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# **Linguistic Strategies for Online Branding: A Study of How Companies Use Language in Social Media Marketing**

A Graduation Research Paper


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2024

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## *Abstract*

This research investigates the role of linguistic strategies in social media advertisements, focusing on the use of rhetorical devices across different linguistic dimensions. The introduction provides definitions of social media, advertisement, and rhetorical strategies, emphasizing the importance of brand language in effective communication. The main types of advertisements are outlined, setting the stage for an exploration of linguistic tactics employed in social media marketing.

The study delves into linguistic strategies, beginning with the semantic aspect, where comparative rhetorical devices such as metaphor, metonymy, and simile are analyzed for their persuasive effects. Furthermore, meaning-related rhetorical devices like hyperbole, oxymoron, personification, pun, allusion, and rhetorical question are examined in the context of social media advertising.

The phonological aspect is explored, highlighting the use of alliteration, rhyme, and assonance to enhance memorability and engagement in advertisements. Additionally, the lexical and orthographical aspect is investigated, focusing on the strategic use of adjectives, informal language, and monosyllabic verbs to create impact and convey brand messages effectively. Finally, the syntactic aspect is discussed, shedding light on how sentence structure and arrangement contribute to the overall effectiveness of social media advertisements.

In conclusion, this research underscores the significance of linguistic strategies in crafting compelling social media advertisements and offers insights into how advertisers can leverage language to engage and persuade their target audience effectively.

## ***1 Introduction***

In today's digital age, technology, especially social media, has changed how people and businesses communicate. Social media platforms have become essential tools for global communication and brand promotion. Companies use these platforms to connect with their target audience and advertise their products or services. However, effective online branding requires more than just being present on social media; it involves using language and linguistic techniques strategically to engage and persuade consumers.

This research paper examines how online companies use linguistic strategies like metaphor, alliteration, and adjectives in social media advertisements to influence consumer perceptions and purchasing decisions. We will analyze captions, slogans, images, and hashtags to uncover how these linguistic strategies impact online branding.

To do this, we will analyze a variety of social media advertisements across different platforms. We will also review existing research in linguistics, marketing, and consumer behavior to support our analysis.

By exploring the relationship between language and online branding, this research aims to provide valuable insights for linguistics, marketing, and communication. Our goal is to better understand how linguistic strategies shape online branding and improve social media marketing practices.

## ***1.1 Definition of social media***

The development of technology from every angle has made huge changes in our lives. One of the most apparent examples is the advent of smartphones. Smartphones, which are also called cellular phones, are advanced types of mobile phones that use operating systems to work and can use and access web pages (Sahin, 2015).

By the time when our phones were getting updated new features were added to them. Those features like social media, which are defined as A variety of technologies that enable its users to share ideas and information.

These technologies like Facebook, Instagram, X (known as Twitter), and YouTube have a wide number of users that can reach up to 4.7 billion users, equal to 60% of the world's population (Dollarhide, 2024). In other words, some gave social media a general definition that is seen as a collection of collaborative Internet platforms and applications that enable its users to create, organize, and share their content whether it is individual or collaborative content (Davis, 2016).

## ***1.2 Definition of advertisement***

The origin of the word 'advertisement' came from the Latin word 'advertere' which means to turn towards something (Goddard, 1998, p.6). As a means of promotion an advertisement can be defined as "any paid form of non-personal communication about a product, service, idea, or organization usually paid for by an identified sponsor and viewed via various media such as newspapers, magazines, television, radio, mail, websites, text messages, etc." (Younis, 2015, p.36). In other words, an advertisement, otherwise known as an advert or ad is acknowledged as a 'public communication' that usually aims to popularize a product, service, event, or brand (Square, 2022).

Living in the 21st century, it is considered difficult not to encounter advertisements, as we are surrounded and almost daily exposed to ads from different mediums such as magazines, posters, television, and social media platforms like (Facebook and Instagram) which are intended to grab our attention and to persuade us to buy their products. In this age, an ad is considered an important socioeconomic activity that has a role in putting impact on the world (Vilaniam & Varghese, 2004, cited in Younis, 2015, p.1).

### ***1.3 The main types of advertisement***

There are different types of advertisements the most common and prominent of which are print, television, infomercial, radio, and online advertisements. The print ad is one of the oldest traditional forms of ads that can be found in newspapers, magazines, and journals. The television ad is another form in which advertisers use Television devices to publicize their goods. According to Younis (2015, p.39), “the television ad is one of the most effective types of ads”.

In addition, there are also Radio ads that deliver the message orally. An Infomercial ad on another hand, is a long and specific televisual ad that usually lasts for an hour and promotes a product in a clear and informative way (Younis, 2015). Lastly, there are also online ads which are considered to be new forms of “persuasive communication”. In these types of ads, the message usually is ‘concrete’ and delivered in ‘fewer words’ to draw the customer’s attention to make them click on the ad. This type conveys its message via the medium of the internet such as search engines, email, social media, etc. (Janoschka, 2004).

### ***1.4 The importance of brand language***

Brand language is essential for building a strong brand identity. According to Bahl (2023), brand language “refers to the specific words, phrases, and tone of voice that a company uses to communicate its brand message to its target audience”.

Successful brand language benefits companies in differentiating themselves from other competitors and forming meaningful connections with their clients. In addition, “Language is a key strategic tool for managing a brand’s impression to target customers and building brand equity”, (Lerman, Morais and Luna, 2018).

Bahl (2023) considers the tone of voice “one of the most important aspects of brand language. “A company’s tone of voice should reflect its brand personality, values, and mission, while also resonating with the target audience. For example, a luxury brand might use a sophisticated, refined tone of voice, while a youth-oriented brand might use a more casual, energetic tone” (Bahl, 2023). Furthermore, studies have shown that advertisements showing linguistic features seem to be more effective at increasing consumer perception and recall of an ad than advertisements not showing specific linguistic features. Moreover, these linguistic features helped to increase the ad’s catchiness, memorability, and interest. Thus, these qualities help in producing powerful and persuasive advertisements (Proctor, 2023).

## ***1.5 Definition of rhetorical strategies***

“Rhetorical strategies are linguistic mechanisms that encourage action or persuade others. Rhetorical strategies, also known as rhetorical devices, are words or phrases you can use to convey meaning, provoke someone's response, and persuade during communication” (Indeed, 2022). In addition, these are called “Attention-seeking Devices in Advertising that plays a role in attracting customer’s attention” (Romanenko, 2014, p.9).

DeRosi (2008, p.23) describes a rhetorical device, which is a typical characteristic of figurative language, as “a method of expression that is an artful deviation from the literal or expected method of expression”.

## ***2 Linguistic strategies***

Hu et al. (2020) define Linguistic strategies as “The ways speakers manipulate their linguistic content of speech for their purpose”. Adverts need to attract attention and arouse curiosity. They can achieve their purpose by using linguistic strategies or aspects, such as phonological, semantic, morphological, and lexical aspects.

### ***2.1 The semantic aspect***

The semantic aspect includes comparative rhetorical devices and meaning-related rhetorical devices. The comparative rhetorical devices encompass metaphor, metonymy, and simile. Regarding meaning-related rhetorical devices, they include hyperbole, oxymoron, personification, pun, allusion, and rhetorical question. We will deal with them in detail

#### ***2.1.1 Comparative Rhetorical Devices***

Comparative Rhetorical Devices are types of devices that “compare or contrast two people, places, things, or ideas”, like simile and metaphor (Beck, 2020).



### 2.1.1.1 *Metaphor*

Underwood (2018) defines a metaphor as “a figure of speech that describes an object or action in a way that isn’t literally true, but helps explain an idea or make a comparison”.

Metaphors are interesting and can arouse the curiosity of the reader about the product. Arakelyan and Chobanyan (2016, p.103) explain that “In advertising, a metaphor usually creates comparison between the product and some other services that the advertiser wants to be associated with product of service advertised”.

No.	Advertisements/Sentences/Phrases		Product/Company
1.	One touch. One light, effortless touch and she realized freedom was something you feel		Revlon
2.	Spread your wings in our most-loved butterfly sweatshirt		H&M
3.	Feel the beauty		WARDAH (Mamonto, Kamagi, and Wongkar, 2023, p. 1117)

For instance, the first ad which is about Revlon face powder shows that the freedom is the powder, it implies that by putting powder on the face she will be free, associating the product with an idea like freedom (Arakelyan and Chobanyan, 2016, p.103). This association can also be seen in the second and third examples.

### 2.1.1.2 *Metonymy*

A metonymy is “the use of a single characteristic to identify a more complex entity” (Mohammed, 2022. p.553). For instance, in advertisements, metonymy stands for the whole group, it replaces the name of one thing with the name of something else closely associated with it. For example, “The pen is mightier than the sword”. The pen in this example stands for the importance of education. Another example is an ad by Adidas “Take the gold” Here the word “gold” indicates the gold medal.

### 2.1.1.3 *Simile*

A simile is a figure of speech, that compares two different things using words such as “like” or “as” (Abrams and Harapham, 2009). For example, “A little outfit that looks like sunshine” The writer here compares the outfit that is being advertised to sunshine, which gives people warmth and comfort.

Another example is a skincare ad on Instagram that uses simile. “**Face shines like a star** with Whitening Series with Whitening Daily BB Cream by MS GLOW. Whitening Series is a series of skincare equipped with whitening Daily BB Cream to brighten a dull face!” (MSG 27 December 2021). In this example, the simile is found in the first sentence, “Face shines like a star” The items that are compared are faces and stars. The ad uses the word “like” which indicates sameness, to compare between shining faces and stars (Hesti, Tang, and Aj, 2022, p. 49).

### 2.1.2 *Meaning-related Rhetorical Devices*

These are the devices that focus on the meaning, the message that it conveys and the association of ideas with other ones. It includes: *Hyperbole, Oxymoron, Personification, Pun, Allusion and Rhetorical question.*

#### 2.1.2.1 *Hyperbole*

Hyperbole comes from a Greek word, huper bole, which means “overshooting”. Abrams and Harapham (2009, p.169) define hyperbole as “bold overstatement, or the extravagant exaggeration of a fact or of possibility. “This stylistic device benefits the advertisements to become “effective, emotional, and humorous” (Arakelyan and Chobanyan, 2016p.104). It exaggerates some qualities of the products which succeeds in persuading the customers.

Advertisements/ Words/Phrases/Sentences	Product/company
Samsung presents ‘world best’	Samsung
One taste and you’re in love	Lays (Mamonto, Kamagi, and Wongkar, 2023, p. 1117)
An accessory can level up your look in the blink of an eye	Forever 21 (Pho-Klang, 2020, p.35)
Red Bull gives you wings	Slogan by Red bull

For instance, in the first ad hyperbole is used to claim that the product is the best in the world. It exaggerates the value of the product showing it to be the best option. In the second and third examples, the exaggeration of speech beyond reality is seen to emphasize or magnify the meaning.

### **2.1.2.2      *Oxymoron***

An oxymoron is a figure of speech that uses two opposite words together. As Romanenko (2014, p.16) clears those contrasting ideas are “sharpened by the use of opposite or noticeably different meanings”

For example, two opposite words are used in this ad (figure 1) to advertise a car “clean diesel” (Volkswagen 2011), these two words are contradictory the first one is an adjective and the second one is a noun indicating diesel engines and fuel. Diesel engines are usually dirty and emit emissions, by putting it with the adjective “clean” shows the advancement in their inventions. Thus, promoting them by the usage of figurative language.



Figure 1

Source YouTube

### **2.1.2.3      *Personification***

Personification is a figure of speech that comes from the Greek word *prosopopoeia*, which gives human characteristics and attributes to inanimate objects or an abstract concept. In other words, it is “the impersonation or embodiment of some quality or abstraction; the attribution of human qualities to inanimate objects.” (Cuddon 2013, p. 529).

No.	Advertisements/sentences/phrases	Company/product
1.	Optimism wakes up with Nescafe	Nescafe coffee
2.	Unlike me, my Rolex never needs a rest	Rolex
3.	The sun is calling.	
4.	When your keys are playing hide and Seek	

In the first example “Optimism” has been described as a person who can wake up it has been given a human characteristic. In the second example, Rolex, the name of an expensive watch, is portrayed as a human that does not need a rest, showing the efficiency of the product. Thus, Companies use language to associate their products with positive ideas.

#### 2.1.2.4 *Pun*

A figure of speech that humorously uses words or phrases that have several meanings or sound like another word (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024). This figure of speech plays on words and creates stylistic effects.

For example, this figure can be seen in this ad (figure 2) “Hey, bud. Just wanted to let you know we’re giving away 10 pairs of #GalaxyByds2 pro.” (Samsung, 2023). In this example the word “bud” is used twice, the first one indicates an informal term that means friend, and the second one is the name of the product. Through the usage of these two words they form a connection between the consumer and their brand and products.

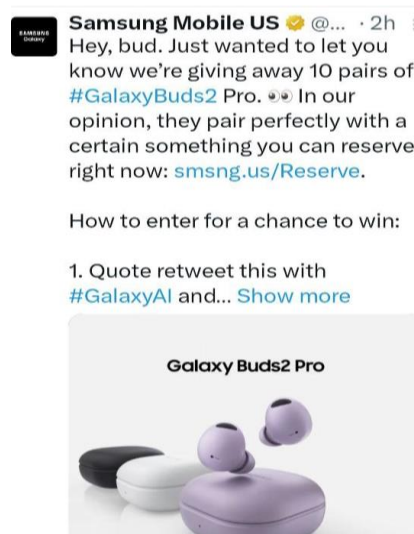


Figure 2 Source Twitter or X

### 2.1.2.5 *Allusion*

A figure of speech that makes a brief, even casual reference to a historical or literary figure, event, or object to create a resonance in the reader or to apply a symbolic meaning to the character or object of which the allusion consists.

For instance, in this ad “Mirror, mirror on the wall... can you tell we love flowers?” we have an allusion referencing to a quote from “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” - “Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them all?” (Pho-Klang, 2020, p.35). This feature benefits the companies in reminding their readers with their favorite stories or things they know, using language to associate their products with stories.

### 2.1.2.6 *Rhetorical question*

A question that requires no answer, is used to make an effect, persuade the readers, and prompt the audience to consider a topic. For example, in this ad (Figure 3) “which icon is in your bag this NYE?” (Narsissist, 2024) a question has been asked to persuade the readers to buy their products, the “icon”. The question expects no answer since we know it is logically impossible for every reader to have the “icon” or the product, it has been asked to attract the attention of the reader.

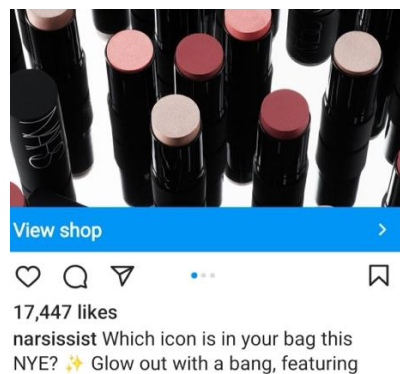


Figure 3

Source Instagram

Another example is “Which color is calling you today?” that does not have a logical meaning but it is asked to make a point and attract the reader (Pho-Klang, 2020, p.35).

## 2.2 The phonological aspect

The phonological aspect includes *Alliteration, Rhyme, and Assonance*.

### 2.2.1 Alliteration

Alliteration is a phonological device in which the repetition of the initial consonant phoneme occurs in different words (Shariq, 2020, p. 568). However, sometimes repetition can occur in the middle of the words.

No.	Advertisement	Repeated consonants/ sounds	Brand/Company/ Platform
1.	<b>Coca-Cola</b>	/k/	Coca-Cola
2.	The <b>pop</b> of <b>purple</b>	/p/	Instagram
3.	<b>Free</b> and <b>flowy</b>	/f/	Instagram
4.	<b>Puffy</b> and <b>peachy</b> to <b>perfection</b>	/p/	Instagram
5.	<b>Swing</b> into <b>spring</b> style	/s/	Instagram
6.	<b>#Line Loud Lip Liner</b>	/l/	Twitter
7.	<b>Freedom</b> for your <b>feet</b>	/f/	Nike

In the above examples, repetition of the initial consonants and the middle consonants can be seen. In the first example, the sounds/p/ and /f/are repeated to attract the listener. Alliteration is the most common feature, through this technique of repeating the initial sounds brands are able to make their advertisements memorable.

### 2.2.2 Rhyme

A rhyme is the repetition or correspondence of sounds in two or more words. These repetitions sometimes can occur at the ends of words. Cuddon (2013, p.608) defines this figure as “a formalized consonance of sounds between words or the endings of words, especially when these are used at the ends of lines of poetry”

For instance, this example was taken from a makeup company on Instagram, that appears as a motto and describes the brand and the benefits of its products “Rule Breaker. Image maker. Risk taker.” (Narsissist, 2024). the last words “Breaker”, “maker” and “taker” rhyme with each other.

Words	Transcription	Rhyming or repeated sounds
Breaker	/'breɪkər/	/eɪ/ /ə/ /r/
Maker	/'meɪkər/	/eɪ/ /ə/ /r/
Taker	/'teɪkər/	/eɪ/ /ə/ /r/

We have the repetition of diphthong vowel /eɪ/, schwa vowel /ə/, and consonant /r/ in the three words. The three words correspond to each other by having a stressed syllable preceding an unstressed syllable, which is also called double rhyme or feminine rhyme. By the usage of this type of rhyme It makes the advertisements easy to be memorized.

**2.2.3 Assonance**

An assonance is a technique of repetition of vowels that is used widely in advertisement and marketing. Cuddon (2013, p.56) defines assonance as “vocalic rhyme, it consists of the repetition of similar vowel sounds, usually close together, to achieve a particular effect of euphony”.

For example, this slogan by Ariston company “Ariston...and on...and on...”, has the repetition of the sound “a”/æ/ and “o”/ ɒ/. Also, the two words “and”, and “on” are repeated, making the slogan memorable, and highlighting the durability of the company’s product (Ivypanada, 2021).

Word	Transcription
Ariston	/'æɪrɪstɒn/
And	/ænd/
On	/ɒn/

Another example is the slogan “Maybe she's born with it. Maybe it's Maybelline.” (Maybelline, 2024). In this example, the word “Maybe” is repeated and it rhymes with the company’s name, we have the repetition of the diphthong vowel /eɪ/ in the words “maybe” and “Maybelline”.

Slogan	Maybe she's born with it. Maybe it's Maybelline
Transcription	/'meɪbi ʃɪz bɔ:n wɪð ɪt/ / 'meɪbi ɪts 'meɪbəlɪn/

Assonance usually appears in short sentences and phrases or mostly in slogans and mottos of the companies, making them easy to remember and appealing to the eye of the readers.

## 2.3 The Lexical and Orthographical aspect

### 2.3.1 Adjectives

Adjectives are words that modify or describe a noun or pronoun. Kokemuller (2017) says that companies try to describe brand benefits that appeal to targeted customers. Leech (1966) highlights the most commonly used adjectives, “new” is one of the most reoccurring ones that describe renewed products with new features and benefits. According to Leech (1966), “good,” “better” and “best” are also common in advertising, “Good” is a broad adjective that indicates a brand will provide the expected and practical benefits of the product category. He also clears that competitive adjectives like “better” and “best” are also common signifying that the advertiser’s products are either “better” than the other products or they are the “best” in the market.

Comparative adjectives are also widely used in advertisements, comparing two things and showing the high quality of the product that is being advertised. For instance, in this example, that describes a smartphone, three adjectives are used to demonstrate the excellent quality of the product “Capture memories with **sharper**, **brighter** and **smoother** zoom quality even in the dark” (Samsung, 2024).



### **2.3.2 Informal language**

In today's age, we are constantly surrounded by the influence of both formal and informal language. As we can see the recent changes in technology and the appearance of the internet, a new kind of language has emerged which is e-language according to Nancy (2018) it is considered the largest "playground" of the language, explaining that we are like children, that we play with words and concepts thus we manage to create informal language. She clears that what makes an informal language, informal, is its "vagueness". On the other hand, formal language has a "certain level of 'control', i.e., we pay special attention to grammar, spelling, style, and especially meaning. The whole point of standard language, besides being the 'correct' one, is to convey the message and the meaning of a text as clearly as possible" (Nancy, 2018, p.3). companies use informal language because it is considered to be more appealing to young readers and viewers.

Some of the common ways are, first the usage of colloquial or informal words and second, contractions. If we look at this slogan by McDonalds fast food company "I'm lovin' it". First, there is the contraction I'm instead of I am. Then lovin' is written instead of love or even loving.

The second example is by Samsung company "**Hey**, #galaxy **fam!** The Gemini app is ready and waiting on YOUR Galaxy S24 phone" As we can see, the words "Hey" and "fam" are used, fam is a slang term that means close friend or family, by using these two words the company tries to indicate its close bound with its customers and to establish a sense of familiarity and closeness to bring customers.

The third way is, the manipulation of the language through intentional misspelling, according to Romanenko (2014, p.12) "companies deliberately misspell the words by which they achieve memorability." "Oh **Deer** ITS hard to **spel** when your hungry If you **keap** making typing mistakes grab yourself a snickers fast" (snickers), three words here are intentionally misspelled; "Deer", "spel", and "keap".

The fourth way is they do not adhere to the grammatical rules and do not put spaces between the words. As we can see in this phrase there is no spacing between the words. “Twoallbeefpattiespecialsaucelettucecheesepicklesonionsonasesameseedbun” (McDonalds 2024).



Source Instagram

### ***2.3.3 Monosyllabic verbs***

In advertising, simple and easy words are used such as monosyllabic verbs, which are words that are short and have one syllable. Local people’s language is limited, simple monosyllabic, and easy verbs are more likely to influence people and it is catchy and easier to remember. Like Smile, go, feel stay, come and love are words that are frequently used (Ni, 2017). For example, simple words are found in these ads “take the big leap” (Apple), the verb “take”, “ride at the highest level of comfort in a Mercedes-Maybach” (Mercedes Benz), the verb “ride”, “just do it” (Nike 2023), the verb “do”.

### ***2.4 The syntactic aspect***

In advertisements, imperative sentences are common and highly used, according to Vesna (2020) they are effective because they call to action addressing the reader to do something, and imply a hidden subject which is the second person “you”. “Just do it” (Nike 2023), “Meet LG’s best dishwasher” (LG Levant 2023), and “Buy now” (Samsung 2024). these are all examples that command and encourage the reader to purchase their products.

### ***3. Conclusion***

With the advancement of technology and social media platforms that enabled its users to share and communicate with each other. Companies and brands started to use these platforms to communicate and use language and linguistic strategies to advertise. As it was found by the studies that the usage of these strategies and techniques made the advertisements more effective and memorable.

To conclude, the strategies that were found are explained into four aspects: which are semantic, phonological, lexical and orthographical, and syntactic aspects. The strategies that were discovered in the semantic aspect is divided further into two subdivisions comparative rhetorical devices that compare two things or ideas and meaning-related rhetorical devices that associate the advertisements with things people already know and create the feeling of closeness with the readers.

The strategies that were explained in the phonological aspect are; alliteration, rhyme and assonance. It was found out that alliteration was the most common among them and the repetition of the vowel and consonant sounds with the usage of rhythm made the advertisements memorable and effective.

In lexical and orthographical aspect, the brands manipulated language by using; Adjectives, informal language or words, intentional mis-spellings and monosyllabic or simple words. The highly used type of adjectives was competitive like “new” and comparative types such as, “Better” and “smoother” to highlight the benefits of their product. It was also found out that companies intentionally mis-spell words in order to grab readers attention and use informal words like “Hey” or “fam” to establish a sense of closeness with its customers.

On the syntactic perspective, the usage of imperative verbs was common that call to action. The usage and manipulation of Language plays an important role in advertisement to persuade consumers and to grab their attention.

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