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## A Multimodal Analysis of Differences Between TV Commercials and Press Advertisements: A Discoursal Study of Persuasion-Seeking Strategies in the Mass Media

Hossein Vahid Dastjerdi<sup>1</sup>; Sajad Davoudi-Mobarakeh<sup>2\*</sup>; Mostafa Zare<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ph.D., English Language Department, Faculty of Foreign Languages, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran.

<sup>2</sup> M.A. Student, English Language Department, Faculty of Foreign Languages, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran.

\*Corresponding author.

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### Abstract

This study reports the findings of a multimodal analysis seeking to find the differences between TV commercials and newspapers advertisements in the application of strategies which make those ads more and more persuasive. Regarding such strategies effort is made to find out which ones are more convincing and appealing to their receivers. The tools used in this study involved 40 tape-recorded TV commercials and 40 ads taken from two Iranian newspapers, Tehran Times and Iran Daily which are published in English as well as the American magazine of Newsweek. The persuasion techniques of each medium were first specified separately and then compared with the techniques used by the others. The main finding of the study was that strategies applied by producers of TV commercials are much more persuasive and impressive than those used by suppliers of advertisements in the press.

**Key words:** Multimodal analysis; TV commercials; Press advertisements; Persuasion

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### INTRODUCTION

The capacity of manufacturers to supply more goods than are actually needed has led to a wide range of ways of creating a need in public, which will then be satisfied by manufactured goods. Producers should find a way to display their goods as much attractive and eye-catching as possible so that they are not got out of the market. The main solution to this problem is advertising. The more saturated the market for a particular type of product, the more complex the advertising needed. Advertising is an indispensable requirement to help producers sell their products. It has become an inseparable part of humans' life. Advertisements are ubiquitous creatures which no one can ignore their presence. You see ads on the walls in the street, in a magazine on a desk in an office, in a barber shop, and other places you can imagine. To advertise for consumer goods the burden is on media. Besides media are dependent on ads financially, so they have to try hard to be more and more persuasive.

In the broadest sense advertisements either persuade or inform receivers in terms of their functionality. The main function of a persuasive advertisement is to persuade the receiver to buy the product. In fact the receiver is directly manipulated to change his/her (consumer) behavior. They present goods in such attractive and appealing appearances to their audience that even junk products will gain some consumers. It is clear to say that amongst many advertisements produced some are more interesting and take the attention of more viewers than others. These are what we call, for the ease of reference, '*persuasive ads*'. In fact an ad is constructed to be persuasive. Suppliers of ads use various techniques to construct more persuasive advertisements. For instance, suppose you are watching an exciting movie in TV and suddenly the film is interrupted

by a mind-racking TV commercial which to a great degree distracts your attention from the movie. Due to its time of occurrence this ad will stay in your mind for a while (they know when to put them). As you see it is a persuasion-making strategy adopted by suppliers which influences their audience either consciously or subconsciously. You may tend to ignore the ad but in reality you do not and it surely influences the choices you make in your shopping. The various characteristics of advertising as identified by Cook (1992, p.214) apply to the broad spectrum of advertisements, in whatever form. The features that follow are prototypical of advertisements rather than definitive:

1- They have the typical restless instability of a new discourse type.

2- They seek to alter addressees' behavior. (Persuasive advertisements are prime examples.)

3- They change constantly. (Advertisements for a specific product change intermittently.)

4- They are a discourse on the periphery of attention. (Advertisements are not regarded as being serious.)

5- They are unsolicited by their receivers. (Advertisements appear in the media, e.g. on television.)

6- They are parasitic: appropriating and existing through the voices of other discourse types. (In magazines, newspapers and on television and radio)

7- They merge the features of public and private discourse, and the voices of intimacy and authority, exploiting the features common to both. (Private conversation and public addresses can be used.)

8- They use various substances for discourse (e.g. a perfume strip in a magazine).

9- They are embedded in an accompanying discourse (e.g. in a newspaper).

10- They provoke social, moral and aesthetic judgments, either positive or negative.

A persuasive advertisement could contain one, all or a combination of these characteristics.

Television and news papers have been more successful than other media to convince their viewers to buy the advertised products. These (TV and newspapers) are names that come to mind when talking about ads and advertising. Drawing on the function of persuasive advertisements, this study tries to make a comparison and contrast between TV commercials and press ads in terms of their power of persuasion making. We want to examine how use of two different modalities makes one medium more persuasive than the other.

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## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

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### Advertising: Brief History Plus Influential Discourse

In the society that we live in today it seems that everywhere we look we are surrounded by advertisements whether they are television commercials, billboards or

press advertisements. Obviously, the main purpose of advertisements is to get the consumer to purchase the product in question, the message within the advertisement has to be as persuasive as possible and ensure that certain emotions, feelings and values are awakened in the consumer. Advertising has an extreme importance in today's society; business companies invest constantly huge amounts of their budgets in well-organized ways to attract higher numbers of customers towards the products and services they offer. Historically, advertisement has always followed the main technological trends moving through newspapers, billboards, radio, television and, more recently, the web and email. (Ferdinando, Rosi, Lent, Manzalini & Zambonelli, 2009).

According to Ramalingam, Palaniappan, Panchanatham & Palanivel (2007) Effective advertisements, beside their entertaining characteristics, do have well-defined objectives and satisfy the customer's personal taste and need; they continue that Effective advertisement's characteristics work on two levels. First one is that advertisers should satisfy consumer's objectives by engaging them and delivering a relevant message. The other one is that advertisements must achieve advertiser's objectives. Initially, a consumer may be interested in watching an advertisement for its entertainment value or to satisfy his/her curiosity. If the advertisement is sufficiently entertaining, customer may remember it. However, customer may then learn that the advertisement relates to a personal need and provides relevant information for that need. Later on, they all point to the basic features of effective advertising; they argue that Strategy, creativity, and execution are the three broad dimensions that characterize effective advertising.

Every effective advertisement implements a relevant strategy. This means that the advertiser develops the advertisement to meet specific objectives which are carefully directed to certain audience and mirror their most important concerns; these objectives are vividly seen in media like print, TV, or the internet, that will reach its audience most effectively. The creative concept is the advertisement's central idea that grabs consumer attention and sticks in memory of the consumer. Moreover, effective advertisements are well executed. That means the details, the photography, setting, printing, and the production values all have been fine-tuned. Many of these techniques are standard in the industry. So these three conditions must be met for an advertisement to be considered effective (Ramalingam, Palaniappan, Panchanatham & Palanivel, 2007).

From a critical point of view, however, advertisements do have hidden ideologies; Fairclough (2001[1989], p.36) cited in Mullany (2004, p.284) puts emphasis on the ideologies hidden in all advertisements and argues that the discourse of advertising is one of the key discourse types "which contain ideologies which legitimize existing societal relations".

Authors such as Tanaka (1994) and Campos Pardillos (1994) (cited in persuasion and advertising English, 2001) have highlighted the importance of strategy implementation in advertising. In this vein, they have emphasized that successful advertising avoids pushing consumers to buy, but rather persuades them, thus reducing the psychological burden consumers suffer during their buying moments. Advertisers attract prospective consumers by using verbal and non-verbal metaphors (Forceville, 1996; Velasco Sacristan, 1999), employing different textual devices which present addressees as co-authors of the advertisement (Myers, 1994), equating ads to informal conversation (Myers, 1994), and exhibiting pervasive trends such as the frequent use of 'disjunctive' syntax and incomplete sentences (Rush, 1998).

Research on the language of advertising has concluded that advertisers typically rely on certain discourse strategies to make their advertisements more persuasive: "(i) use of regular patterns of textual choices; (ii) importance of foregrounding strategies, such as alliteration, repetition of letters, assonance, language mixing and unpredictable spellings; (iii) preference for certain sentence types (especially rhetorical questions and commands) and sentence structures, such as implicit comparison, ellipsis, substitution, and shorter clauses; (iv) frequent use of certain semantic relations, (especially homonymy, polysemy, and ambiguity) and semantic associations; (v) choice of language dialects and register, thus making direct associations between the product and the target audience; (vi) imitation of informal conversation; (vii) importance of figurative language, especially metaphor, synecdoche and metonymy. In sum, these different discourse strategies seem to balance the referential, conative, and poetic functions of language" (Fuertes-Olivera, Velasco-Sacristan, Arribas-Botio and Samaniego-Ferntidez, 2001).

### **Advertising from a Semiotic Analysis**

The advertising of products has been analyzed by a number of experts in order to determine the specific uses of language found and strategies applied for the transmission of the message of an ad as well as evaluation of their persuasion power. In fact to do work on semiotics and visual discourse is growing rapidly and it attracts more and more researchers.

In a study conducted by Eduardo de Gregorio Godeo he used a social semiotic approach to explore the structure of visual discourse of male-perfume advertising in British men's magazines. In this study Eduardo asserts that any visual images may be understood as having an essentially textual dimension and they imply a cultural perspective. In a research done by Esmat Babaii and Hassan Ansary, textual and contextual characteristics of contemporary Iranian TV advertising style were explored. In this article they revealed that features used in Iranian TV commercials are to a great extent similar to standard

western advertising style both in language use and discourse structure.

Heather Adams and Laura Cruz Garcia in another semiotic study contrasted the advertising of financial products in the press to advertisements for consumer products. They concluded that adverts for financial products mirror many of the characteristics of ads for consumer products.

Since the basic focus of this study is a multimodal analysis which seeks to find the differences between TV commercials and newspapers advertisements in the application of strategies which make those ads more and more persuasive, we will consider each of them thoroughly.

### **Advertising in Print and TV: Which Mode Persuades the Audience?**

Wheeling Walks campaign (Reger et al., 2002) conducted a study to investigate which mode of advertisement delivery including television, radio and news paper could be recalled better by audience. Evaluation results using a Hierarchy of Evaluation Framework found that 76% of respondents reported recalling the television advertisements, compared to 32% recall for the radio advertisements and 5% for public health education programs held in churches and worksites (Reger et al., 2002). This indicates television is an important media to use when advertising for public acceptance. From this study, we can conclude that television advertisements are more convincing and can be recalled better than advertisements on news papers.

Print advertisements are an extremely effective way to reach a mass audience. Obviously, because the advertisements are in print, the use of colour, text and photography are all key factors in ensuring a successful campaign. Advertisements cannot simply attempt to sell the product in question; they must make it appeal to the consumer. It is important that advertisements not only attempt to make clear the attributes of the product they are trying to sell but also ensure that these actually mean something to us the consumer (Williamson, 1978, p.12).

Today television has acquired the central position in all our entertainments. Television is not only the most popular technological device of entertainment but it is also the best medium for sending information in the simplest way. Various production units and advertisement agencies use the electronic media such as the television to show off their products and services to the existing and prospective consumers. Saha, Pal & Pal (2007) emphasize the importance and popularity of TV for advertising in the modern world and state that companies normally prefer this medium to many other media since through this medium they can demonstrate the superiority of their products over others' products, and thereby can attract the attention of the prospective buyer which leads to an increase in the sale of their products.

There is no doubt that television commercials are among the most pervasive of all media products in the world. All this together with the hundreds of millions of dollars spent on commercials throw us to the conclusion that the producers of commercials and the makers of the products they promote feel that they do have some effect on potential buyers. Del Saz-Rubio & Pennock (2009) highlight the significance of TV ads in promoting a buying mood among customers and declare that the basic aim of the producers of TV commercials is to promote or sell a product, while a less obvious one is to create an atmosphere that may encourage buying, that is to foster a buying mood (Baker, 1994, p.62–63; Cohen Eliya & Hammer, 2004, p.169). According to Del Saz-Rubio (2000), TV ads are a one-way conversation which takes place between the advertiser and the buyer with no opportunities for immediate feedback. Del Saz-Rubio (2000) then continues that that the function of the TV commercial is, among other things, to offer a piece of advice or a recommendation to the audience, and so, within a classification of speech acts it would best fall within the exhortative type (cf. Haverkate, 1994).

In another study, Ramalingam, Palaniappan, Panchanatham & Palanivel (2007) point to basic advantages of TV ads. First, it has a great influence on consumers' taste and perception. Second, it can reach a large audience in a cost-efficient manner. Third, its sound and moving images create a strong impact. That is why TV advertisement is considered to be an influential mode to market commercials in the third millennium.

Lee, Carpenter & Meyers (2007), in another study, emphasize the pervasiveness and ubiquity of TV among all forms of media. They continue that due to this ubiquity, television plays an important role in shaping viewers' attitudes. Images on television become readily accessible icons and archetypes (Shrum & O'Guinn, 1993), and portrayals on television influence how people think about a variety of social groups, including older adults.

Finally, Guadagno & Cialdini (2007) examined how modality and likeability of the speaker could persuade the audience and result in their change of attitudes regarding the advertised commercials. Participants received a persuasive communication through one of three communication modalities: written, videotape, or audiotape. When the speaker was likeable, participants in both video and audiotape conditions elicited greater attitude change than participants in the written communication condition. When, the speaker was not likeable, attitude change was greatest for participants in the written communication modality. These results suggest that in the video and audio-tape conditions the personal cues associated with the communicator were more salient and participants engaged in heuristic processing. Conversely, in the written communication condition, where the personal cues were less salient,

participants processed the message systematically. It is also relevant to the present research to acknowledge that the written communication mode muted the fact that the communicator was not likeable.

Last but not least is related to the fact that the need for a multimodal approach to TV advertising is also justified if we take into account that there has been a progressive shift in advertising strategies involving a greater use of images and music rather than words in order to influence the audience (Saha, Pal & Pal, 2007). Since the 1920s, manufacturers and advertisers have come to understand that advertisements must do more than simply convey information concerning the product (Ewen, 1976 reported in Cohen Eliya and Hammer, 2004, p.167).

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## METHOD

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### Materials

Materials and the tools used in this study were 40 videotape-recorded TV commercials for different kinds of goods recorded with the aid of satellite technology, and 40 printed advertisements taken from two Iranian newspapers, Tehran Times and Iran Daily, and Newsweek Magazine.

### Procedure

The transcriptions of the advertisements taken from TV as well as those collected from newspapers were studied and analyzed carefully and thoroughly. Strategies used in each medium were specified and arranged. Through this study, we came up with a table which consisted of 16 pairs of parallel descriptive statements describing strategies used in the preparation of advertisements in both modalities. This list will be presented in the *Results* section. After constructing the table the strategies were compared with each other and a final statement were made which evaluated the strategies according to their power of persuasion-seeking.

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## RESULTS

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Through our analysis of the ads appearing in all forms of media like TV, radio, magazines and newspapers and internet websites we came up with some general strategies common to all advertisements regardless of their modality and also some strategies specific to TV and newspapers. The main result of our study was that the strategies used in TV commercials are more powerful and influential in attracting the attention of their receivers and in persuading them to buy the advertised products. In fact TV is by its nature the most convincing medium of transmitting all kinds of information including advertisements. In what follows we first express the techniques common to all media then we try to explore how TV and press include these strategies in their advertisements.

## General Strategies Common to All Advertisements

### Language Functions of Ads

- Ads typically include language which fulfills,
- The referential function (to describe the product),
- The appellative function (to catch the addressees' attention),
- The emotive or expressive function (to persuade the potential consumer),
- The common function of ads of all types is the appellative function used to attract the addressee.

### Syntax

- Advertising language is normally expressed in simple, short sentences.
- The ellipsis is very common in advertising discourse, as it creates an atmosphere of proximity and intimacy. In this way information is not explicitly mentioned but has to be supplied by the reader. Ellipsis also saves space and money.
- Exclamations occur in ads in personal and face to face communication.

### Semantics

- Much use of superlative and comparative adjectives.
- The dominant lexical trait of adverts is the repetition of all types of words especially nouns and adjectives.
- The adjective 'new' is the most frequently used adjective.
- Use of the same slogan in different ads for the same product.

### Image, Picture

- Images in adverts convey a set of values which are associated with the product. In some products like cosmetics, the image is accompanied by little or no text. The image is tacitly accepted by the addressee.

### The Strategies Specific to TV commercials and Press Ads

In the following chart we have presented the strategies which suppliers of ads in TVs apply to be more and more persuasive and also those techniques which developers of advertisements for newspapers use to make products appealing for the people so that they can gain more consumers.

**Table 1**  
**Specific Characteristics of TV Commercials versus Newspapers' Advertisements**

TV Commercials	Newspapers' Advertisements
much use of spoken language	much use of written language
use of face to face conversation	use of short sentences
use of informal language	use of formal language
all ads include element of picture and image	some ads have no pictures and just in written form e.g. ads for employment
heard and watched passively i.e. they are unsolicited	should be intentionally read and watched
understood by all kinds of viewers whether literate or illiterate.	in written form understood just by literates.
much use of humans and real objects and use of authentic situations and contexts.	much use of photos of people and objects
viewers get the intention of the ad as soon as they see it on the screen	ads should be read entirely to get what it is for
involving the element of voice and phonological aspects of language	everything is conveyed via image and written language.
due to the use of sound some words form a rhyme which through repetition in the ads this rhyme remains in receivers' minds.	the rhymes hardly outstanding in written language.
facility to use animated pictures	everything conveyed through printed image
easy to access wherever TV is available.	not available up-dated especially in rural places where access to the press is limited.
use of second person singular to create a friendly situation as if they know their audience	third person singular to refer to all kinds of audiences
frequent use of puns and metaphors	puns and metaphors are infrequent
neologism and loan words are prevalent	more factual words and sometimes copying language used in TV
large terminology	limited terminology

## DATA ANALYSIS

- Through the analysis of these two modalities we found that every advertisement consists of two parts. The first part is the main body of ads which occupies the larger portion. The main body in TV commercial is made of the animated pictures, images and spoken language. This part plays the main role to take the attention of the viewers. The main body in printed ads is just in image format. This part has also the role of attention-getting. As you see in TV attention-getting is achieved via three elements of animated pictures, images and spoken language but in the press just images can be used for this end. The use of animated pictures alone in TV ads has a very important role to attract more viewers than printed advertisements lacking it. It helps producers to create exciting and emotional scenes which stays in the minds of receiver for a long time.
- The second part of an ad is the written part which is in small print. It occupies a smaller portion than the main body.
- Survey shows that people consider ads in paper as a valuable source of information whereas ads in other media like TV and cinema are viewed as being entertaining rather than informative.
- TV commercials make use of spoken language which is understandable to every group of viewers but in ads in the press the medium of interaction is written language. This is a negative point for ads since those receivers who are illiterate can not use them.
- Elaborating on points 2, 3 we see that TV ads are informal and use face to face conversation whereas in printed ads they are formal and usually in short sentences. Use of informal language creates a sense of proximity and intimacy in the viewers which stimulates them to follow the ad. The use of formal language does not lead to such intimacy.
- Pictures and images are prevalent in all TV ads but in newspapers some ads do not have picture like 'employment ads'. The use of pictures in itself attracts a larger number of receivers than ads for the press.
- TV commercials are unsolicited creatures which are heard and watched passively without much attention but for printed ads you have to stop and read them. In fact few groups of people do this and most people consider it as a waste of time.
- TV commercials by the use of humans, real objects and authentic situations put people into reality. In this way they trust what they see. But in press every thing is conveyed via image which does not have a very lasting effect.
- TV commercials make use of phonological aspect of language which is a great privilege in itself. The

use of sound gives producers of TV commercials the chance to combine words which form a rhyme together and also help them to construct songs. Songs are much easier to remember and hard to forget. The rhyming words in printed discourse are not very outstanding.

- TV commercials use second person singular pronoun. This implies the sense that they know their audiences. In fact it is a mutual feeling because the audience also thinks they are familiar to each other so they trust them. In the press third person singular is used to refer to all kinds of audience.
- In TV ads puns and metaphors are used a lot but in advertisements for press they are infrequent. No one can deny the effect of art in their life. It adds to the attraction of TV commercials.
- TV commercials have a large terminology including loan words and neologism, but in the press terminology is limited. In fact the language used in the press is to a large extent a copy from language of the TV. Especially slogans advertising a particular product which are used in the press come only after they are shown in TV and when people observe them in the news papers it just remind them what they have seen in TV and not anything new.

As it is clear all strategies implemented in ads in TVs are much more persuasive and have more lasting effects than those strategies used in the press.

## DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Findings of this study support the claim that strategies used in the production of TV commercials are with no doubts much more persuasive and influential than those applied in the press. This power is reflective of the aim of constructing TVs. TV productions, no matter the kinds of programs, are inherently made to entertain and attract their audience and also to modify their behavior. If they do not fulfill this aim (they are not persuasive) their inherent reason underlying the production of those programs is questioned.

Newspapers as another system of broadcasting in this study are put in a lower position to TV. There are three reasons underlying this draw back. The first is what was mentioned regarding the strategies used in news papers. As it went before these techniques and strategies are less convincing than those in TVs. The second reason is that use of the press as a means of broadcasting as a whole is a culture-bound phenomenon. In some cultures people prefer the printed media to other means of broadcasting so that they are informed of the events of the world. In some other cultures newspapers have been put aside to be replaced by TV and other media. The third reason for this drawback is the development of electronic technology like

internet and satellite. The advent of these technologies with their much attraction and deception power relegated the press to a least important position for transmission of information.

With regard to what went on if we want to improve the position of newspaper advertisements the solution is not only trying to make press ads more interesting and appealing but to find ways to change the attitude of people about the printed media so that they are upgraded to the higher level of TVs and Internet.

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