

## A Critical Discourse Analysis Of The Manipulated And Persuasive Language Used In Kid's Advertisements And Its Impact On Them In Youtube Advertising Contexts

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### Abstract:

*Advertising is a practice that aims to influence viewers, readers, audiences or a specific audience to buy a product or service. It intends to make an interest in the product or service, build brand loyalty among the consumers, and induce them to take action. Kids represent a lucrative target market for companies because of their purchasing power and their ability to influence their parents' buying decisions. However, prior studies on advertising have addressed adults rather than kids. The current study uses critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough's three-dimensional model, 1989–1995) to examine the linguistic characteristics, persuasive methods, and lexical choices employed in kids' commercials to discover its impact on children. CDA examines the relationship between language, domination, and power and how language is used to influence, stimulate and attract children in advertising contexts as a controlling force over them. The study concluded that commercials use product placement in motion pictures and television shows, celebrity endorsements, and promotional strategies to urge kids to buy products. These tactics have the potential to raise brand awareness, stimulate demand for the product, and persuade kids to buy. Fast food establishments, toys, films, and TV shows all have connections that work well as persuasive strategies.*

**Keywords:** *Critical Discourse Analysis, Commercials, Kid's Advertisements, TV shows, Media.*

### 1. Introduction

Advertising is a type of commercial communication that aims to influence, entice, or manipulate audiences to engage in new actions, such as making a purchase or using a service. All forms of communication are being impacted by current technologies, and as a result of globalisation and these technologies, we have recently seen the emergence of new forms of interaction that permeate every aspect of our everyday lives (Bardaweel & Rabbabah, 2021:18). The media has a significant and dangerous impact <sup>1</sup>on people's lives and societies. From the comfort of their chairs in their homes, people can see and hear around the world (Bani Younes & Nazri Latif Azmi, 2020:18). As technology disrupts consumer behaviours and alters where and how advertisers contact consumers, the advertising sector is undergoing significant shifts. New sellers of advertisements are emerging as a result of the popularity of online buying and streaming TV. As kids are considered the "consumers of tomorrow," organizations attempt to cultivate preferences and brand loyalty during the formative years of children's consumerism to increase product awareness. One of the reasons why organizations consider children as preferred target audiences is because they possess the

capacity to influence their parents' purchasing decisions and also have their own spending power and will eventually become adults themselves. (Mani, 2014:130)

Critical discourse analysis, an interdisciplinary approach, examines how language, spoken, written, or visual shapes ideology, power, and knowledge. By considering the speaker, the message, and the context, critical discourse analysis places language in a social context and acknowledges it as a social practice (Fairclough, 1989). Fairclough's (1989) concept of consumerism explores how changing a society's ideological focus or establishing a new one can demonstrate the power of a certain entity. Furthermore, he argues that establishing a relationship with a specific community and cultivating customers are the means by which demands are met and authority over that group is obtained. According to Fairclough (1989), advertising and other mass communication mediums employ language to establish a feeling of personal connection or relationship with clients, even if they are viewed as part of a large audience.

The current study examines the language elements, persuasive strategies, and words used in children's commercials to discover how they influence or appeal to young viewers using Fairclough's 3-D model (1989, 1995).

## **2- Objective of the study**

The study aims to highlight the linguistic traits and persuasive techniques used in advertisements targeted at children, and explore their impact on young viewers.

## **3- Research questions:**

The study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What linguistic features are utilized in kids' advertisements?
2. What methods of persuasion are employed in children's commercials?

## **4. Literature Review**

According to Aporbo (2022), fast food chains use a variety of linguistic tricks in their advertising. Furthermore, the propaganda's intended audience's meaning was analysed with the use of fifteen (15) language corpora. At the textual level of analysis, the data revealed that imperatives, disjunctive syntax, direct address, positive adjectives, and personal pronouns were employed in fast food chain advertisements. At the discursive level of analysis, some of the tactics used in propaganda were celebrity endorsement, weasel language, promotional advertising, bribery, facts and statistics, bandwagon, commercial jingles, and targeting certain audiences. Many people, especially those with busy schedules, appreciate fast-food businesses for their quick and affordable meal options. The health risks of fast food today come from the high use of butter and oil, along with high levels of fat, sugar, and salt in the menu items. Nowadays, many people, especially children and teens, are completely fixated on fast food and will do whatever it takes to satisfy their cravings. Commercials for fast food have the ability to influence or control people. As stated in the advertising, the ability to transform lives was the primary motivator. The propaganda's taste, look, persuasive language, and strategies also had an impact. Additionally, every fast-food commercial has a distinct theme that is shaped by a variety of elements.

Sjöberg (2015) examines three different infants discourse prevalent in direct marketing letters delivered to three families within the first year of their first infant's birth. The main objective is to examine how new parents feel about the direct marketing communications that arrive in their

mailboxes at home. The study illustrates how direct marketing portrays children as crucial to a specific type of consumption. As parents are the primary purchasers of the advertised products for their children, children are presented as an extension of their parents, both in terms of being customers and sharing their desires. The emphasis on newborns' beliefs and perceptions justifies their involvement in consumption, highlighting how children's perspectives are essential in understanding daily consumption and the cues that shape parents' consumer socialization. The study emphasizes the value of open communication regarding obligations and expectations between parents, producers, advertisers, and other participants in the kid consumer business. This is because the portrayal of parents and infants is quite similar within this age group, and marketing strategies often target mothers' anxieties about not providing the best possible environment for their children. The findings indicate that the three separate discourses collaborate to present convincing claims about reality, giving the impression that the essence of babies compels parents to consume rather than the marketers. Direct advertising efficiently conveys the idea that loving one's own newborn entails care, consumption, and the character of the kid by using images that capture the essence of newborns.

In a study conducted by Vergara and Vergara (2012) on the use of the "new social studies" and CDA as a framework to explore the main components of commercial discourse related to childhood, they investigate how these components interact with kids' perspectives of this period of life by considering contextual elements that might affect the understanding of messages. In the area of advertising content analysis, the discussion seeks to provide a discursive focus to the functionalist approach of communication studies. Discourse analysis was initially used to investigate social representations and uncover stereotypes inherent in kids' commercials, to determine the achievable goals of the message. Group interviews with 10 and 11-year-old boys and girls from middle-class homes in Santiago, Chile, were conducted to compare these findings. The comparison of the two results indicates a connected and nuanced understanding of childhood. When it comes to creativity, imagination, and freedom, children see themselves as burdened by their parents, while adults are seen as lacking liberty. These stereotypes are reflected in children's TV, where some shows use sarcasm and parody to mock adults' responsibilities as parents and moral authorities, portraying them as inept.

On the other hand, Qudeisat and Rababah (2021) highlight the significance of using the local language in business promotions and the prevalence of different languages on store signs. The study analyzes the languages used in commercial store signage in Irbid. The findings reveal that 36% of store signs are bilingual in English, while another 36% are monolingual in Arabic. It is interesting to note that only 9% of store signs are written in Arabic, whereas other languages like French are used in 18% of them. The study also notes that English is frequently used in Jordan's commercial sector.

Although previous research has mostly focused on critical discourse analysis of adult advertising, there appears to be an opportunity for further research on discourse analysis of kids' advertising. To address this gap, the study aims to draw attention to the language characteristics and persuasive strategies, used in kids' commercials and examine their impact on children.

## **5. Theoretical Framework**

### **5.1 Discourse Analysis**

Amaireh and Rababah (2022:909) define discourse analysis (DA) as a linguistic field that investigates the knowledge of language needed by participants to communicate effectively. It goes beyond individual words, phrases, or sentences, examining how cultural and social factors interact

with language. Analyzing language patterns in different texts is also a focus of discourse analysis.

According to Brown and Yule (1983:11), discourse analysis is a necessary component of analyzing language in use. Therefore, it cannot be limited to the description of forms of language without considering the intended uses or roles of these forms in human activities. The discourse analyst is committed to examining the goals of a language, as opposed to concentrating on determining its formal features. DA also explores how language shapes different perspectives and worldviews, influencing interpersonal dynamics. It delves into the impact of language on social connections and identities. Contrary to popular belief, discourse analysis encompasses both spoken and written language.

Discourse analysis has become a term with diverse implications that are relevant to various tasks. It is used to describe research at the intersection of multiple academic disciplines, such as computational linguistics, philosophical linguistics, psycholinguistics, and sociolinguistics.

## **5.2 Critical Discourse Analysis**

According to Wodak (2014:302) in the field of social sciences, critical discourse analysis (CDA) has become a well-established area. CDA is a problem-oriented, multidisciplinary research program with various approaches, each having its own theoretical models, research techniques, and goals. Focusing on the semiotic elements of power, injustice, and socio-political, economic, or cultural change in society is what ties these methods together. Language examples are frequently used to demonstrate these ideas.

Discourse, according to CDA, is a type of "social practice," connecting particular discursive occurrences to the circumstances, establishments, and social structures that influence them. Both the context and the discursive event influence each other, shaping circumstances, knowledge objects, individual and group interactions, and social identities. Discourse is both shaped by society and constitutive of it (Wodak, 2014:303)

Van Dijk (2015:466) states that the socio-cognitive approach examines the relationship between discourse and cognition to explore social power dynamics. The crucial connection between discourse language use and social interaction with social contexts and structures is cognition. Discourse control aims to regulate the goals, strategies, information, viewpoints, attitudes, and ideologies of the recipients, as well as the behaviors that result from them. Contextual factors impact the way people control scenario models and shared social representations. This includes sociocultural knowledge, group attitudes, ideologies, as well as persuasive text and speech patterns. Consequently, people tend to accept the knowledge, opinions, and beliefs of authoritative, trustworthy, or credible sources, such as professionals, experts, academics, or trustworthy media, unless those beliefs conflict with their own.

## **5.3 Three Dimensional Model (Fairclough)**

According to Fairclough (1989), "language is a social practice," and discourse is the total process of social interaction, of which a text is only one part. Critical analysts should examine the connections between texts, production methods, and the social environment in which they exist, as well as the texts themselves, their production process, and their interpretation. (Zhang, 2013:31)

Additionally, Fairclough (1989, 1995), stated that each aspect requires a distinct analysis: text (description) which focuses on the formal aspects of the text. Processing (interpretation) which focuses on the connection between text and interaction, viewing the text as a product of a production

process and as a resource for interpretation, and social topics (explanation) which focuses on the connection between social context and interaction, how the social order shapes the production and interpretation processes, and how these processes impact society (Janks, 1997:329)

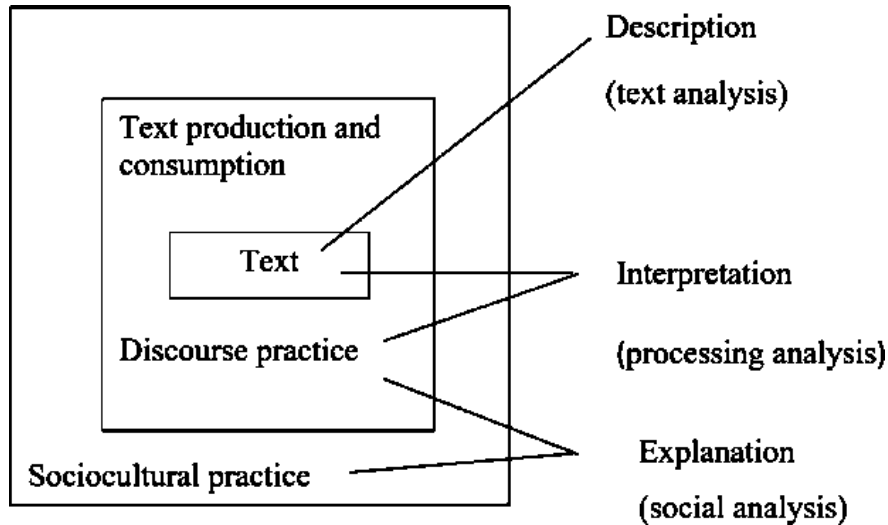


Figure 1: “Discourse as text, interaction and context” (Fairclough, 1989)

**6. Method:**

**6.1 Research design:**

Fairclough's three-dimensional Approach (description, interpretation, and explanation) is used in this qualitative study to examine and investigate the linguistic features and persuasive strategies present in commercials targeted towards children.

**6.2 Data collection**

The study analyzed six YouTube advertisements for kids to identify the various language features, strategies, and persuasive elements used.

**7. Data analysis and Discussion**

**7.1 Textual Analysis:** This has to do with the first research question. It relies on formal text analysis to highlight linguistic elements used in the targeted advertisements.

**Use of Imperative forms:**

In advertising, the use of imperative verbs is often observed as a means to encourage viewers, including children, to consider purchasing the products being promoted. The following table indicate the use of imperative verbs and statements in the context of kid’s advertisement.

Commercials	Imperative forms
Colgate	“Grab a brush” “Add a pea-sized drop of paste” “Pick those nasties down the drain” “Get start with a smile”

Macdonald's Happy meal	"let the fun begin with the new Despicable Me , collect all 10 (toys) today"
Fun slides	"Check the replay" "Dance like a maniac" "Ask about the tricks thick slide rail sold separately"
Cheetos	"Try baked Cheetos flaming' hot and set your mouth ablaze"
Lego	"Bridge the unbridgeable"
WWE toys (Mattel toys)	"Deliver the pain"

As shown above, various imperative verbs are used in all the selected advertisements. Obviously, the imperative structures are used in English by the speaker or writer to instruct the implied addressee (kids) to do something, which is in this case driving kids to buy the products without any hesitation. In addition all the imperative verbs are used in the first position of the imperative statements to highlight the concept of direct commands addressed to kids by the marketers. In sum, the use of more than thirteen imperative verbs within the context of the selected advertisements is a clear clue how such structure directs and instructs the kids to do the purchase process attractively.

On the other hand, Fairclough (1989: 62) examined the impact of corporate language on society. He initially coined the term "synthetic personalization" to describe how large corporations create personal connections with potential customers:

#### Use of Personal pronouns:

It is common practice in advertising to use personal pronouns in order to create a connection between the marketer and the viewer. Examples are taken from commercials used in the study:

**Colgate:** "you know those little germs are in your mouth"

"We will have to use our imagination"

"You see fluoride on your toothpaste"

"Hold your brush"

**Fun Slides:** "You decide the race"

"a slide that you safely zoom across any size"

"You control the action"

"We will include our fun slides Tips and Tricks DVD"

**Lego:** "We are a team bound by blood"

"Our own imagination"

"Pulls our talent where we each bring something different to the table"

"When we are in the game, we are in the zone"

“We conceive the inconceivable”

**Cheetos:** “Try one if you can handle it”

**WWE Toys:** “The title is yours”

The pronouns used in all the sixth advertisements are in the nominative case personal singular and plural pronouns (you, we, it) and possessive case personal pronoun (yours, ours). Therefore, all these personal pronouns used in the advertisements focus on highlighting the close relationship between the two essential parties of the advertisements, the producers and the consumers.

### **Vocabulary:**

The vocabulary used in commercials targeted for children is carefully chosen to correspond with their age and successfully impact their view of the product.

The “Colgate” advertisement thoughtfully used words and adjectives that were both appropriate and accessible to its younger viewers:

(Nasties - little germs – tiny circles – invisible nasties – the boss)

The other advertisements cited in this study “Cheetos” used vocabulary and adjectives that capture the interest of children and draw them towards the product:

(glide slide – super smooth – blast off – fun slides – fired up – Tasty surprise – flaming hot snacks- deliciously hot dangerous – imagination – something different – unstoppable – smashing – bone crashing – big action).

All these nouns and adjectives are used in the selected advertisements to stimulate kids and attract their senses with multiple linguistics flavors as in these expressions “tasty surprise” flaming hot snakes”. It is clearly shown, how language could shape the opinions and believes of audience and how words and various adjectives could manipulate the decisions of the kids towards the products.

### **7.5 Disjunctive Syntax:**

According to Leech (1996:90), disjunctive syntax, indicating incomplete phrases, is a common feature in advertising that deviates significantly from the typical discursive framework. Disjunctive sentences lack verbs or subjects, containing only one or two grammatical components. The following table indicates the various use of the disjunctive syntax.

<b>Commercials</b>	<b>Disjunctive syntax</b>
<b>Colgate</b>	“No more nasties!”
<b>Cheetos</b>	“Flaming hot Cheetos” “deliciously hot dangerous”
<b>Fun Slides</b> <b>WWE Toys ( Mattel)</b>	“super smooth plastic – heel to toe” “sold separately” “Wrecking rampage rig”
<b>Lego</b>	“Bridge the unbridgeable”
<b>Macdonald’s happy meal</b>	“Free today” “Each free with every happy meal” “Exclusive minions meals”

As shown in the preceding table, many examples reveal how much incomplete phrases are used in the chosen advertisements to attract young viewers (kids) to these products. Notice these instances taken from Cheetos advertisement “Flaming hot Cheetos” and “deliciously hot dangerous”. These structures are used to encourage the kids in a concise, interesting and attractive way to buy the products.

### **Use of Question Forms:**

The questions in the selected advertisements are designed to engage children and prompt them to consider the product; they are clear and easy to comprehend.

### **Cheetos flaming' hot**



### **Macdonald's happy meal**



In the above two advertisements' photos, there is a discourse of questions: “can you take the heat?” and “which one will you get?“, which is a direct attraction to children in the form of interrogative



structure (Yes/No question and Wh-question). The purpose of these rhetorical questions is not to answer them, but rather to highlight and enhance children's' desire to try to experience these products. Moreover, these two questions have the beneficial functions of attracting children to concentrate on the content of the advertisements 'photos (Chips and Burger). Interestingly, this directive and rhetoric form of questioning is evident how language and contexts manipulate and stimulate the audience towards certain things.

### Using Repetition

The most direct form of lexical cohesion is the repetition of lexical items (Halliday & Mattiessen, 2014). In the course of the selected advertisements, the repetition of some words like 'brush' and 'toothpaste', phrases as in 'extra extra clean' and sentences as in 'we are in a game, we are in a zone' indicate the cohesion unity. Repetition is a rhetorical device used to emphasis certain topics or ideas in the minds of language receivers. It is capable of maintaining and highlighting the messages delivered to the targeted audience. In other words, repetition helps to improve the quality of comprehension and reminds the brains and memories to take appropriate actions towards certain topics. The following table shows more examples on repetition through the use of repeated words and sentences.

Commercials	Repetition
Colgate	Repetition of words brush, toothpaste, nasties. Phrases like (extra extra clean teeth)
Cheetos	"Flaming –hot – dangerous"
Fun Slides	"nowhere to run, nowhere to ride" "go,go,go" – "fun,fun,fun" "heel to toe, heel to toe"
Lego	"eye to eye" "we are in a game, we are in a zone"
Mattel toys	superstar – blow

In addition to the above mentioned point, another style of repetition can be revealed through the use of parallelism structure. Parallelism is a rhetorical and syntactic figure of speech. It is used as a construct in which several adjacent sentences are constructed with the same grammatical forms and arranged in the same sequence. Notice these two parallel structures 'nowhere to run, nowhere to ride' and 'we are in a game, we are in a zone' which are all taken from Fun Slides and Lego advertisements respectively.

Accordingly, the perception of these repetitive and parallel structures reinforces the meaning conveyed through its musical effect on the children. Inevitably, this may catch their attention and in turn tempt them more to purchase the products by making these products unforgettable to them.

## 7.2 Discourse Practice Analysis

Practice analysis addresses the persuasive techniques employed in kids' commercials and is connected to study question number two.

### Celebrity Endorsements

The practice of celebrity endorsement involves leveraging the popularity of well-celebrities to promote a product or service. When a celebrity endorses a brand, they are often seen interacting with the product or service. Celebrity endorsements are a powerful marketing tool that can significantly improve brand perception. Advertisers posit that including a celebrity in a commercial can positively influence consumer awareness, recall, follow-through, and purchase intent. (Aporbo, 2022: 311)

The Colgate advertisement features American actress Jenna Ortega endorsing the toothpaste product.



One of the most brilliant ways to get kids to accept the advice (the recommended daily teeth brushing) and purchase the promoted product is to use a celebrity child who is about the same age as the kids watching the advertising.

### Exaggerated Words

Another linguistic technique used in the context of kid's advertisement is the use of exaggeration. Such use is capable of adding more strong feelings and simultaneously taking action of the purchasing process to the products. Exaggerated words can be found in these selected commercials:

Commercials	Exaggerated words
Cheetos	Flaming – ablaze
Fun Slides	most amazing slide – super smooth – Best product
Colgate	“extra better cleaning”

The preceding table depicts some examples of exaggerated words as found in Fun Slides and Colgate advertisements respectively ‘most amazing slide – super smooth – best product’ and ‘extra better cleaning’. Basically, adjectives are used to describe nouns by expressing moods, feeling, and opinions or to tell specific information. The over emphasis of using these

adjectives, the comparative and superlative forms like ‘super, best, extra, better’ could add more colorful and significant flavors to the advertisements’ goal which is attracting and persuading kids to buy these promoted products as considering these products the unique items ever.

### Promotional Techniques

One way of convincing consumers to make a purchase is to concentrate on the promotional techniques. In this study, the Macdonald’s happy meal adv. uses a promotional technique by providing free toys to children with each meal they purchase.



The preceding photo shows clearly the promotional technique used in Macdonald adv. through the following statements and phrases “free toy, collect all 9”, “limit to 3 pieces per customer transaction” and “today’s offer”. This technique could skillfully influence kids and their parents to decide buying the products easily as promoted.

### 7.3 Social Analysis

This level of analysis encompasses the understanding of inter-textual connections that aid in comprehending the wide-ranging societal influences impacting the text under study (Fairclough, 1989). Advertisers have used various marketing strategies to reach out to younger audiences. These strategies include product placements in TV shows and films, as well as connections between films and fast food chains, and TV shows and toys or other item. For instance, associating dolls with celebrities that kids admire:



This figure depicts the connection between Mattel toys and WWE action figures. Consequently, this could be a prominent force in convincing and stimulating kids to buy these items.

Similarly, The Happy Meal adv. from Macdonald's shows a connection between the kids' toys and the popular animated movie "Despicable Me."



Animated movies have a special appeal to children, who often find themselves enamored with their beloved characters, many of whom happen to be popular celebrities or superstars. Furthermore, the endorsement of products in advertisements by celebrities can have a significant persuasive influence on viewers, especially children. Thus, intertextuality occurs by using all these elements (attractive words and famous people).

## 6. Results and Conclusion

Six different advertisements from various companies are used in the study, and the following results are obtained:

The language used in children's commercials is selected to align with the age of the target audience and to positively influence their perception of the product. Simple words and adjectives are

employed to facilitate children's comprehension and accessibility. Pronouns and imperatives are employed to create a strong bond between the promoters and the audience (kids).

Certain elements included in advertisements are intended to stimulate children's thinking about purchasing the advertised products. For instance, promotional tactics are utilized to generate or boost product demand. As a result, children may feel incentivized to make a purchase. Celebrity endorsements, especially those targeting children, can be an effective way to increase brand recognition and encourage child consumers.

Product placements in movies and TV shows are common. The relationships between fast food restaurants and movies, and toys or other products and TV shows are the best persuasive techniques.

Due to the lack of research on kids' advertising, it is recommended to conduct more studies on the linguistic elements that influence these advertisements.

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