

Critical Discourse Analysis of Language and Visuals in Beauty Advertisements

Abstract: *Language and the function it performs in producing meaning is one of the main aims of critical discourse analysis. Discourse analysis deconstructs social practices to examine the ways in which information is conveyed. In this regard, advertisements play a significant role in influencing ideologies. This paper aims to analyze the ideology of "beauty standards" portrayed in different advertisements for popular beauty products. This study is based on Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA, which examines how the advertiser's use of language and visual representations of such beauty products attract and manipulate women. The analysis also discusses the ways in which such companies in power present the stereotypical view of beauty associated with "whiteness" and presents it as something essential to living a better life, thus controlling the minds of people.*

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Key Words: CDA, Advertisements, Ideology, Beauty, Language, Visuals

Introduction

Language plays a vital role in the representation of cultural aspects of any society. It is the influence of the language that helps in firstly creating any ideology and then in spreading those ideological beliefs. With the developing and advancing society, the use and needs of language are also advancing and changing. Today, in the world of business, different multinational companies are producing products according to the needs of the people. These products are commercialized with the help of advertisements. Therefore, in order to attract and engage the attention of customers, the advertisements are tactfully planned and have some motive behind them. The use of language in these

advertisements is essential in the promotion of business along with influencing everyday life. The linguistic features used in any advertisements have some kind of influence on the audience. Advertisers exploit the use of language for their own benefits and to persuade the target audience.

In critical discourse analysis of advertisements, analysts find out how the use of language and visuals help to persuade, inform, affect, influence, or change the opinions of the viewers of these ads (Cook, 2001). Advertisements have the power to construct the identities of the individuals therefore, CDA aims to discover the influence of words, colors, and other visual representations on the minds of the

* Student, Department of English, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad, Pakistan.

† Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan, KP, Pakistan.

Email: dr.shaistakhan@awkum.edu.pk (Corresponding Author)

audience. According to Williamson (1978), "Advertisements are selling us something else besides consumer goods: in providing us with a structure in which we, and those goods, are interchangeable, they are selling us ourselves." Therefore, ideology is connected to the use of language, so it is important to find how the text of such advertisements portrays specific ideologies and is thus responsible for manipulation and exploitation.

Gee (2011) asserts that the power of language is that it can enable people to do certain things in a certain way. It can help in persuading people and changing their ideologies and perspectives about something. Beauty product advertisements take the edge of the power of language in order to persuade the audience and especially to target women for buying their products. Thus, the idea of beauty standards laid down by society is instigated by these advertisement companies. As a result, women of different age groups get occupied by the idea of beauty and its benefits. In addition to the use of flowery language, beauty advertisements also design visuals such as attractive models and different colors to engage the attention of the consumers. The use of bright and light color themes helps them to instill the idea of "white beauty" among the audience. Therefore, today's woman longs to have perfect skin and body as portrayed in the beauty products advertisements.

In advertisements, a problem-solution relation is depicted in the language used by the advertisers (Fairclough, 2003). Firstly, a problem is indicated that concerns the customers and then a solution is provided according to consumers' needs and desires. The solution is given by the product itself. Moreover, the text comprises meaning and a message. The language used in advertisements consists of not only written letters but also various other semiotic modalities, including visuals, gestures, colors, and layouts. Each advertisement is the result of some in-depth planning. Different strategies are used by the advertisement companies to attract the attention of the audience and to get more customers. In the advertisements for beauty products, the main audience involves the female group therefore, the advertisements are represented by most the female models. In this way, women get more

attracted by looking and getting inspired by the same gender portrayed in the beauty product advertisements. Meanwhile, the harsh reality of society is also reflected through these advertisements in which women are judged by their physical appearance and color of their skin rather than their capabilities or skills (Davis et al., 2006). Thus, these advertisements exert pressure on the women to use the products to look better in order to get accepted by society.

Fairclough (2003) believes discourse involves writing and speaking thus, it is a part of social action that reflects action and interaction. It implies that the language used in any discourse becomes a mode of interaction between the actor and the audience. In the critical discourse analysis of the beauty product advertisements, the language creates a bridge between the advertisers and the consumers. The words used in these advertisements create a persuasive impact on the women that convinces them about the marginalization of a woman based on beauty standards. As a result, women are forced to buy such products. Thus, CDA presents an in-depth analysis and criticizes the power of language used by advertising companies in reflecting the idea of social oppression among women based on beauty ideals.

Critical discourse analysis is an approach that considers language as a form of social practice, which helps in focusing on the ideological and political domination reproduced by the text. According to Wodak and Meyer (2015), critical discourse analysis aims to critically analyze the social inequalities which are expressed and legitimated by the language in discourse. Critical discourse analysts see language as a form of social practice. Therefore, it is also considered that every social practice has some specific context to which it is tied. The language used in any text serves different questions by revealing the social practices. These questions are related to the positioning of the text, target of the text and consequences etc. In this way, discourse is related to power relations and these power relations are addressed through critical discourse analysis.

According to Fairclough's three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis, there are three stages in discourse analysis, including

description, interpretation, and explanation (2015). These three dimensions perform different functions. Firstly, the description deals with the text analysis. This includes linguistic devices and features of the text. The linguistic devices serve a very planned purpose, so these should be keenly analyzed. Interpretation involves the contextual analysis of the text. Here the context becomes very important as it is considered the soul of the text. Moreover, it is the context that depicts the intention of the message to be conveyed to the audience. Lastly, explanation involves the socio-cultural analysis of the text. Its goal is to analyze the discourse by keeping in view societal practices. Hence, all three dimensions analyze power and ideology prevailing in society.

Aims and Research Questions

This study is about the linguistic and visual analysis of beauty product advertisements by some known brands. It aims to find out how the image of women is portrayed in these ads and what kind of influence such ads have on the minds of the audience. In addition, the study focuses on what impact the use of linguistics terminologies, colors, and representation of beauty icons in the form of models have on the daily lives of common women. Similarly, it also questions how the concept of being "white" is related to the ideological perspectives of society. Therefore, this article will address the following research questions:

- 1- What is the choice of words or linguistic items used in the beauty product advertisements?
- 2- How do the visual representations of these advertisements attract and influence women?
- 3- What kind of racial ideologies are promoted in the advertisements for these beauty products?

Data Analysis

The data for analysis is taken from the advertisements of famous beauty products, including Fair & Lovely, Nivea, L'OREAL and POND'S. The discourse of these advertisements will be critically analyzed according to

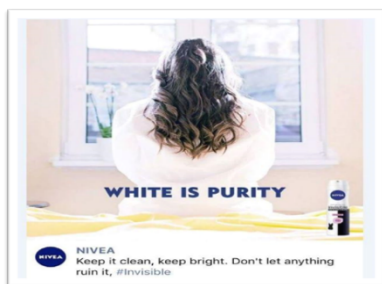
Fairclough's three-dimensional framework of CDA.



1- The first analysis is of Fair and Lovely advanced multivitamin cream. This cream is the product of Unilever and has been one of the highly commercialized products for many years. The analysis of this advertisement first involves the choice of words and linguistic items. Phrases such as HD GLOW are capitalized in order to emphasize it. Secondly, the claims of the product are written just below the important text. These claims involve "skin clarity," "more radiance," and "superior brightness." Thirdly, the woman in the advertisement seems to be smiling, confident and has a fair complexion. Lastly, the overall color scheme of the advertisement is of pink and white color.

Looking into a broader perspective, every text and visual representation in the advertisement for cream is very carefully planned. Firstly, the name of the product, "Fair & Lovely," itself is very significant in depicting the standard of beauty. That is, if a woman is fair, she will be seen as lovely. Likewise, the use of capitalization for HD GLOW can be analyzed as something very important for a woman and which can only be achieved by using this cream. Moreover, it can also be assumed that this is the beautiful feature that is preferred by most women, and it defines beauty. The claims of clarity, radiance, and superior brightness again hint towards the concept of "whiteness," which is important for women to be seen as beautiful. The use of pink and white color in the advertisement gives a feminine appeal which eventually attracts the attention of women. In addition, the model's

flawless and fair face is associated with a woman's confidence and happiness.



2. The second analysis is of Nivea Invisible deodorant, which is one of the popular brands and is used by many people around the globe. The only text on the picture states, "White is Purity." Moreover, the caption further asserts, "keep it clean, keep it bright. Don't let anything ruin it." The model in the picture is wearing a white cloth and the overall color scheme of the advertisement seems to be very bright.

The contextual analysis of this advertisement suggests that the concept of purity is related to white. That is, if something is white, it will be pure. Similarly, in this advertisement, cleanliness and brightness are also the ideas associated with whiteness. The woman's face is not visible in the advertisement, but the overall appearance of the picture is intended to make it peaceful and calm. Lastly, the advertiser has used imperatives such as "keep" and "don't" in order to connect with the audience by using informal language. This strategy helps in building a friendly relationship between advertisers and consumers.



3. The next analysis is of another famous beauty brand, L'OREAL Paris. The use of vocabulary in the advertisements is of utmost

importance as it signifies many aspects of beauty standards. Firstly, the main caption is provided with bold letters stating, "GLOWING SKIN IN 5 DAYS". Secondly, besides the product, the phrase "White Perfect" is written with capitalization. Moreover, two product variants can be seen with different packaging of white and blue colors. Lastly, there are multiple claims in the advertisement, including "Fade Out Dark Spots," "Even Out Skin Tone," and "Dermatologically Tested." The overall color scheme used in the advertisement is of white and blue colors.

The in-depth analysis of this advertisement can be done through multiple dimensions. The main caption of the advertisement signifies that beauty and glowing skin can be miraculous when achieved through this product, as the claim of 5 days itself is very evoking and can attract the attention of women who want instant results from the product. Furthermore, the phrase "White Perfect" hints towards the notion of perfection which is dependent on skin color. The packaging of the products also seems to be very luxurious and presenting different variants with different colors can provide options to the customers. The claims of the products seem to be very promising. The claims such as it can fade out the dark spots and even out skin tone mean that the objective behind the advertisement is that any kind of darkness on the skin can lead to imperfection. In addition, the advertisers had also used another tactic by claiming that it is "Dermatologically Tested," which helps in providing a kind of guarantee to the customers from dermatologists. It further helps in ensuring the quality of the product. Lastly, the face of a light-skinned model invites the women to achieve perfection and celebrate beauty.



4. POND'S is one of the other renowned companies known for its beauty products. This

analysis deals with the white beauty face wash by POND'S. The overall outlook of the advertisement seems to be quite simple yet appealing. The packaging of the product is of white and pink color. Similarly, the dominant color used in this ad is pink to give it a womanly look. At the top left corner of the advertisement, the name of the company and product are in writing. Whereas, in the middle, the main claim of the product is highlighted as "Reveal the natural fairness hiding behind dark skin cells." The model seems to be unfolding a bright face with a pretty smile.

The data analysis of POND'S white beauty face wash can be done through the language and visuals used in the advertisement. Firstly, the name of the product itself claims to provide whiteness to the skin complexion as it states, "white beauty." Secondly, the phrase white beauty depicts the idea that beauty comes with white skin; therefore, in order to look beautiful, one needs to have a white complexion. Moreover, the benefit of the product is described through its claim which states that it will reveal "natural fairness" and all the dark skin cells will be diminished. In this way, the advertisers are trying to win the trust of the consumers that the use of the product won't result in an artificial white complexion. Rather, it will reveal white fairness. Lastly, the way the model is stripping the dark cells and dark spots from the skin indirectly helps in convincing the audience that attaining a white and bright complexion is not at all difficult. Thus, the language and visuals used in this advertisement are kept simple yet quite persuasive.

Results and Discussion

The above analysis shows that advertisements are an important tool in the promotion of beauty products. The deliberate use of various linguistic items and visual representations by the advertisers helps in the effectiveness of the promotion of these products. Moreover, these ads also help to understand the socio-cultural aspects through contextual analysis. In today's world, beauty is highly admired and desirable by people. Women are considered icons of beauty therefore, it is important that their skin should be white, clear, and free of any dark spots. Such flawless

skin is the representation of a perfect woman and hence all women should experience such perfection through these beauty products. This helps advertisers to take advantage of women's needs and sell their products. So, the obsession with fair skin and a beautiful appearance is what has led the beauty and cosmetic industry to grow rapidly. These advertisements also suggest the ideological views of society which values fair and bright skin. It depicts how society admires women based on their skin color and not their skills or intellect. In this way, bright and fair skin has become one of the primary features of judging any woman. Thus, the power of advertisers in controlling the consumer's mind often misleads the women into believing everything is true.

Meanwhile, these advertisements portray the benefits of their beauty products without referring to the target directly. However, the representation of faces of women implicitly hints towards the target audience. Moreover, there is no direct use of such language in these advertisements that directly invites the consumers to come and buy the products. Similarly, no such linguistic items are used, showing that our product is the best. However, these advertising companies have very reasonably used persuasive language that indirectly invites the readers. The main captions and visuals of these advertisements are quite impressive to engage a maximum number of consumers. Similarly, the overall appeal of the ads and the products themselves seems to be quite feminine and that clearly shows that the target audience is the women. In the advertisement of L'OREAL, the phrase 'Tested on Asian skin' is also hinting towards the fact that Asians have a brown skin tone; therefore, they should use such beauty products to experience a lighter skin complexion.

In addition, the images of confident and fair models also constitute a greater narrative as these attractive women present the images of women who are considered beauty icons. This also depicts the stereotypical views of society. The study also reveals that women in these advertisements are portrayed as beautiful and attractive, although they are supposed to perform many other roles. This aspect can also have a

negative impact on a young woman who gets influenced by such advertisements. According to [Mendrofa \(2020\)](#), middle-aged women have become dissatisfied because of the standards of beauty set by society. This social pressure leads to the view that women can only be appreciated when they will have flawless and white skin. In this way, the beauty advertisement companies target the lower images of the consumers who consider themselves inferior. This shows how white and fair women are given an edge in different spheres of life and these women can lead whatever they want to. Similarly, the inferiority complex evoked by such advertisements also helps in more demand for the product. According to Trampe et al. (2011), such advertisements have the power of showcasing these mundane objects as highly valuable. Therefore, these strategies help the advertising industries to instill the idea that such products not only enhance beauty but also help transform the overall lifestyle of their buyers.

Conclusion

A language is a powerful tool that helps in creating a greater impact on people's minds. The analysis of the content of these advertisements suggests that both linguistic and visual aspects are important in engaging the attention of the readers. According to Fairclough's three-dimensional model, it is evident that linguistic items serve a very planned purpose in shaping

ideology in these advertisements. Catchy phrases, impactful color schemes and representation of models are marketing strategies that play a significant role in instilling the concept of beauty standards among the audience and eventually help the advertisers in selling their products. Furthermore, the use of such linguistic and visual items helps in better understanding of the content, as these elements evoke greater chances of excitement among the audience. Therefore, it is important to ponder over the fact that the power of these advertising industries promotes certain kinds of ideologies in societies and has a great impact on the minds of the audience.

Future Recommendations

Critical discourse analysis is a vast field of analysis that can be applied to multiple disciplines and subject matters. With the advancements in the area of consumerism, the promotions on advertisements are also excessively increasing day by day. These advertisements play an important role in meaning-making culturally as well as socially. In this way, the critical discourse analysis of advertisements provides a great variety for future researchers to work on this specific area. This study will be helpful in looking at other dimensions of analysis. Future research may include other types of advertisements that indirectly present different ideologies through various marketing strategies.

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