

# ANALYZING THE STRUCTURATION OF IDEOLOGIES: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF SELECTED SKINCARE ADVERTISEMENTS

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## Abstract

*Discourse analysis of any piece of writing is in relation to its social context which further probes and explores the connectedness and interpellation involving the symbolic and actualized meanings of the discourse(s). All texts represent an ensemble of socio-political- cultural positions maneuvered by the clandestine ideologies and idealizations— the dominant*

*& the peripheralised —which constitute the base of the superstructure of such positions. Consequently, all readers/consumers usually form their opinions from reading the texts and thus construct their docile responses to the dominant discourses engulfing their situatedness at a particular time and space.*

*In the present paper, I have taken the texts from the world of advertisements. Conspicuously, such advertisements are very common in our lives and influence our way of being-in-the- world in myriad ways. The ads create a pervasive mechanism for promoting an idealized life style and manipulate readers/consumers to a certain extent into believing whatever that is advertised is indeed true and valuable. Interestingly, this form of discourse shapes us, frames our responses, makes and sustains the world we live in. This paper aims at analyzing advertisements based on skincare products in manufacturing and manipulating the demands of the desirous buyers using the tools of critical discourse analysis.*

**Keywords:** Ideology, CDA, Advertisements, Skin care ads, discourse, base and superstructure, interpellation.

## INTRODUCTION

Being an efficient and intriguing network of communication, advertisements have the ability to bring revolutionary changes in the mind of set of the recipients. Accordingly, advertisements have the power to cajole the choices and preferences of the social mind. The technology-imbued world of advertisements voices itself polyphonically through audio- visuals, language, conversation, music, jingles, face value and the like. Henceforth, it plays a pivotal role in catalyzing a social change. Notably, this form of discourse holds persuasive power and affects the behaviors and thought processes consciously as well as unconsciously and also brings out the unequal relations of power which plague our society from times immemorial. Discourse plays a fundamental role in the daily expression and reproduction of ideologies. (Van Dijk). Further, discourse analysis is:

- (a) concerned with language use beyond the boundaries of a sentence/utterance;
- (b) the interrelationships between language and society and;
- (c) the interactive or dialogic properties of everyday communication.

Foucault holds that each era defines its own discourses and these definitions may vary over time. The core idea is that technical specialists (advertising specialists) always work together to establish their field and its dominant ideas. The technical fields in question exert an ever- increasing power over people and these discourses profoundly shape the structure of our society. In this sense, discourse may be understood in terms of a politically and sexually divisive strategy to produce polarized thinking which highlights a power play. It is a loose structure of inter-connected assumptions that makes 'knowledge' possible. Such a cluster of claims to knowledge is what Foucault calls discourse. The establishment of two binary opposites as in the case of power/knowledge leads to the formation of systems of exclusion and inclusion. The dynamics of systems of exclusion and inclusion form the identity of an individual with varied ideological significations. Foucauldian conception of discourse aims at exploring the ways in which we are enslaved to social thinking even without knowing it. The penetration of regulation into the smallest details of everyday life assures the smooth functioning of power. The discursive formations create social impressions in the making of identity on the part of an individual. The discursive formations can be defined as a large group of statements that belong to a single system of formation. The discursive formations impose definitions on us.

Such a conception of discourse relates to Althusserian view of ideology as a 'false consciousness. Importantly, ideology shapes individuals as subjects. So, ideology forms our very reality and thus appears to us as true or obvious. In this sense, ideologies, discourses and social structures are all interpellated.

In the light of these polemics, this paper investigates the use of language and other semiotic modalities in selected beauty product advertisements. It further highlights the strategies employed by the advertisers to attract the focussed customers. It is worth considering how the women mind-set is interpellated and its beliefs are taken into control through the discursive discourses of advertisements. Contextually, this paper addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the lexical features used in skincare advertisements?
2. How do advertisers portray an idealized image of women?

### *Methodology and Theoretical Framework*

The theoretical framework employed in this study is Critical Discourse Analysis. Advertisements come under media discourse and involve language. In this paper, advertisements are analysed using a three pronged approach that encompasses linguistic analysis, social analysis and cultural analysis. Linguistic analysis is a critical examination of the language used in advertisements. In this analysis lexical choices are identified along with the various elements used. The social analysis brings forth the effect of the advertisements on the targeted audiences. Here the preferences of the concerned society are taken care of. The cultural analysis particularly aims to see the effects of advertisements on the modern life. Hence, this framework tries to build a relationship between the three dimensions to understand the underlying meanings of the discourse of advertisements.

Critical analysis aims to reproduce interpretations and explanations of areas of social life which both identify the causes of social wrongs and produce knowledge which could (in the right circumstances) contribute to righting or mitigating them. (Fairclough, 2010, p.8). Critical Discourse Analysis is about language and its role in the society. It helps in reformulating discourse not on a linguistic level or according to purely technical infrastructures, but by the ideologies of the subjects. Ideologies determine not only discourse content but also the way discourse is organised. Hilary Janks in her study on CDA (henceforth) further questions – How is the text positioned or positioning? Whose interests are served by this positioning? Whose interests are negated? What are the consequences of this positioning? – that relate discourse to the relations of power. Where analysis seeks to understand how discourse is implicated in relations of power, it is called *critical* discourse analysis.

Fairclough's (1989, 1995) model for CDA consists three inter-related processes of analysis tied to three inter-related dimensions of discourse. These three dimensions are:

1. The object of analysis (including verbal, visual or verbal and visual texts).
2. The processes by means of which the object is produced and received (writing/speaking/designing and reading/listening/viewing) by human subjects.
3. The socio-historical conditions which govern these processes. Fairclough and Wodak summarize the main tenets of CDA as follows:
  1. CDA addresses social problems
  2. Power relations are discursive
  3. Discourse constitutes society and culture
  4. Discourse does ideological work
  5. Discourse is historical
  6. The link between text and society is mediated
  7. Discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory
  8. Discourse is a form of social action.

What is useful about this approach is that it enables you to focus on the signifiers that make- up the text, the specific linguistic selections, their juxtapositioning, their sequencing, their layout and so on. However, it also requires you to recognize that the historical determination of these selections and to understand that these choices are tied to the conditions of possibility of that utterance. This is another way of saying that texts are instantiations of socially regulated discourses and that the processes of production and reception are socially constrained. Why Fairclough's approach to C.D.A is so useful is because it provides multiple points of analytic entry. It does not matter which kind of analysis one begins with, as long as in the end they are all included and are shown to be mutually explanatory. It is in the interconnections that the analyst finds the

interesting patterns and disjunctions that need to be described, interpreted and explained. The CDA not only concentrates on visual texts and their meanings but also focuses on the question of how these meanings reflect or support the dominant patriarchal ideology and discourses in the society. Embedding this stance into the critique of the present study, this uncovers deeper social and marketing ideologies in advertisements. Advertising, an important television genre helps in making an image of woman and man which is essential for the understanding of discourse practices, social interactions and implications along with prevalent ideologies. In addition, advertising considered as a cultural form and discourse is a site in which different subjectivities struggle to impose or challenge, to confirm, negotiate or displace definitions and identities. (Gledhill,1988:72).

#### Data Analysis

Here the selected beauty advertisements have been analyzed using the above mentioned concepts of CDA.  
**Text 1**



In this advertisement is a beauty product of L'OREAL. L'Oréal is a French cosmetics and beauty company headquartered in with a registered office in Paris. It is the world's largest cosmetics company and has developed activities in the field of cosmetics, concentrating on hair colour, skin care, sun protection, make- up, perfumes and hair care, the company is active in the dermatology, toxicology, tissue engineering, and biopharmaceutical research fields and is the top nanotechnology patent- holder in the United States.

In his add, advertisers capture the attention of women by using the terminology '**DERMO EXPERTISE**' from the discourse of science and medicine, mathematics, beauty and skincare. With the usage of this term, the company projects the treatment/care of skin by strengthening the belief that the product helps in retaining and enhancing the beauty of women and at the same time stressing the researched expertise of the manufacturer of the product. The '**WHITE PERFECT**' – the catch phrase – implies beauty to be perfect only if it is white which depicts the societal and cultural preferences and at the same time privileging and perpetuating the Eurocentric dominance of colour politics especially in the Third World. Further, if seen linguistically, the usage of three consecutive adjectives used for skin "spotless, smooth, and fair" grabs the targeted attention and convinces more effectively. The projection of the world's most beautiful woman as the face of the advertisement makes it more potent to condition the consciousness of the recipients. Another tagline viz. '**TRIPLE FAIRNESS POWER**' makes ideologies powerful by fixing them in the minds of the buying behaviors. Women are persuaded to buy effective fairness products to make their positions

felt in the society. Importantly, the power is again associated with the fair / white. This furthers the stance of clandestine capitalist colonial stance which requires a postcolonial reconstruction thereof.

**Text 2**



In text 2, the discourse begins with an interrogative statement i.e. 'What does it take to be the No. 1 Anti-wrinkle brand worldwide?' that quickly grabs the attention of the customers and answers it in an enticing vocabulary. *Patented Formulas Proven Results*

***And the ability to make Millions of women Lean into the mirror And say...Wow***

The conceptualization of the anti-aging coupled up with the adjectives 'Patented' and 'Proven' highlight the product's market value and the covert gullibility of the promise. Further, the clause 'And the ability to make **millions** of women lean into the mirror and say...Wow' assures the intense effect of the product and makes **millions** of consumers believe that only this product has the capacity to do wonders. The name of the product

'Revitalift' is the result of affixation wherein the root word 'vital' has a prefix 'Re' that directly impacts the minds of the consumers and gets fixed. Further, the vocabularic condensation of 'wow' signifying charisma aims at producing a mirror-defeating impact and here the mirror is representative of the patriarchal codes of hegemony which can be best be addressed by this wow effect –though in a subtle manner. Notably, wow itself becomes hosts a sort of discursivity. Further, the textuality of the advertisement is loaded with an empowered counter-narrative to the matrix of dominant power relations in the society by way of beautifying and thus empowering the feminine. Conversely, it gratifies the patriarchy in terms of projecting the feminine engrossed in the process of achieving the Hellenic beauty. Hence, the discourse of the add has a dual impact on its recipients which not only unsettles but also creatively shapes the ideological hierarchies in the society.

**Text 3**

The following text is a transcript from the brand Estee Lauder and the name of the product is *New Dimension Shape+Fill Expert Serum. Turn Right, Turn Left We all have a favourite angle*

***Introducing New Dimension Shape+Fill Expert Serum Now every angle becomes your best In just two weeks, you see more defined looking contours Cheek and Jawline are visibly more lifted Look into the mirror You love what you see Estee Lauder New Dimension***

<https://www.gapbodhitaru.org/>



*Now every angle becomes your best angle.*

In this text, the company uses discourses of physical dimensions as well as facial features to invoke the desires of the customers. The reference to serum signifies the positive terms of reference i.e. proteins, the electrolytes, antibodies, antigens, hormones and the like – all contributing to persuade the recipient of the credibility and potency of the product.

Further, all these discourses have been strategically woven into the discourse of skincare. The sample has been produced by Estee Lauder, one of the world's largest cosmetics and beauty company. The text will travel in the form of information and gossip amongst groups and masses which leads to the larger audience. The featuring of an American actress Eva Mendes in the advertisement proves to be an icing on the cake.

## CONCLUSION

This study aimed to unveil the hidden ideologies in advertisements of skincare from the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis. The present paper mainly focused on the use of language in skincare advertisements and strategies employed by advertisers to manipulate and attract their customers. Through these endorsements the market value of the particular brand is uncashed. The stereotypical beliefs of beauty products are shown synonymous with a perfect and happy life. With the use of this language an ideal picture of woman is projected.

Advertisement is a powerful media to appeal and to reach to the common minds. In other words, it has the power to control the masses. The marketing strategies aim to sell the product with the help of heavy laden words that persuades the consumer to buy the product.

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