



LANGUAGE AS A TOOL OF PERSUASION IN ADVERTISING MEDIA

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Abstract

Language is one of the most powerful tools used in advertising. Through words, slogans, and messages, advertisements try to attract attention, influence thinking, and encourage people to buy products or services. Advertising language is not used randomly; it is carefully chosen to persuade consumers by appealing to emotions, logic, culture, and personal identity. This paper studies how language works as a tool of persuasion in advertising media such as print advertisements, television commercials, and digital platforms. The study focuses on different linguistic strategies, including word choice, sentence structure, meaning, and implied messages. It also explains how advertisers use emotional appeal, cultural references, humour, and storytelling to influence consumer behaviour. Special attention is given to Indian advertising, where multilingualism, code-switching, and cultural values play an important role. Examples from popular brands like Amul, Fevicol, Zomato, and Coca-Cola are discussed. The paper also highlights ethical concerns related to advertising language, such as manipulation, stereotyping, and misleading claims. With the rise of digital media and social networking platforms, advertising language has become more personalised and interactive, increasing its persuasive power. The study concludes that advertising language is not merely informative but deeply persuasive, shaping consumer attitudes and social values. Understanding these strategies helps consumers become more aware and critical of advertising messages.

Keywords: Advertising language, persuasion, media discourse, rhetoric, consumer psychology, digital advertising

1. Introduction

Advertising is an integral part of modern life. We encounter advertisements everywhere on television, in newspapers, on mobile phones, across social media platforms, on billboards, and even within apps and games. From morning toothpaste ads to late-night food delivery notifications, advertising surrounds us continuously. At the heart of all advertising lies language. In advertising, language is not just used to convey information about a product. Its main aim is to persuade and influence how people think, feel, and act. Advertisers use language to create desire, build trust, and encourage consumers to choose one product over another. Even simple words can have a



strong impact when used cleverly. For example, Nike's slogan "Just Do It" uses only three words yet motivates action, confidence, and self-belief. Similarly, Amul's witty one-line captions connect products with current events and cultural humour. These examples show that advertising language is carefully planned and highly strategic, and that it works alongside images, music, and visuals. However, words give these elements meaning. Language creates stories, emotions, and identities. It tells us not just what to buy, but also why we should buy it and what kind of person we become by buying it. In India, advertising language becomes even more interesting because of cultural diversity and multilingualism. Advertisers often mix Hindi and English (Hinglish) or use regional languages to connect emotionally with different audiences. Phrases like "Yeh Dil Maange More" or "Daag Achhe Hain" have become part of everyday speech. This paper examines how language functions as a persuasive tool in advertising media. It examines different linguistic techniques, emotional appeals, cultural influences, and ethical issues. By understanding how advertising language works, consumers can become more aware and make informed choices.

2. Literature Review

The study of persuasion originates from the works of Aristotle (trans. 2004), who identified ethos, pathos, and logos as three modes of persuasion. According to Aristotle, effective communication depends on credibility, emotional appeal, and logical reasoning. Modern scholars have applied rhetorical theory to advertising. Cook (2001) argues that advertisements construct persuasive meaning through interaction between text, visuals, and cultural context. Myers (1994) emphasises that advertising language is deliberately conversational and intimate, creating a relationship between brand and consumer. Petty and Cacioppo (1986) proposed the Elaboration Likelihood Model, which explains that persuasion operates through central and peripheral routes. Most advertising relies on peripheral cues such as celebrity endorsement, music, and emotional imagery rather than detailed logical reasoning. Norman Fairclough (1995) argues that media discourse reflects power structures and social ideology. Advertising promotes consumerism and constructs desirable lifestyles. Goddard (2002) observes that advertising language frequently creates artificial needs by suggesting personal inadequacy. In the Indian context, Varghese (2018) studied the use of Hinglish in advertising and found that code-switching enhances relatability and youth appeal. Kaur (2017) notes that Indian advertisements often reinforce family values and collective identity. Berns et al. (2011) used neuroscience methods to demonstrate that emotional responses significantly influence purchasing decisions. Emotional branding, according to Thomson et al. (2005), increases consumer attachment and loyalty. Cadbury and Coca-Cola campaigns frequently



use nostalgia and happiness to build emotional association. Emotional appeal often proves more effective than factual argumentation.

3. Research Objectives

The study aims to:

1. Analyse linguistic strategies used in advertising discourse.
2. Examine how rhetorical elements (ethos, pathos, logos) function in Indian advertisements.
3. Investigate emotional and cultural appeals in advertising language.
4. Explore ideological implications embedded in advertising discourse.

4. Research Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative research design using Critical Discourse Analysis. Qualitative analysis is appropriate because the research focuses on meaning construction and persuasive strategies. Qualitative research is suitable when the focus is on analysing words, ideas, symbols, and interpretations rather than numerical data or statistical measurements. Since this study examines how advertisements use language to influence consumers, a qualitative approach is more appropriate than a quantitative one. The primary method used in this research is Critical Discourse Analysis. This is a method of studying language in relation to society, power, and ideology. According to Norman Fairclough (1995), language is not neutral; it reflects social structures and influences how people think and behave.

5. Theoretical Background

5.1. Persuasion and Rhetoric

The concept of persuasion is very old. One of the earliest thinkers to study persuasion was Aristotle, a Greek philosopher. In his work Rhetoric, Aristotle explained that persuasion works through three main elements:

- Ethos – credibility or trustworthiness
- Pathos – emotional appeal
- Logos – logical reasoning

Advertising uses all three elements effectively. Ethos is seen when a famous personality or expert promotes a product. For example, when a doctor appears in a toothpaste advertisement, the brand



gains credibility. In India, celebrities like Amitabh Bachchan or Virat Kohli often endorse products because people trust them. Pathos refers to emotional appeal. Many advertisements make people feel happy, nostalgic, sad, or hopeful. Emotional ads are very effective because emotions influence decisions faster than logic. For example, Cadbury's ads often show family moments and celebrations, creating emotional warmth. Logos involves logic and facts. Advertisements may show numbers, statistics, or comparisons to convince consumers. For example, "9 out of 10 dentists recommend this toothpaste" sounds logical and scientific. Modern persuasion theories have expanded these ideas. One important theory is the Elaboration Likelihood Model by Petty and Cacioppo. According to this model, persuasion works in two ways:

- Central route: People carefully think about information (used for expensive or important products like cars or insurance).
- Peripheral route: People rely on simple cues like music, slogans, or celebrities (used for everyday products like snacks or soft drinks).

Most advertising uses the peripheral route because it is quicker and more effective for mass audiences.

5.2. Discourse Analysis and Advertising

Discourse analysis studies how language is used in social contexts. Norman Fairclough, a well-known linguist, explained that language is connected to power and ideology. Advertising does not just sell products; it also promotes values, lifestyles, and beliefs. For example, luxury brands use language like "exclusive," "premium," and "elite" to create a sense of class difference. Beauty advertisements often promote ideas about youth, fairness, and perfection. In India, advertisements often reinforce cultural values like family bonding, respect for elders, and tradition. Surf Excel's "Daag Achhe Hain" campaign uses language to connect stains with children's moral learning, turning a cleaning product into a symbol of good parenting. Discourse analysis helps us understand that advertising language is never neutral. It reflects social norms and shapes how people see themselves and others.

6. Linguistic Features of Advertising Language

6.1. Lexical Choices (Word Selection)

Lexical choice means the selection of words used in advertisements. Words are very important because they create the first impression of a product. Advertisers carefully choose words that sound positive, attractive, and exciting. Words are the foundation of advertising language. Advertisers choose words that sound positive, exciting, and attractive. Negative words are usually avoided.



Common positive words include:

- Amazing
- Perfect
- Natural
- Fresh
- Powerful
- New

Superlative words like “best,” “number one,” and “ultimate” are often used to make products appear superior. Advertisers also create new words (neologisms) to make products memorable. For example, “Kodak moment” or “Instagrammable” became popular through advertising and media. In India, advertisers often use Hinglish to sound friendly and modern. Maggi’s “2-minute noodles” combine speed with convenience and have become a household phrase. Case Study: Amul Advertisements Amul’s advertisements are famous for their wordplay and humour. They use puns and simple language related to current events. This makes the brand feel intelligent, approachable, and culturally connected. Another important strategy is creating new words (neologisms). These new words make the product memorable and unique. For example, the phrase “Kodak moment” became popular because of advertising and is now used in daily life. Similarly, “Instagrammable” became widely used through social media culture. In India, many advertisements use Hinglish (a mix of Hindi and English) to sound modern, friendly, and relatable. For example, Maggi used the slogan “2-Minute Noodles.” This phrase clearly shows speed and convenience. Over time, it became a household expression, showing how strong word choice can shape everyday language. The advertisements of Amul are famous for their clever wordplay and humour. The brand uses short, simple, and creative sentences that often relate to current events such as politics, sports, movies, or social issues. By connecting with current events, Amul shows that it understands society and culture. As a result, customers feel emotionally connected to the brand.

6.2 Sentence Structure (Syntax)

Advertising sentences are usually short and simple. Long explanations are avoided. Sentence structure, or syntax, refers to how sentences are formed in advertisements. In advertising, sentences are usually short, simple, and direct. Long explanations are avoided because people do not have time to read or listen to lengthy messages. Short sentences quickly grab attention and are easier to understand.



Common sentence types include:

- Imperatives: “Try it now,” “Buy today”
- Questions: “Are you ready?”
- Repetition: “Have a break, have a KitKat”

Short sentences are easy to remember and suitable for billboards, TV ads, and social media posts. Indian ads often use rhythmic slogans in Hindi, making them catchy and memorable. For example, Fevicol’s “Jod Hai Toh Duniya Hilegi” uses strong imagery and rhythm. Repetition is also widely used in advertising. Repeating words or phrases makes the message more memorable. In India, many advertisements use rhythmic slogans, especially in Hindi. Rhythm and rhyme make slogans catchy and easy to recall. For example, Fevicol uses the slogan “Jod Hai Toh Duniya Hilegi.” The sentence creates strong imagery and suggests powerful bonding. The rhythm of the words makes it enjoyable to hear and easy to remember.

6.3 Figurative Language

Figurative language makes advertisements interesting and imaginative. Figurative language means using words in a creative or imaginative way. The words are not always meant to be taken in their literal meaning. Instead, they create pictures in the mind, express feelings, or make ideas stronger and more interesting. In advertising, figurative language is very important because it makes messages attractive, emotional, and memorable. Advertising is not only about giving information. It is also about creating feelings. Figurative language helps advertisers move beyond simple facts and create imagination. Instead of just saying that a product is good, they describe it in a special way that touches the heart and mind of the audience

Common forms include:

- Metaphor: “Red Bull gives you wings”
- Simile: “Smooth as silk”
- Personification: “The car that loves you back”
- Hyperbole: “World’s best coffee”

Indian advertising often uses cultural metaphors and traditional expressions. This helps in emotional connection with audiences. A metaphor directly compares two things without using the words “like” or “as.” It says that one thing is another thing, even though they are different. The purpose is to show a similarity in a strong and creative way. For example, a jewellery brand may describe gold as “Lakshmi of the home,” comparing wealth and prosperity to the goddess Lakshmi.



Such metaphors create emotional and cultural connections with the audience. A simile compares two things using the words “like” or “as.” It helps the audience understand the quality of a product by comparing it to something familiar. For example, the phrase “Smooth as silk” is commonly used in beauty or fabric advertisements. Silk is known for its softness. By comparing skin or cloth to silk, the advertiser clearly communicates smoothness and comfort. Similes make advertisements more poetic and emotional. Personification means giving human qualities to non-human objects. It makes products seem alive, friendly, or caring. Personification works well because human emotions are powerful. Hyperbole means exaggeration. It is used to make something sound bigger, better, or more impressive than it really is. The purpose is not to lie, but to create excitement. Hyperbole is also used during festival sales. Phrases like “Biggest Sale Ever” or “Offers You Can’t Resist” create urgency and excitement among customers. Figurative language plays a very important role in advertising. It makes advertisements creative, emotional, and memorable

7. Pragmatic and Semantic Strategies

7.1. Implicature and Presupposition

Advertising often suggests ideas without directly stating them. In advertising, companies do not always say everything directly. Instead, they carefully design messages so that consumers infer or assume certain meanings. Implicature happens when an advertisement suggests something without clearly stating it. The meaning is understood indirectly. The advertiser does not openly claim something, but the audience naturally concludes. Presupposition happens when a sentence assumes something is already true. This is called implicature.

For example:

- “Because you’re worth it” implies that buying the product proves self-value.
- “Get your glow back” presupposes that you have lost it.

Such strategies influence consumers subconsciously and are difficult to challenge legally. Implicature and presupposition are subtle but powerful tools in advertising language. They allow advertisers to suggest ideas without directly stating them. These strategies shape consumer thinking quietly and influence decisions at a subconscious level.

7.2. Personalisation and Direct Address

Personalisation and direct address are important strategies in advertising. Using words like “you” and “your” creates a personal connection. Consumers feel that the message is meant especially for them. Digital advertising uses data to personalise messages even further. Food apps like Zomato use humorous and relatable language to connect with users emotionally. When people



see the word “you,” they automatically pay more attention. In the digital age, personalisation has become more advanced. Social media platforms and apps collect user data such as age, location, browsing habits, and purchase history. Companies like Zomato show how humour and relatable language can make communication friendly, emotional, and memorable.

7.3. Emotional Appeals in Advertising

Emotions play a very important role in advertising. Many studies show that people often make buying decisions based on feelings, not only on logic. Even when consumers compare prices and features, emotions strongly influence their final choice. Advertising uses emotional appeals to create connection, trust, and attachment. When people feel something deeply, they remember the brand for a long time. Some common emotional appeals used in advertising are happiness, nostalgia, fear, and love or family bonding.

Common emotional appeals include:

- Happiness (Coca-Cola)
- Nostalgia (Cadbury)
- Fear (insurance ads)
- Love and family (Indian household brands)

Storytelling is a powerful tool. Ads tell short stories with characters, problems, and solutions. This makes messages memorable and relatable. The brand often shows people smiling, celebrating, and sharing moments. This emotional appeal works because people want to feel happy and socially connected. The product becomes linked with positive emotions in the consumer’s mind. Ads may show childhood memories, school days, old friendships, or family celebrations. Emotional appeals are central to modern advertising. Whether through happiness, nostalgia, fear, or love and family values, brands aim to connect with the heart rather than just the mind. Through storytelling and emotional language, advertisements become memorable and relatable. In both global and Indian contexts, emotional connection plays a key role in persuading consumers and building long-term brand relationships.

7.4. Cultural and Social Dimensions

Culture strongly influences advertising language. What works in one culture may not work in another. Culture plays a very important role in advertising. Advertising does not exist separately from society. It reflects the beliefs, values, traditions, and social habits of people. What is attractive



or persuasive in one country may not work in another country because cultures are different. Therefore, advertisers must understand the cultural background of their target audience. Language, symbols, colours, humour, and even gestures can have different meanings in different cultures. If an advertisement ignores cultural sensitivity, it may fail or even create controversy.

In India:

- Family values are emphasised
- Multilingual expressions are common
- Festivals and traditions are used as themes

Code-switching helps advertisers reach wider audiences. Mixing languages makes ads sound natural and modern. India is a multilingual country. People speak Hindi, English, and many regional languages. Because of this diversity, advertisements often mix languages to reach a wider audience.

For example, an advertisement may use Hindi for emotional connection and English for a modern or premium feel. This mix reflects real-life communication patterns in urban India. Cultural and social dimensions strongly influence advertising language. In India, family values, festivals, traditions, and multilingual communication shape advertising strategies. Code-switching makes ads sound modern and relatable, while cultural themes create an emotional connection. Successful advertising respects cultural differences and reflects the social realities of its audience. By understanding culture, brands can communicate more effectively and build long-lasting relationships with consumers.

7.5. Advertising Language in Digital Media

Digital media has transformed the style and structure of advertising language. Traditional advertisements in newspapers, on television, and on radio were usually formal and carefully structured. By contrast, digital advertising is more casual, interactive, and fast-paced. Because people scroll quickly through social media feeds, advertisements must be short, eye-catching, and easy to understand. Digital platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter (X) require a different style of language from traditional media. The tone is friendlier and more conversational.



Features include:

- Informal tone
- Emojis and hashtags
- Short captions
- User-generated content

Influencers use conversational language, making ads feel like personal recommendations. However, this can blur the line between genuine opinion and paid promotion. Digital media has transformed advertising language into a more informal, interactive, and visually expressive form. Emojis, hashtags, short captions, and influencer marketing make advertisements feel personal and relatable. While digital advertising increases engagement and reach, it also raises ethical concerns about transparency and authenticity. Overall, digital platforms require brands to communicate quickly, creatively, and conversationally to capture audience attention in a fast-moving online environment.

7.6. Ethical Considerations

Advertising language can become unethical when it misleads or manipulates. Advertising plays an important role in shaping consumer behaviour. However, advertising language can become unethical when it misleads, manipulates, or harms individuals or society. Ethical advertising means promoting products honestly, respectfully, and responsibly. When advertisers focus only on profit and ignore moral responsibility, serious ethical problems can arise. Some common ethical issues in advertising are false claims, stereotypes, targeting children unfairly, and privacy invasion through data tracking.

Common ethical issues include:

- False claims
- Gender and racial stereotypes
- Targeting children
- Privacy invasion through data tracking

In India, organisations like ASCI regulate advertising standards, but self-awareness among consumers is also important. Children are a vulnerable audience because they may not fully understand persuasive intent. Advertising directed at children can influence their preferences,



eating habits, and behaviour. Similarly, advertisements may promote certain beauty standards related to skin colour, body shape, or lifestyle. This can negatively affect self-esteem and promote discrimination. Ethical considerations are essential in advertising language. False claims, stereotypes, child targeting, and privacy invasion can harm individuals and society.

8. Conclusion

Language is the most powerful tool in advertising. Through words, advertisers shape desires, identities, and social values. Advertising language is creative, persuasive, and culturally rich, especially in a diverse country like India. However, with great power comes responsibility. Ethical advertising and informed consumers are essential. Understanding how language persuades helps people make better choices and resist manipulation. The study concludes that advertising language is a powerful instrument of persuasion. It operates through rhetorical strategies, emotional engagement, cultural symbolism, and pragmatic subtlety. In India's multilingual and digital environment, advertising discourse plays a significant role in shaping consumer attitudes and social values. Future research may explore AI-generated advertising and cross-cultural comparisons.

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