

Influencing through Language: Skincare Advertising Discourse on Instagram

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Abstract

This study examines the linguistic strategies employed in Instagram skincare advertisements and their role in constructing persuasive messages and reinforcing dominant beauty ideologies. The study adopts a qualitative method through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), utilizing Fairclough's three-dimensional framework: textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice. Data were collected purposively from five Instagram posts by prominent skincare brands, selected based on relevance and audience engagement. The analysis reveals the use of imperatives, emotive vocabulary, structured narratives, and authoritative tone to build trust, appeal to emotions, and promote aspirational beauty ideals. These linguistic choices contribute to a discourse that equates beauty with confidence, self-worth, and social acceptance. The study identifies how these advertisements implicitly link consumption with self-improvement, positioning skincare not merely as a product but as a lifestyle necessity. The findings suggest that skincare advertisements on Instagram function not only as marketing tools but also as ideological texts that shape consumer identity and perpetuate societal norms regarding beauty and self-care. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on discourse and digital media by highlighting the intersection of language, ideology, and consumer culture in online marketing practices.

Keywords: advertising language, Fairclough's framework, Instagram

Introduction

In the digital age, social media platforms, particularly Instagram, have transcended their original purpose as spaces for social interaction and emerged as powerful tools for marketing and branding. The skincare industry, in particular, has harnessed the potential of Instagram to market products through visually captivating content and strategically crafted language. These advertisements go beyond the mere promotion of products; they shape societal

perceptions of beauty, self-worth, and lifestyle choices. The language employed in advertisements is inherently ideological, as it conveys values and constructed messages designed to influence consumer behaviour. Terms such as glowing, natural, and flawless, along with narratives about achieving "ideal skin," play a crucial role in constructing beauty standards that significantly impact how individuals perceive themselves and others.

Yusuf and Abas (2024) stated that language in advertisement is deliberately constructed to influence purchase intention. It delivers emotional appeal, trust building, and social identity. The emotional appeal stimulates emotional reactions such as happiness, fear, or other feelings. The use of emotional language would have a great impact on purchase decision. Advertisements always use linguistic strategies to establish credibility which helps build consumer trust. Shimp (2010) highlighted that the choice of lexicon will increase perceived reliability. So it is noteworthy that to influence customer, the use of language should embrace the meaning of the best guarantee. Furthermore, advertising language often target the customer's identity, lifestyle or aspirations. When people notice that the advertising language matches with their value, they would likely to buy the product. Machin and Mayr (2012) stated that language constructs identity positions, such as self-care conscious teenagers or the beauty within the woman. With the choice of lexicon, customer can fit their identity and would likely to be persuaded. As a result, the advertising language is more interpersonal because it touches the sense of social role. Interpersonal meaning from Halliday (1994) denotes how language expresses and negotiates the social relationships, attitudes and interaction between speakers/writers and listeners/readers. Language choices signal who has authority or expertise, who is closed or distant. Therefore, by formulating the advertising language which fits the customer's identify, there would be likely to pro with the product.

Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this study seeks to investigate how language in Instagram skincare advertisements reflects and reinforces broader social and cultural ideologies. One of the approaches to be used to analyse the language use is Fairclough's three-dimensional framework (2010): textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice. Using the framework, the linguistic strategies used by skincare brands would be identified and classified. The advertisements not only promote consumer products but also perpetuate a specific ideological narrative about beauty, self-care, and identity. In the context of skincare advertisements on Instagram, the advertisements play a significant role in shaping consumer perceptions and attitudes toward beauty, health, and lifestyle. In an increasingly digital world, Instagram has emerged as a key channel for brands to impact audiences using thoughtfully designed visual and textual content.

Therefore, understanding how language is used in skincare advertisements offers deeper insights into how these ads not only sell products but also promote ideologies and specific values, such as dominant beauty standards. Furthermore, discourse analysis provides an understanding of the relationship between language and power within the marketing context. Advertisements do not merely promote products; they also serve as tools to construct and reinforce social narratives related to identity, gender, and individual roles in society. As such, discourse analysis helps explore how language in advertisements can influence consumers' self-perceptions and their perceptions of others, while also contributing to the creation and reinforcement of broader social standards.

In terms of digital advertising, skincare companies utilize Instagram to reach and interact with their customer base. Skincare is a basic need for many people, particularly women who desire radiant, smooth, and healthy skin throughout their lives. Men, too, look for products suited to their skin types. Skincare companies respond to this demand by offering tailored solutions and using language in their marketing that speaks directly to these desires. Accordingly, the study investigates the use of promotional language on Instagram within the context of skincare marketing.

Method

This study uses primary data obtained directly from skincare advertisements on Instagram. This data consists of advertisement texts, images, and other visual elements displayed by skincare brands on the Instagram platform. The data were chosen because Instagram advertisements provide a direct representation of how skincare brands communicate with their audiences, as well as how language and visuals are used to build product images and shape beauty ideologies.

The data were analyzed to identify the language strategies used in advertisements and how these discourses shape audience perceptions of beauty and self-care. In this study, the data were analyzed using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which refers to the approach developed by Fairclough (1995). CDA is used to analyze how language in skincare advertisements on Instagram functions to construct, reinforce, or challenge ideologies and power relations that exist in society, especially related to beauty and consumption of skincare products. Fairclough's approach (1995) focuses on three main dimensions: text (linguistic), discursive practices (production and consumption of text), and social practices (broader social context). The analysis has unveiled the verbal texts in advertisements (such as words, slogans, and product descriptions) and visuals (images and videos) to identify representations of beauty constructed by advertisements. The analysis also covers how the discourse is produced and consumed by the audience and how it relates to social practices and dominant values about beauty in society. This analysis helps identify how implicit messages in advertisements influence the formation of beauty standards and self-identity. Using this approach, the study aims to explore how discourse in skincare advertisements on Instagram influences ideology and social perceptions of beauty, as well as how these advertisements are used to build product and brand images in the context of social media.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sub-heading Title 1

Data: Text Quotes from Skincare Ads on Instagram

1. Text Quote from Skincare Brand X Advertisement

Text: "Achieve flawless skin in just 7 days with our new GlowBright serum! Say goodbye to dark spots and hello to radiant skin. Clinically proven to brighten your complexion!"

Analysis:

Textual analysis reveals persuasive and emotionally feelings, promotes a specific standard of beauty, and suggests efficacy, trustworthiness and instant gratification using these following features:

- 1) Imperatives as "achieve flawless skin", "goodbye", "hello" which commands encouraging consumer action
- 2) Descriptive language as "flawless", "radiant", "brighten" which evoke beauty and positivity
- 3) Contrast as "goodbye to dark spots / hello to radiant skin" sets up a binary between undesirable and desirable
- 4) Scientific authority as "clinically proven" gives the credibility, appealing to logic
- 5) Time frame as "in just 7 days" implies quick, guaranteed results, increasing urgency

Discursive practice reveals how the ad is produced, distributed and interpreted using the following description:

- 1) Production is by marketing team for a skincare brand and by using well-known advertising strategies, such as fear of imperfection, promise of transformation
- 2) Distribution can be found on TV, social media, online ads, or magazines and the target consumer is who is interested in skincare and beauty
- 3) Consumption is the women (possibly aged 18-35), beauty conscious consumers, people with insecurities about skin tone or blemishes.

Social practice examines how the ad reflects broader social values, ideologies and power relations. The underlying ideologies are:

- 1) Beauty ideology promotes the idea that flawless, radiant skin is ideal
- 2) Colorism reinforces negative associations with darker skin tones as the phrase mentioned "dark spots"
- 3) Consumerism implies self-worth can be improved through buying a product
- 4) Scientific authority supports beauty standards as the phrase mentioned "clinically proven".

Based on the analysis, the advertising language reinforces gendered expectations around beauty (mainly targeting women), suggests a problem-solution narrative, and shapes consumer identity by promoting a narrow, market-driven definition of attractiveness.

2. Text Quote from Skincare Brand Y Advertisement

Text: "Transform your skincare routine with our all-natural ingredients. Nourish your skin with the best that nature has to offer – no chemicals, no fuss!"

Analysis:

Textual analysis reveals desire for naturalness and authenticity using these following features:

- 1) Imperatives as "transform", "nourish" which command the consumer to take action
- 2) Positive evaluative language as "all natural", "best that nature has to offer" which creates a sense of purity and superiority
- 3) Contrast as "no chemicals, no fuss" positions the product as a clean, simple alternative to other chemical products.
- 4) Personal appeal as "your skincare routine" directly addresses the consumer

5) Naturalistic rhetoric as “nature”, “all natural ingredients” create trust and appeal to eco-consciousness.

Discursive practice reveals how the ad is produced, distributed and interpreted using the following description:

1) Production is by marketing team to promote a natural skincare product and to follow current trends in health, wellness, and environmental consciousness

2) Distribution can be found in social media ads, natural health blogs, organic product websites, or eco-conscious magazines and uses visual branding consistent with “green” aesthetics

3) Consumption is consumers who prefer organic, eco-friendly, chemical free skincare (possibly middle-class, health conscious) and appeal to seek a clean lifestyle

Social practice reinforces capitalist consumerism under the guise of simplicity and health, aligns with the dominant wellness using the underlying ideologies are:

1) Naturalness as moral superiority promotes the idea that “natural” is inherently better or safer, aligning with green consumerism

2) Anti-science sentiment as “no chemicals” plays into a common misconception that chemicals equals bad.

3) Consumerism masked as simplicity as “no fuss” encourages consumption as a way to achieve well-being

4) Wellness culture fits into a broader cultural trend that links beauty, health and morality through lifestyle choices.

Based on the analysis, the advertising language reinforces naturalness and wellness with simplicity and authenticity, suggests a health consciousness, and shapes consumer identity by promoting a clean lifestyle.

3. Text Quotes from Skincare Brand Z Advertisement

Text: “Experience the magic of age-defying beauty with our Rejuvenate cream. 98% of users saw visible results in just 14 days!”

Analysis:

Textual analysis reveals a sense of hope and possibility and reinforces the idea that aging is a problem that should be fixed, using these following features:

1) Imperative verb as “experience” which directly engages the consumer action

2) Evocative language as “magic of age-defying beauty” which appeals to emotion and desire

3) Scientific claim as “98% of users saw visible results” adds the credibility and a sense of objectivity

4) Time frame as “in just 14 days!” implies quick, guaranteed results, increasing urgency

5) Positive evaluative terms as “rejuvenate”, “visible results”, “age-defying” associates the product with youthfulness, effectiveness, and transformation

Discursive practice reveals how the ad is produced, distributed and interpreted using the following descriptions:

1) Production is by marketing team for a skincare brand and is followed by the established advertising conventions

2) Distribution can be found on TV, social media, beauty websites, or magazines and is accompanied by testimonials to enhance credibility

3) Consumption is primarily women (possibly aged 30 years above), who are interested in anti-aging products

Social practice examines how the ad reflects capitalist consumerism and gendered power dynamics. The underlying ideologies are:

1) Anti-aging ideology promotes that aging is a flaw

2) Beauty standards uphold youth and flawless skin

3) Gendered marketing reflects societal pressures on women to maintain youthful appearance and beauty to value and identity

4) Scientific authority legitimates the product as the phrase mentioned “98% of users”.

Based on the analysis, this advertisement not only sells a cream but it sells the ideology of eternal youth, beauty as self-worth, and the belief that aging is a problem to be solved through consumption.

4. Dialogue in Instagram Ads

Dialog: “I used to worry about my skin every morning, but now, thanks to Skintific, I feel confident and radiant all day long. It's my skincare secret!”

Analysis:

Textual analysis reveals emotional appeals and builds trust using these following features:

1) Personal narrative as the use of first person pronoun “I”, makes the message relatable and authentic

2) Before and after structure as “I used to worry about my skin every morning” (before) which suggests a problem and “I feel confident and radiant” (after) presents a solution

3) Attribution to success as mentioned “Thanks to Skintific”

4) Positive, emotional language such as “confident”, “radiant”, “secret” which evokes happiness, beauty and exclusivity

5) Appeal to secrecy as mentioned “It's my skincare secret!” which adds a layer of intimacy and exclusivity

Discursive practice reveals how the ad is produced, distributed and interpreted using the following description:

1) Production is by marketing professionals simulating a testimonial-style message

2) Distribution can be found on social media, or product websites where authentic storytelling resonates the consumers

3) Consumption is mainly women who are self-conscious about their skin and looking for skincare solutions

Social practice encourages women to internalize beauty anxieties and look for commercial solutions. Beauty ideology promotes the idea that flawless, radiant skin is ideal. The underlying ideologies are:

1) Beauty norms and self-worth suggests that good skin leads to confidence and emotional well-being, which implying the effect of personal value

2) Gendered expectations suggest that managing appearance is part of female identity

- 3) Consumerism reinforces the idea that personal transformation and happiness can be purchased through the right skincare product
- 4) Authenticity as a marketing tool reflects a broader trend in advertising where real voices are used to build trusts

Based on the analysis, this advertisement reflects deep societal messages that beauty equals confidence that skin concerns should cause emotional distress, and that the solution lies in buying the right product.

5. Narrative in Skincare Advertisements

Narrative: "Meet Sarah, a busy professional who tried everything to combat dryness and dull skin. After just one week with Safii, her skin was visibly smoother, brighter, and hydrated. Now she feels like herself again!"

Analysis:

Textual analysis reveals working professionals and effective, emotional rewarding product using these following features:

- 1) Narrative structure tells a before and after transformation
- 2) Introduction of a character as "meet Sarah, a busy professional" constructs relatability and positions her as a role model
- 3) Problem-solution frame as "tried everything... dryness and dull skin" (problem) and "after just one week with Safii..." (solution)
- 4) Positive evaluative language such as "visibly smoother, brighter, and hydrated" presents sensory, specific, and desirable outcomes
- 5) Emotional resolution as mentioned "now she feels like herself again!" suggests emotional satisfaction and identity recovery

Discursive practice reveals how the ad is produced, distributed and interpreted using the following description:

- 1) Production is by beauty brand marketing team and uses a testimonial-style format
- 2) Distribution can be found in digital campaigns, TV commercials, or social media ads, and paired with before and after visuals
- 3) Consumption is likely women aged 25-45, especially working professionals

Social practice reinforces the idea that external appearance defines internal identity, places responsibility on the individual, and continues a trend of emotional branding. The underlying ideologies are:

- 1) Beauty as identity as mentioned "feels like herself again" implies that beauty is central to selfhood
- 2) Work and appearance as "busy professional" taps into modern gendered expectations
- 3) Consumerism suggests personal well-being and identity recovery can be achieved through product consumption
- 4) Normalization of insecurity constructs dryness and dull skin as problems serious enough to threaten one's sense of self

Based on the analysis, this advertisement does not just promote a skincare product but it sells a narrative or emotional recovery and self-worth through appearance.

Discussion

The results of the analysis show that skincare advertisements on Instagram strategically use language to shape perceptions of beauty, reinforce certain ideologies, and encourage consumer behaviour. Through word choice, discourse structures, and transformation narratives, advertisements not only sell products but also construct social realities that uphold certain beauty standards. Estévez and Fabrizio (2014) assured that the effectiveness of advertisement proposes recall, brand image, and buying intention framework from both consumer and advertiser perspectives. When an advertisement is successful, it likely resonates with the consumer's needs, allowing the advertiser to position themselves from the consumer's perspective. Using Fairclough's approach helps reveal how language in advertisements is a social practice that reflects power relations and dominant values. Thus, critical discourse analysis becomes an effective tool for understanding the strategic role of language in the digital advertising industry.

In critical discourse analysis, meaning does not only come from the words used, but also from the relationship between language, power, and ideology. In Fairclough's approach, language in advertising is understood as a social practice that takes place at three levels: text, discursive practice, and social practice. At the text level, the choice of diction such as "glow," "flawless," or "rejuvenate" is a form of representation of certain aesthetic values associated with ideal beauty standards. The use of imperative sentences and transformative metaphors such as "unlock your skin's true potential" shows how language constructs the perception that beauty is something that can be accessed by consuming certain products. At the level of discursive practice, language in advertising does not stand alone, but interacts with the structures of production and consumption of social media, where audiences not only receive messages but also reproduce and spread them. The social practices involved show how the ideology of capitalism and ageism is implied in the discourse of digital beauty, with the pressure to appear young, bright, and perfect. Fairclough views that in this context, language becomes a means to normalize certain values in society.

Based on the analysis in results, skincare advertisement reveals certain textual meanings, particular discursive and social practices. In terms of textual meanings, persuasive, positively emotional feelings, imperatives, structured narratives, problem-solution framework, and scientific authority lie behind the meanings of consumers' attraction. Susanti (2019) found that using strong adjectives and rhetorically powerful phrases have power to attract or create desire especially used in beauty advertisement. Yu and Rungrojsuwan (2020) suggested to use imperative sentences to help catch attention. Pramusita (2021) emphasized that using positive adjectives and scientific terminology persuade consumers. Dwiyanti (2024) dan Widayastuti (2024) also affirmed that using emotional language, persuasive language, and personification are convincing to the consumers. These types of language are effective in attracting consumers to use skincare products and should be crafted in a way that builds and reinforces brand recall.

In terms of discursive practice, the skincare advertisement channels mostly from the marketing team of the brand company, testimonial style in production. For the distribution, it is more likely shown in TV commercials, digital campaigns, social media ads, or magazines. The consumer target is mainly women who are self-conscious about healthy appearance and

free threatening environment. Yusiana, et.al (2023) found that using influencer marketing and online advertising have direct positive impact on consumers' purchase decisions. Salsabila, Ali and Septiani (2023) have examined the model of AISAS (Attention-Interest-Search-Action-Share) is effective for those stages of consumer behavior. Sunitarya and Adriana (2016) found that endorsement and product attributes positively increase consumer trusts in skincare brands. Based on the results and the relation with the previous studies, the influencer marketing and online advertising directly boost consumers' purchase decision. Key stages of consumer behavior from attention to sharing and endorsements and product features play a significant role in building consumer trust in skincare brands.

In terms of social practice, the beauty and skincare advertisement constitutes naturalness, authenticity, wellness, anti-aging, beauty standards, gendered expectations, consumerism, and scientific authority. Tantri and Yuniari (2023) highlighted how linguistic strategies such as repetition and mood selection construct aspirational identities and reinforce consumer behaviour. Sinaga , et.al (2022) utilized Van Dijk's CDA framework dissects how Emina's advertising constructs beauty standards and influences consumer emotions through narrative structures and linguistic choices. Mendoza (2020) applies feminist critical discourse analysis and found that how whitening ads perpetuate gendered and racialized beauty standards, advocating for more inclusive representation in advertising. It is noting that skincare advertisements use specific language techniques to shape idealized identities and influence consumer behaviour. Also, they construct and reinforce beauty standards through carefully crafted narratives and emotional appeals, and highlight the need for more inclusive representation in advertising.

Studying the language of skincare advertisements through Fairclough's framework – textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice – offers a comprehensive understanding of how these ads do more than just promote products. They actively shape consumer identities, reinforce societal beauty standards, and reflect broader cultural ideologies. This multidimensional approach reveals the power of language in constructing meaning, influencing behavior, and sustaining social norms within the beauty industry. Ultimately, such analysis not only uncovers the strategies behind persuasive advertising but also encourages critical awareness of the social implications embedded in everyday media messages..

CONCLUSION

Skincare advertisements are not just commercial messages – they are powerful cultural texts that influence how beauty, identity, and social norms are perceived and enacted by consumers. The analysis of skincare advertisements using Fairclough's framework – textual, discursive, and social practices – reveals the complex ways language shapes consumer perception and behavior. Textually, persuasive strategies such as emotional appeals, imperatives, positive adjectives, scientific language, and structured narratives are employed to attract attention and build brand recall. In terms of discursive practice, the production of skincare ads is largely driven by brand marketing teams using testimonial and influencer

styles, distributed widely through digital platforms, television, and print. These practices target appearance-conscious consumers, primarily women. From a social practice perspective, skincare advertisements are embedded in broader ideologies such as wellness, anti-aging, beauty standards, gender norms, and scientific authority.

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