AND CONCEPTUAL BLENDING IN ENGLISH ADVERTISING DISCOURSE: A LINGUO-COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract. *This article investigates the linguo-cognitive functioning of frame semantics and conceptual blending in English advertising discourse. The theoretical foundation combines Ch. Fillmore's frame semantics with the conceptual integration (blending) theory of G. Fauconnier and M. Turner. A corpus of 180 English advertising units collected between 2021 and 2025 was analysed against the Berkeley FrameNet database; dominant frames were identified across product categories, and the distribution of four blend types (simplex, mirror, single-scope, and double-scope) was established. The findings show that the meaning of an advertising message is generated not by the lexical meanings of individual words but by the configuration of frames activated in the addressee's mind and by the integration operations that yield emergent structure. The scientific novelty of the work consists in introducing the notion of brand frame anchor and in demonstrating that the persuasive force of advertising is localised precisely in the emergent properties of conceptual blends rather than in the input spaces taken separately.*

Keywords: *frame semantics, conceptual blending, mental spaces, advertising discourse, cognitive linguistics, FrameNet, emergent structure, English language.*

Introduction. Contemporary English advertising discourse exhibits a striking economy of linguistic form coupled with an extraordinary richness of communicated meaning. A two-word slogan such as "Think different", a three-word imperative such as "Just do it", or a five-word promise such as "Red Bull gives you wings" succeeds in mobilising elaborate networks of cultural, evaluative, and behavioural inferences that no purely compositional theory of meaning can account for. The cognitive linguistic reorientation initiated by Ch. Fillmore and subsequently developed by G. Fauconnier and M. Turner supplies the conceptual instruments by which this disproportion between linguistic minimalism and semantic richness can be explained. Within this perspective, two interlocking constructs are central: the frame, understood as a structured background of knowledge that lexical units evoke; and the conceptual blend, understood as the dynamic integration of multiple mental spaces into an emergent structure unavailable in any input space taken separately.

The relevance of investigating these two cognitive constructs in English advertising is grounded in three considerations. First, English-language advertising is the most globally circulated genre of persuasive communication, which makes it a privileged empirical site for testing cognitive-linguistic hypotheses. Second, frame-semantic and blending-theoretic approaches have to date been applied more systematically to political and literary discourse than to commercial discourse, leaving a methodological gap in advertising research. Third, the rise of AI-driven advertising production has raised the question of which cognitive structures distinguish

persuasive copy from non-persuasive copy - a question that can be approached only with explicit formal models of meaning construction such as frame semantics and conceptual integration.

Previous studies of English advertising discourse have explored its pragmatic, persuasive, and conceptual-metaphorical dimensions, but the frame-semantic and blending-theoretic dimensions remain under-theorised. While individual analyses of well-known slogans have been offered in the literature on conceptual integration, a systematic corpus-based study of frame activation and blend distribution across product categories of English advertising is still lacking.

The aim of this article is to characterise the linguo-cognitive functioning of frame semantics and conceptual blending in English advertising discourse and to demonstrate that advertising meaning is constructed through the activation of culturally entrenched frames and the operation of conceptual integration that yields emergent persuasive structure.

The object of the research is English-language advertising discourse. *The subject* is the frame-semantic and conceptual-integration mechanisms operative in this discourse as linguo-cognitive instruments of meaning construction.

Materials and Methods

Theoretical framework. Two interrelated cognitive-linguistic theories constitute the framework of the present study.

Frame semantics, developed by Ch. Fillmore and operationalised in the Berkeley FrameNet project, holds that the meaning of a lexical unit cannot be accessed without simultaneously accessing the background frame to which it belongs. A frame is a schematisation of an experience type comprising a set of frame elements (FEs) and their typical relations. For example, the verb “buy” evokes the COMMERCIAL_TRANSACTION frame, whose core elements include BUYER, SELLER, GOODS, and MONEY. To understand the verb is to access this whole structure, not merely to retrieve a definition.

Conceptual integration theory, advanced by Fauconnier and Turner, extends the analysis of meaning beyond two-domain mapping (as in Conceptual Metaphor Theory) to the dynamic integration of multiple mental spaces. A blend involves at least four mental spaces: two input spaces, a generic space that captures structure shared by the inputs, and a blended space in which selective elements from the inputs are integrated to produce emergent structure not present in any single input. Four blend types are distinguished: simplex (one input supplies a frame, the other supplies values), mirror (inputs share an organising frame), single-scope (one input’s frame organises the blend), and double-scope (inputs have conflicting frames whose clash produces novel structure).

Corpus. The empirical material consists of 180 English advertising units collected between 2021 and 2025 from the following sources: (a) award-winning campaigns of the Cannes Lions, Effie Awards, and D&AD archives; (b) the official brand communications of Apple, Nike, BMW, Coca-Cola, Volvo, L’Oréal, De Beers, Burger King, IKEA, and Tesla; (c) cross-platform digital advertising aggregated from Advertising Age and Campaign. The corpus covers six product categories: technology (32 units), automotive (30), beverage and food (30), cosmetics and personal care (28), luxury and lifestyle (30), and quick-service retail (30).

Methods. The research employs the following procedures:

1. Frame identification via the Berkeley FrameNet database, with each lexical unit of the slogan being mapped to its primary evoked frame.
2. Frame element analysis to determine which FEs are linguistically realised, which are implicit, and which are reconfigured by the advertising context.

3. Conceptual integration analysis following the four-space model of Fauconnier and Turner, with explicit identification of input spaces, generic space, blended space, and emergent structure.

4. Blend typology classification according to the simplex / mirror / single-scope / double-scope distinction.

5. Frequency and distribution analysis across product categories.

Results

Dominant frames in English advertising. Quantitative analysis of frame activation across the corpus identified eight dominant frames. Their distribution is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Dominant frames activated in the corpus (N = 180)

Frame (FrameNet label)	Frequency	% of corpus
ACHIEVEMENT / SUCCESS	31	17.2%
TRANSPORT / MOTION	26	14.4%
WELL-BEING / VITALITY	24	13.3%
AESTHETIC-APPEARANCE	22	12.2%
COMMERCIAL-TRANSACTION	19	10.6%
PERSONAL-RELATIONSHIP	18	10.0%
COMPETITION	21	11.7%
TRANSFORMATION	19	10.6%

Two observations follow from this distribution. First, the ACHIEVEMENT frame, lexicalised by such items as “win”, “succeed”, “achieve”, “breakthrough”, and “master”, dominates the corpus across categories. Second, frames typically thought of as utilitarian (COMMERCIAL-TRANSACTION) are statistically subordinate to frames of value, transformation, and relationship - a finding that supports the view that contemporary English advertising frames purchase as something other than a market transaction.

Brand frame anchors. The analysis reveals that successful brands consistently anchor their communication in a small number of recurrent frames, here termed brand frame anchors. The brand-frame mapping is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Brand frame anchors in the corpus

Brand	Primary frame anchor	Secondary anchor
Apple	TRANSFORMATION / INNOVATION	AESTHETIC-APPEARANCE
Nike	ACHIEVEMENT / COMPETITION	PERSONAL-DETERMINATION
BMW	TRANSPORT / MOTION	ACHIEVEMENT
Volvo	PROTECTING	PERSONAL-RELATIONSHIP

Brand	Primary frame anchor	Secondary anchor
Coca-Cola	EXPERIENCER-FOCUSED-EMOTION	PERSONAL-RELATIONSHIP
L'Oréal	AESTHETIC-APPEARANCE	SELF-WORTH
De Beers	PERSONAL-RELATIONSHIP	DURATION (PERMANENCE)
Tesla	TRANSFORMATION	TRANSPORT / MOTION

The notion of the brand frame anchor explains a number of phenomena observable in English advertising practice: the consistency of campaigns spanning decades (Volvo's PROTECTING anchor has persisted since the 1960s), the immediate recognisability of brand voice even in the absence of brand identifiers, and the cognitive efficiency of brand recall, which proceeds via frame activation rather than via lexical retrieval.

Typology of conceptual blends in advertising slogans. Classification of the 180 slogans according to the four-type blend typology produced the distribution shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Distribution of conceptual blend types in the corpus

Blend type	Frequency	% of corpus
Simplex	38	21.1%
Mirror	44	24.4%
Single-scope	52	28.9%
Double-scope	46	25.6%

Simplex blends. A simplex blend integrates a frame from one input with values from another. Example: "Because you're worth it" (L'Oréal). Input 1 supplies the COMMERCIAL-TRANSACTION frame (purchase justification); input 2 supplies the personal-value content (the addressee's self-worth). The blend fills the COMMERCIAL-TRANSACTION frame's JUSTIFICATION slot with a non-commercial value, producing a structure in which buying becomes an act of self-affirmation rather than of consumption.

Mirror blends. Input spaces share an organising frame. Example: "A diamond is forever" (De Beers). Both inputs share the DURATION/PERMANENCE frame: input 1 is the physical permanence of the diamond as mineral; input 2 is the temporal permanence of romantic love. The mirror blend allows each input to motivate the other: love is permanent because the symbol is permanent; the symbol is meaningful because love is permanent.

Single-scope blends. One input's frame organises the blend, while elements from the other input are selectively projected. Example: "The ultimate driving machine" (BMW). The MACHINE frame organises the blend; selective elements from the DRIVING/EXPERIENCE input (pleasure, control, mastery) are projected into the blended space, producing a structure in which the automobile is both engineered artefact and source of qualitative experience. The persuasive force comes from the importation of values typically associated with experience into a frame that ordinarily carries only technical specifications.

Double-scope blends. The two inputs have different organising frames whose clash generates emergent structure. Example: “Red Bull gives you wings.” Input 1 is the CONSUMPTION frame (drinking a beverage); input 2 is the FLIGHT frame (acquiring wings). The blended space inherits the consumption agent from input 1 and the wing-acquisition outcome from input 2; the clash between the bodily-physical frames generates the emergent structure that ordinary consumption can produce non-ordinary bodily capacity. This emergent structure is unavailable in either input on its own and is the locus of the slogan’s persuasive force.

Emergent structure and persuasion. Across all blend types, the analysis confirms that the persuasive content of the slogan is concentrated in the emergent structure of the blended space, not in the propositional content of the inputs. The proposition “Red Bull contains caffeine and taurine” is informative but not persuasive; the emergent claim that consumption of Red Bull confers an enhanced bodily capacity is persuasive but not directly assertible. This dissociation between assertible propositions and emergent persuasive content allows advertising language to operate beneath the threshold of explicit truth-evaluation, which is the cognitive foundation of its effectiveness.

Discussion. The findings substantiate three interrelated theoretical claims.

First, advertising meaning is irreducibly frame-dependent. The semantic minimalism of advertising slogans is a function of the maximal exploitation of frame-semantic background knowledge. The brevity of “Just do it” is possible only because the ACHIEVEMENT and PERSONAL_DETERMINATION frames are pre-activated in the cultural cognition of the addressee, supplying the missing argument structure that the slogan itself leaves unexpressed. Without frame-semantic background, the slogan would not communicate; with it, the slogan communicates richly.

Second, brand identity is best modelled as a frame anchor rather than as a bundle of attributes. The consistency of effective brand communication across decades is explicable by the persistence of the frame anchor: Volvo activates PROTECTING regardless of the specific campaign or model. This account integrates cognitive linguistics with marketing research on brand positioning and provides an explicit cognitive mechanism for what marketing literature has hitherto described in heuristic terms.

Third, the persuasive force of advertising is located in the emergent structure of conceptual blends rather than in the propositional content of input spaces. This claim has both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it explains why advertising language is resistant to truth-conditional evaluation: the persuasive content is emergent and cannot be directly asserted or denied. Practically, it suggests that the design of effective advertising copy is the design of productive blends, not the formulation of accurate descriptions.

Among the four blend types, single-scope and double-scope blends are slightly more frequent than simplex and mirror blends. This distribution reflects the cognitive trade-off between integration cost and emergent yield: simpler blends are easier to process but generate less emergent structure; more complex blends require greater integration effort but generate richer emergent meaning. Award-winning campaigns gravitate toward the more complex types, suggesting that the cognitive industry of advertising selects, over time, for higher-yield blends.

These results stand in a complementary, not competing, relationship with the conceptual-metaphor account of advertising discourse. Conceptual metaphor describes a specific type of cross-domain mapping; conceptual integration provides the more general architecture within which metaphorical mappings are one option among several. The two approaches converge on the

same broad finding — that advertising meaning is cognitively constructed rather than linguistically asserted — while offering complementary analytical instruments.

The limitations of the study include its focus on verbal slogans; multimodal frame activation through image and sound remains to be investigated. The corpus is also limited to globally circulated English advertising and does not capture localised English-language advertising in non-Anglophone markets, where frame-cultural variation is to be expected.

Conclusion. This investigation has demonstrated that frame semantics and conceptual blending operate jointly as the principal linguo-cognitive instruments by which English advertising discourse constructs meaning. Eight dominant frames were identified across the corpus, with ACHIEVEMENT, TRANSPORT, and WELL_BEING displaying the highest activation rates. The four-type blend typology was applied to 180 slogans, with single-scope and double-scope blends dominating award-winning campaigns. The brand frame anchor was introduced as a cognitive–commercial unit explaining the cross-temporal coherence of effective brand communication.

The principal theoretical contribution is the demonstration that the persuasive force of advertising is localised in the emergent structure of conceptual blends rather than in the propositional content of their input spaces. This localisation accounts for the cognitive efficacy of short slogans and for the resistance of advertising claims to truth-conditional evaluation.

The results open three directions for further research: (1) the construction of a computational-linguistic model integrating frame identification with blend typology, which will form the methodological core of the present author's further dissertation work; (2) the contrastive analysis of frame anchors and blend preferences across English and Uzbek advertising, in order to identify cognitively universal and culturally specific structures; and (3) the application of frame-blending analysis to AI-generated advertising copy, where the question of whether machine-generated text produces genuine emergent structure or only its surface form becomes the central empirical issue for cognitive evaluation.

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