



RESEARCH PAPER

Investigating Advertising Strategies: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Social Media Advertisements in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze advertising strategies on social media and customer feedback towards those ads, focusing on trends across various platforms. Drawing from Van Dijk's (1999) model of language control and Kress and Leeuwen's (2020) multimodal framework, this research explores how advertisers influence consumer behavior through linguistic and visual elements. Qualitative analysis was conducted on advertisements from randomly selected Facebook brand pages. Both textual and image analyses were applied to examine how these ads persuade consumers. The analysis revealed that advertisers use specific linguistic choices and images to shape consumer perceptions. Moreover, advertisers frame a lifestyle necessary for society to live a better life, and the pictures of celebrities or products have a greater space than the text itself that forces the consumers to take immediate decision. Customers, in turn, engage by showing interest and asking questions in the comment sections. Future studies could use this research to raise awareness of how social media advertising influences consumer behavior and encourage more informed interactions with such advertisements.

Keywords:

Advertisements in Pakistan, Advertising Strategies, CDA of Social Media Ads, Critical Discourse Analysis, Social Media Ads

Introduction

Digital marketing has influenced the business communities to advertise their products on social media because of its emerging use in society. For social media users, it is quite instant to approach the product sellers or service providers by clicking a given link. The trend of online shopping is increasing because the advertisers use appeals in their ads that convince the audience to take immediate action (Teichert, Hardeck, Liu & Trivedi, 2018) and contact the relevant person for buying the desired product. To convince a greater number of customers and increase the demand for the products, the advertisers use several linguistic choices, i.e., specific adjectives, adverbs, and phrase structures. They try to present their products as the best choice for the consumers with the help of effective textual and image designing that will be analyzed through a multimodal analysis (Singh, Abhishek & Azad 2024). The images along with verbal use of language play a vital role in setting the beliefs of the customers (Kim & Lennon 2008).

The current study can be significant for both the CDA researchers and the advertisers. The future researchers may apply the similar patterns of analysis to analyze the other latest ads to understand genre of other social media platforms such as TikTok or YouTube, and the advertisers may learn the art of using verbal language and images strategically to attract the relevant audience. The public is not aware of the manipulating techniques that are commonly used, for example, the term bandwagon (Jain, 2024) is used as a propaganda tool to convince the customers for buying a product as quickly as they can, i.e., buy one get one or limited offer.

Literature Review

In the late 1970s, a group of linguists and literary theorists at the University of East Anglia developed Critical Linguistics (Shukurovna & Bakhronova, 2024). They followed the approach based on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The CDA thinkers Teun van Dijk, Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak, Gunther Kress, and Theo van Leeuwen worked on CDA in the first stages but now CDA has become a subject and field. According to Van Dijk (2001), CDA is a type of discourse analysis focusing on social power abuse resisted or dominated by political or social communication. CDA not only focuses on linguistic features used in text but also discusses language from a sociolinguistic perspective focusing on pragmatics. CDA helps common people to analyze persuasion and manipulation which is sugar coated and embedded with words. According to Chen & Weninger (2024), CDA aims to educate people how to find out hidden issues through critically analyzing a text.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) deals with any type of discourse whether it is written or spoken. CDA indicates the very first point linked with social phenomenon (Fairclough, 2001). CDA helps understand the hidden structures that have been part of social set up. CDA also sets up a relationship among semiotic signs, paralinguistic features, and advertisements (Boetti, 2020). Gee (2014) says that CDA is an approach that deals with the analysis of a discourse that has text which is based on social phenomenon such as politics, status, gender, or class etc. According to Sahmeni & Afifah (2019), CDA helps to examine the ideology behind the messages and their pragmatics e.g., what has been said directly or indirectly? Researchers have used CDA methods to analyze influencing strategies used by the advertisers on Pakistani billboards (Shah, Irfan & Shamim, 2024); and social media headlines, i.e., how the news headlines on YouTube thumbnails manipulate the audience achieve certain goals (Shah & Bashir, 2024).

Mangold & Faulds (2009) in their research social media: The New Hybrid Element of the Promotion Mix said that with the emergence of internet-based social media has made it easy for individuals to communicate online with hundreds of brands and companies. It has also enabled the companies to reach their customers directly. The researchers have suggested to organizations to shape conversation with costumers in a manner. They should build networking platforms such as blogs, social media tools and promotional tools to engage larger customers. Tuten (2008) has defined advertising as promotional mix that requires to reach maximum audience to promote the brand or product so, the trend and philosophy of advertising is getting changed not wholly but partially because consumers are available easily online. This is the reason advertisers prefer to reach them online rather than knocking at the doors or visiting markets. The author of the book 'Social Media Marketing in a Web 2.0 World has also mentioned the investment that is being made for online shopping. TNS Media Intelligence, a company that tracks competitive ad spending, has given a report that television earns 44.1%, radio 7.0 %, outdoor advertising 2.6 % and internet advertising 8.0% of all spending. 8% may be a small percentage but this is a fact that the percentage is increasing day by day. No doubt, online advertising has achieved the highest growth rate of any media and pulled televisions, magazines, and newspapers into the online category.

Material and Methods

The study is qualitative and presents a comprehensive analysis of social media advertisements from top brand pages on Facebook. The data was collected by taking snapshots from those pages randomly by scrolling them down, e.g., CORAL, LUX, Khaadi, Stylo Shoes, Limelight, Fair & Lovely, and Jazz. One advertisement from each page was selected, and consumer feedback—both positive and negative—was investigated based on the comments under those ads. The researchers developed a model named as 'Ad-Feedback Synergy Model' to analyze the data, focusing on textual and semiotic analysis by linking it with customer feedback, as there is a significant relationship between feedback and advertisements published on social media. This model shows how advertisers use specific

language, either textual or semiotic, and it further bridges a link between the type of feedback generated by the audience and the analysis itself. The analysis holds four subsections:

- textual analysis
- semiotic and cultural analysis
- feedback analysis
- linking ads analysis with the feedback

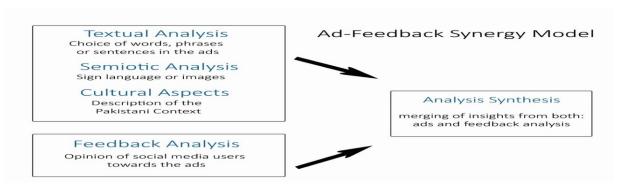


Figure 1. Ad-Feedback Synergy Model

The total sample includes seven advertisements and 70 comments, with ten comments selected under each ad for analysis. Ethical considerations were followed when selecting bold images, but images of females were included due to the high comment ratio. The qualitative analysis is based on the researcher's understanding of the use of language in society. While developing the model, a major hint was taken from Van Dijk's CDA model, focusing on how elites use language to control people. In this context, advertisers are elites who use language to persuade the public to buy their products. And Multimodal Analysis (MDA) approach by Kress and Leeuwen (2020) was also followed to look deeply into images for the analysis. Additionally, cultural aspects of the ads in the Pakistani context were deeply investigated. A comprehensive analysis is given below.

Results and Discussion



Figure 2. CORAL – Up to 70 % OFF

The advertisement does not convey a complete message. If this ad is shown to people who have never heard the brand name, they will be unable to guess what is being sold. Well, this is a shoe brand. In the advertisement, bandwagon propaganda technique has been used 'Up to 70% OFF' which means the buyer will get 70% from the actual price of the product.

But the advertiser has missed the most valuable information about pricing. How the consumer will get the idea about the percentage he is going to get off. Only those consumers can get the percentage who regularly shop from CORAL and have some idea what the current pricing of the company is. '70%' is written in the big format to attract the attention of Facebook users. The whole text has been typed in capital letters. The most important of the text is the largest while less important has been kept bold and the least valuable information has been kept regular. The text out of the image has the same message, but half is missing. The text ends with an exclamatory sign '!' which may give the meaning that the copy writer has no more information to share so he ended the text by using this exclamatory sign. As it is common in written communication when someone is silent, he just uses small text and ends it with the same sign of exclamation. The second phrase 'for two more days' also has the same propaganda technique 'bandwagon' which can be translated as 'limited offer, don't be late, buy quickly.' In this phrase, the advertiser has kept the date and ending date hidden by choice so that every consumer will take this message as fresh and keep moving to buy the product from CORAL. The post was done on august 23, 2017. If someone sees it, he may think about the next two days and may visit the office because the ending date of the offer has not been mentioned in the image. The phrase 'Your wish has been granted' has been used as an emotional appeal to attract the audience emotionally. The word - YOUR has a possession which is an emotional touch with the things. The word 'wish' has itself strong meanings. Everyone has a wish to look smart, beautiful, and attractive in society. So, the brand will help them to get a better look. The word 'granted' has been used to give honor to the consumers. The whole phrase shows that the consumer's wish is their primary focus. So, consumer's choice should have primary choice in selection of CORAL.

In terms of semiotic analysis, the current advertisement targets the psychology of Pakistanis, many of whom prefer to bargain and feel satisfaction when purchasing items at a discounted price. By offering a 70% discount, the advertiser attracts more attention from this demographic. However, the image used in the advertisement is irrelevant to the product, as there is no picture of shoes, despite the ad being for CORAL footwear. The image of Ala'din is metaphorically significant, as it conveys the idea of an impossible deal coming true, reinforcing the 70% discount as a magical or mythical offering.

In this advertisement, vital information such as price and location were missing from the text. Analysis of the comments reveals that many consumers asked about the missing information, which increased engagement on the Facebook page. Consumers inquired about online purchase availability, store locations, and prices. Although the advertiser mentioned a discount, the omission of the price was noted by the audience. Despite this, the advertiser received positive feedback, showing successful engagement.



Figure 3 LUX - Maya Ali Gives the Gift of Long-lasting Fragrance

In the advertisement, the text contains the link to the video from where the images of the celebrity have been captured to put in the print ad. There is direct projection of the celebrity and indirect projection of the brand. 'Maya Ali made all surprise' has action verb which is done by Maya Ali. The word 'all' shows the audience that were business class, families, and other circles of society. The word 'all' has huge meaning, if we see opposite side of the sentence, we get to know there were nobody left who were not impressed by Maya Ali. That seems imaginary. But the video shows that the audience who were present there in 'Cinepax' have taken the impact of Maya Ali's beauty. The comments of Facebook users will also prove that Maya Ali really surprised the audience. 'Watch the video' gives two meanings. One that the reaction of the people cannot be described in words. Secondly, the social media marketing team wants the people to directly open YouTube channel of Lux so that they may get the largest subscriber on YouTube channel too. Because most online journalists do the same thing these days. They leave the news incomplete and ask the users to access their website because having much traffic on website also generate online advertising business. If there was only one purpose to share the reaction of people, then video of Maya Ali could be uploaded directly on Facebook but giving link of YouTube shows that the advertiser wants the audience to visit the YouTube channel as well. The text which is on the image gives some more deep meanings. The sentence 'Maya Ali gives the gift of long-lasting fragrance' is in present simple tense and is interpreted as regular action. Whoever uses lux will give fragrance just like Maya Ali. The sentence gives two meanings because the word 'gift' creates ambiguity. If gift is physical entity, then the sentence says that Maya Ali introduces Lux as a gift which will give you long lasting fragrance. If we take the word 'gift' as non-physical entity, then the meaning would be that Maya Ali personally gives you fragrance because she has been presented as symbol of lux. Indirect meaning is again that lux gives you fragrance. 'Long Lasting Fragrance' is a compound noun that could be written with hyphen between long and lasting like 'long-lasting' and fragrance separately. So, that the meaning could be clearer what is lasting. Long or fragrance? For example, Long Lasting-Fragrance gives some other meaning. The other essential information that has often been requested from the consumers is pricing. The advertiser has mentioned the price of the product, which is necessary information. The price is in Rs. that means the advertiser has particularly hit the Pakistani people.

The second advertisement employs the testimonial technique, featuring Maya Ali, a well-known Pakistani actress, to promote the product. Lux uses her as a symbol of long-lasting fragrance, though this association cannot be generalized to her other roles. The ad contains a cluster of imagery, including flowers, to emphasize fragrance, and its dark red color theme creates a romantic atmosphere, reinforcing the luxurious and alluring nature of the product.

The advertiser effectively used the testimonial technique by featuring Maya Ali, a well-known figure in Pakistan. While there were 56 comments, most focused on the model rather than the product, praising her appearance. However, ethical concerns were raised by some on her attire, reflecting the socio-cultural influence of religion in Pakistan, where 98% of the population is Muslim. The impact of Indian media on Pakistani culture was also noted. While, in (Figure 2), twelve consumers inquired about the price, even though online services were mentioned. One comment misspelled "price" as "prize," but the intended meaning was clear. Other comments were positive, with one user directing another to the brand's page for shopping purposes. This highlights the engagement generated by the advertisement, even in the absence of specific price information.



Figure 3 Khaadi – Winter Volume

The text which is out of the image gives the message; we are entering in the winter and Khaadi asks to spend winter by wearing Khaadi's collection. The sentence has been written in literary genre. In 'Khaadi's collection' possession has been used with the noun rather than pronoun. That creates an emotional touch on the audience. 'Our collection' and 'Khaadi's collection' both can be interpreted. If someone is in an emotional state of mind, he may use his own name 'John's your friend' rather than 'I'm your friend.' E.g., 'Khadi's winter collection (is) offering a wide range of fabrics for all your winter needs. The word 'winter' between Khaadi and Collection is an extra word that could be skipped because winter had already been mentioned in the start of text. If we analyze the whole sentence, we get to know that 'Khaadi's latest winter collection' can be linked with the first part of the sentence and with the last one as well. In the first part, it is a prepositional phrase that has started from 'with' and in. If we link it with the second part of the sentence it becomes a noun phrase and performs as a subject. E.g., 'Khaadi's winter collection (is) offering a wide range of fabrics for all your winter needs. But the advertiser has willingly missed Capula 'be,' and offering is followed by a hidden preposition 'by' e.g., by offering a wide range. The word need has been kept plural. So that it may cover the maximum winter needs of the audience. 'Available in stores and online' gives promotion to online business. It has been seen that people usually ask about the location. So, the information about location is missing from the advertisement. The link to the website has been pasted for other details. The text which starts from hash (#) is a Facebook feature that is used to get direct access to the album. In other words, the brand has pasted the link of its album where all the collection can be seen.

The above advertisement captures two models from a video ad, allowing consumers to choose between two pieces of clothing. The color contrast in the background is poor, as the dress of one model blends with the wall color. However, the casual style of the models and their confident appearance aligns with the brand's message, suggesting that choosing Khaadi's collection will boost a customer's confidence.



Figure 4 Stylo Shoes - Style That Matters

The advertisement starts with an imperative sentence. The word 'carry' has been used two times in the ad. Carrying a clutch has been symbolized with carrying a good lifestyle. As long as someone carries Stylo's clutch, his lifestyle will remain good. The description of the lifestyle has been left on the consumers. There is no suggestion in the lifestyle. Whatever is good for the consumer they can have by buying the Stylo's clutch. The name of the clutch has been mentioned as cream clutch that may give the meaning of compound noun which was kept for the product. The cream also finds the color of the product. 'Stand out of the crowd' has been referred to the confidence that every girl needs. So, advertisement hits the girls. Secondly clutch is product for females. The choice of adjectives 'gorgeous' has been used to add some more importance in the noun 'Cream Clutch.' The phrase 'with you wherever you go' has been used to directly address the audience. Every individual can receive the information as a 2nd person. The word 'you' has been used two times to give importance to the consumer because the speech which is considered the best in advertising language addresses every individual so that he may take quick reaction. The phrase 'wherever you go' covers the large meanings such as going to parties, going to concerts or going to university. So, it addresses the audience of each category whether it is business class or university going students. The advertisement text has two more pieces of information usually asked by the consumers: price and product code. The price has been mentioned by using a bandwagon technique in which consumers have been asked to get a discount or bonus because the prices have been reduced as compared to earlier prices. The other information is offering online shopping and WhatsApp number has been shared because WhatsApp is an easier access than visiting their website. The image holds the shortest information 'Style that matters'. The brand name 'Stylo' is a modified form of 'Style' so, the same word has been used in the theme of the advertisement. According to advertisement, the selection of the style should be a key interest of the consumers. That is why the style of the text has also been kept very stylistic.

The advertiser advertisement appeals the Pakistani psychographic preference for discounts. The word 'WhatsApp' is used as a verb in the ad, reflecting its common usage in society, like how 'Google' is used. The ad effectively features an image of the product, designed to attract the audience and emphasize the discount.

The comments under this advertisement show a 50/50 split between those praising the brand and those asking for the price, even though the price was mentioned in the advertisement. This suggests that many users did not fully read the advertisement before commenting. The brand's responses were helpful and polite, addressing each query. The use of affectionate language such as "thank you" in replies further encouraged positive feedback.



Figure 5 Fair & Lovely BB

Most of the advertisements include 'You' to address the target audience but the above advertisement has directly addressed the girls to grasp their attention. Girls are more conscious than man about their beauty especially their skin color. So, the advertiser has used the word 'girls' rather than 'you.' If the advertiser uses the word 'you' it covers both the genders. If men do not use this cream they can buy for their wives.' If we compare this ad to the other ads, they give 7 days' time to get fair skin, but this gives the time of just two minutes. It seems like a myth. The word used here 'just' is the adverb it is the intensifier that shows the advertiser has created intensity to influence the audience. The advertiser has two in digital form 2. The link that is shown there to shift the audience on their website so that they can have rush of people there. The video could be posted on Facebook directly. The text is shorter but incomplete. The contact number is missing. And the location is also missing. Prices are not mentioned there. Text can be more creative and powerful by using proper structure and proper use of words.

In the current ad, BB Cream contrasts it with regular Fair & Lovely Cream by positioning it as a party makeup choice. The model featured in the advertisement is naturally attractive and wears appealing jewelry, enhancing the overall aesthetic of the ad. The brand name 'Fair and Lovely' taps into common social expressions, using familiar terms to appeal to a broader audience.

The analysis of the advertisement revealed that the advertiser successfully gained customer trust, with all selected comments praising the product. Consumers expressed satisfaction with BB Cream, with many saying that they no longer needed to visit a doctor or use other products. There were no negative comments writing down the effectiveness of the advertisement's strategic communication. The brand's engagement with customers through replies also contributed to the positive feedback.



Figure 6 Jazz - A friend in Need

The theme of the advertisement is noticeably clear and vivid. They are selling services of taking and giving loans to friends when balance is finished. The advertiser has used emotional appeal by using friendship. If we see on the deeper level, 'you' covers a huge audience that everybody may think that he is being addressed. 'Can' shows there is a possibility or a suggestion for the customers. 'Can' differentiate this advertisement from the other advertisements which usually start from verbs. The advertiser directly ordered the products; but in this advertisement, it has left on the customer's choice. There is a suggestion for the customers when their balance gets finished, they should ask their friends to share their balance. The word 'now' is used to ask the customer to act instantly. 'now' is an adverb of time. 'Now' is a common word in advertisements for example buy now, get now are often

used in advertisements. But here 'now' has been used with two verbs share and receive. Which means that the service of taking loan is active now-a-days. The share and receive have been attached with '&' which is used in written communication. Three prepositions have been used in one phrase. 'a temporary loan from friends in time of need with Jazz FNF advance service.' The phrase starts and ends with compound nouns which make the structure complex. A favorite quote 'a friend in need is a friend indeed' has been shown in the image very visible which strongly highlights the strategy of using emotional appeal. Two mobile phones have been shown which wonderfully describe the idea of 'receiving' and 'sharing.'

The advertisement also holds the slogan 'dunya ko bta do.' The text is incomplete, and it should be changed by a noun. What to tell the world? The slogan can be interpreted as 'tell the world about Jazz Company or tell the world about the current service or tell the world that a friend in need is a friend indeed.' If we zoom in the image and have a look on received-message we get to know that the Jazz has sent the message to the receiver 'Sending Rs.5 Jazz Friend Advance' contains the replacement of Jazz advance to Jazz Friend Advance' that psychologically hit the audience and keep them satisfied that there are using the right service no matter how much text they have to pay for it.

The advertisement uses two primary colors—red and yellow—reflecting Jazz's branding. The color red holds dual meanings in Pakistani society, symbolizing both danger and love. The image shows a girl receiving balance from a boy, a common scenario in Pakistan, where boys often share balance with girls. The use of the word "Can" is significant, as it implies that borrowing balance from friends, although common, is subtly discouraged due to societal attitudes toward borrowing.

Feedback analysis of the above ad shows that consumers had more queries, such as how to activate certain services, send shares, or inquire about tax charges. One member noted that tax charges were deliberately hidden but appreciated that their query was later addressed. This selective disclosure of information appears to be a strategy by the advertiser to manage the flow of information.



Figure 7 Limelight - LIMELIGHT | MAN

The advertisement starts from verb 'discover' and consists of an imperative sentence. The advertiser has asked the consumers of Limelight to explore more decent varieties of men's clothing. The word 'men's' has been written without apostrophe but the word holds possession. The word 'men's' has been attached with 'Jacquard' to make a

compound noun. The word 'Jacquard' can be interpreted as a fabric made on a loom fitted with an intricate variegated pattern. The word 'Kurta' is a traditional word in Pakistani society and is used for shirts. 'At limelight' is prepositional phrase which can be interpreted as 'outlet store where the product can be purchased' but the exact direction is hidden from the text. The other two pieces of information are code and price that is often asked for by the customers. Just like other advertisements, the way the price has been mentioned is significant. The total price is 1500/- but the brand has mentioned 1490/- which creates psychological impact. The ad directly targets a male audience by featuring a man and providing separate prices for a Kurta and trousers, suggesting that buying the pair is not mandatory. The ad's green color scheme, including the plant in the background, creates a natural and calming environment, aligning with the brand's aesthetic, and reinforcing its connection to nature.

Though the advertisement targeted a male audience, yet 11 out of 12 comments were from females. These users asked for further details, such as whether the clothing was stitched or unstitched and if it could be bought online. One user mentioned her brother, while another intended to buy the item for her 14-year-old child, saying that the advertisement appealed to a specific age group. The idea of presenting the product as a gift was also clear in the comments, highlighting societal values of gift-giving.

Conclusion

The current study's purpose was to explore the linguistic strategies used to manipulate and persuade social media users to decide on online shopping. Advertisers use powerful language as Van Dijk (1999) explains how elite class uses language to change the minds of people. Advertisers not only give the information about the product but also use some propaganda tools such as bandwagon (Lim, Bouchacourt & Brown-Devlin, 2021) was used in (Figure 2), i.e., Up to 70% for 2 more days. The advertisements also have the images of some personalities whose influence is already there on the minds of people. It is easier to convince the people to decide by showing those images, i.e., Maya Ali's image was shown in (Figure 3). Moreover, the advertisers have a clever idea to choose a relevant celebration for a specific ad as they understand the psychology of the people. For instance, when the ad presents soap, a bold actress could be a perfect choice for the image. Some phrase structures with specific adjectives and adverbs are common in ads, i.e., shop now, limited offer, hurry up etc.

The advertisements also depict Pakistani modern and traditional culture through the presentation of dresses that gives us an overview to understand the ideology of the advertisers. For example, in Khaadi's advertisement, a complete proper dress was shown but without hijab or the image of Maya Ali in bold dress (Figure 3). Those having religious background sometimes share their feelings by criticizing the content creators in the comment box through hate speech (Carlson, & Terry, 2024) when such images appear on their social media walls. In Fair and Lovely ad, only a zoomed in face was shown that is a tool to attract the audience by showing facial expressions (Оразбаева, 2024).

70 comments have been analyzed in this section. Out of 70 comments, 41 had adjectives in which 38 were positive and were in praise of bra or the modals used in the advertisement. Three comments were negative and used negative adjectives against the product. 17 people asked about the price event on those advertisements which had pricing in the image. Six people asked about the location and where the product can be bought. Six comments were in the other category which have complaints about the product and some suggestions to make the brand better. One more thing has been seen during analysis that most of the comments were based on one word replies which tells the importance of functional language on social media. People avoid using proper structure on Facebook. Code mixing and switching is rarely found in the comments because most of the Facebook users

used one-word answer. The dominant language was English and Urdu was almost neglected. Most of the feedback has been positive. It does not mean that most customers were satisfied, but the reason can also be some comments that go against the content creators are removed by them. Dekay (2012) has explained the same issue in his research 'how large companies react to negative comments'. Some companies reply to them in a moderate way and try to convince them to believe in an ideology. This study focuses only on the comments that were present there during the analysis.

Overall, the study explores that a specific use of language by advertisers generates power (Fairclough, 2013) on social media and manipulates the customers to think about the presented products and decide to buy them.

Recommendations

The present study focused on textual, image; and feedback analysis of the social media advertisements from Facebook. We believe that there are various social media platforms that use distinctive styles to advertise specific products. We suggest that the researchers may collect data from platforms other than Facebook and a comparative study could present some interesting results. Moreover, the ads we analyzed were images, but video ads may also be analyzed and compared with image ads. Furthermore, social media advertisements may also be compared with newspaper ads.

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