

Ideology in Advertisement: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Selected Nepali Advertisements

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Abstract

This paper explores the way ideology is embedded in the underlying structure of advertisements, applying Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a theoretical tool focusing on the ideas of Michael Foucault and Norman Fairclough. Four advertisements telecasted in Nepal Television are selected for the analysis. They represent four different fields such as jewelry shop, bathing soap, food supplement and electric cable. Following qualitative research design, this study has used critical, analytical and interpretative method for analyzing the textual data. Critical analysis of these representative advertisements has led to the conclusion that mass media discourse is a fertile playground for ideological games. Keeping in mind the social structure of Nepalese society, they all in a united form impart patriarchal ideology to the audiences. This article proposes a solution to such biased representation. Language is being used as a means of imparting the patriarchal ideology and we should seek a solution from there. We should create critical linguistic awareness for the audience and empower them to resist all such misrepresentations. Resistance is essential for gender equality and only critical linguistic awareness can help create a just society.

Keywords: Advertisement, critical awareness, ideology, resistance, underlying structure

Introduction

The history of visual advertising goes back to the 1940s and 1950s aiming at increasing the sale of the product with the help of certain strategies. In Nepal, visual advertising began after the beginning of Nepal television in 2042 B.S. If we critically analyze Nepali advertisements from past to present, we find a strong embedment of different types of ideologies. In the underlying structure we find the subtlest and most complex forms of hidden messages. As Nepali society is a patriarchal society, in advertisements like cosmetics, bathing soap, jewelry, electrical cable and many others, gender bias or patriarchy is common. They mostly impart the message that females are and need to be more concerned with their beauty than other aspects of their lives. In these advertisements, beyond the surface of the initial message there resides a somewhat disturbing subtext of sexism, patriarchy and male fantasy. They try to show that beautifying things are more important for females than other things. Guiding the female audiences to be more concerned with beauty than being intelligent is their motive. Some of them give the message that household and physical work belong to females and outside and skillful work to males.

Certain researchers have discussed the propaganda of advertisements, which are used to attract the attention

of the consumers toward their products. They are part of their business strategies. Hassain, J. et al. (2022) in their article "A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Advertisements of Unilever Pakistan Limited" observe, "The use of language in commercials of Unilever Pakistan and the tactics used by the advertisers to attract and convince the consumers to buy their product" (p.74). They have discussed the self-reflective advertising system that assigns human values to products. It is done to promote the purchasing of these products to satisfy a non-material need. In the same way, Turhan and Okan (2017) have examined "The language of a non-productive advertisement, not isolating it from its interaction with other texts that surround it" (p. 213). They have analyzed the bank advertisement of their services and shown just surface meanings of advertisements are insufficient. They should be analysed in relation to many things with which they interact. Vahid and Esmae'li (2012) have investigated the power of product companies that are exercised through advertisements to influence consumers indirectly. It is perceived that a particular form of ideology is enacted to persuade consumers to believe and trust the product entirely. They have also discussed how advertisements use ideology to create trust.

This research is concerned with decoding the connotative meaning of advertisements to unfold

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them their underlined agenda of patriarchal ideology. It shows, how they are not just parts of business but parts of higher social structure. Their main motto is financial but within that motto, ideology penetrates. As Fairclough claims no discourse is free of politics, we can claim that no advertisement is free of ideology. Another aim of this research is to find ways of combating such default messages and advocating action for change.

Methods and Materials

To show the underlying patriarchal ideology embedded in Nepalese advertisements, a few TV advertisements are selected. They are the representative ones from four different fields: jewelry, bathing soap, supplementary food and cable. This purposive selection is appropriate as per the issue raised. The analysis of these advertisements can take us to a valid conclusion. Qualitative research uses both primary and secondary data and analyzes using critical, analytical and interpretative methods. For the analysis, CDA is used as a theoretical tool focusing the ideas of Michael Foucault and Norman Fairclough.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis is the new critical perspective that got its disciplinary existence in the 1980s. Because of its focus going deeper in language studies along with social theories, it rapidly gained importance. It proved to be one of the most influential theoretical tools of critical analysis. There are certain differences among the scholars while defining CDA. The differences lie in their diverse perspectives about the relation between discourse and concept that discourse interacts. All perspectives are equally important but the ideas of Norman Fairclough as Dialectical Relational Approach and Michael Foucault's ideas as Dispositive Analysis are two prominent ones. They are more concerned with seeing power relations in different discursive practices going beyond the surface-level message of any discourse.

In defining CDA, Norman Fairclough has been influenced from Marxist ideas as they always see text in context and never imagine a discourse away from social issues. He began analyzing language and power and revealed the need for critical analysis of language to bring out the power dynamics of any discourse. In his pioneering book *Language and Power* he writes, "Language functions in maintaining and changing power relations in contemporary society about ways of analyzing language which can reveal these processes, and about how people can become more conscious of them and more able to resist and change them" (2001, VII). The most prominent contribution of Fairclough in

CDA is his focus on the bilateral relationship between the discourse and social structure. He claims that social structure affects discourse and discourse affects social convention. The broader objectives of his works in CDA are "to develop ways of analyzing language which addresses its involvement in the working of contemporary capitalist societies and to better understand how capitalism prevents, limits or facilitates human well-being and flourishing" (*General Introduction*, 2010, p. 2). Fairclough's purpose is to increase human welfare through critical linguistic skills.

In his latest publication, Fairclough has focused on the connection between critique, explanation and action. He lately emphasizes supporting political action to change social life and solve social problems. He names the four steps of dialectical reasoning as I) Normative critique of discourse II) Explaining what features brought about this state of affairs III) Critiquing this state of affairs IV) Advocating action to change the existing state of affairs for the better (*CDA as dialectic reasoning*, 2018, p. 16). Here Fairclough's emphasis is to advocate for change. Only showing the problem we cannot change the society, what is needed is action that leads to change. He argues that "the purpose of critical discourse analysis is to provide those in social struggle with a resource for language critique in circumstances where the turn of language makes language critic important part of such struggle" (*Language and power*, 2001, p. 216). Here he highlights the purpose of CDA which is not just analyzing language but supporting for social change by standing against all types of domination and discrimination and encouraging marginalized ones for resistance.

The contribution of Michael Foucault is crucial in shaping CDA as an independent discipline. His ideas shaped the Dispositive Analysis Approach, which deals with the issues like what knowledge is, how it arises and is passed on to others, what function it has for constituting subjects, and what impact it has on societal shaping and development. This approach attempts to bring the analysis of any discourse out of the boundary of linguistic domain. It focuses that "analysis should move beyond the exclusive domain of language towards work on non-linguistic element" (Catalano and Waugh, 2020, p. 188). The vital idea of Foucault related to the analysis of CDA is to open the way for analyzing the hidden agenda that made CDA a powerful resisting discipline. He argues that the dispositive approach in CDA "is thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institution, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions- in short, (the value) of unsaid(is) as much as (or even more than) the said" (1980, p.194). Foucault

highlights the hidden agenda and shows more value of hidden ideas than surfaced ones.

Mass-Media Discourse

This research is concerned with analyzing advertisements, so it is better to refer to specify ideas related to mass media. With the development of technology media discourse is rising as an important discourse. Without acknowledging it, our study cannot be complete. As a type of visual media, advertisement can be one of the most crucial mass-media discourses in terms of manipulation of language use and hidden ideology. Advertisements are part of our daily lives and they convey specific messages and deal with values, attitudes and shared knowledge that affect mass. Fairclough considers mass media discourse as interesting because they aim for unknown audiences with certain assumptions. He writes, "Mass-Media Discourse is interesting because the nature of the power relations enacted in it is often not clear, and there are reasons for seeing it as involving hidden relations of power" (2010, p. 41). They are examples of hidden play of power and language.

When mass-media discourse-related texts like advertisements are examined, purposeful intertextual elements are encountered. This research claims that just individual analysis of advertisements fails to depict the underlying commonalities that are the product of our social structure. Emphasizing the hidden power of media Fairclough writes, "The hidden power of media discourse and the capacity of the capitalist class and other power-holders to exercise this power depend on systematic tendencies in news reporting and other media activities" (*Language and power*, 2001, p. 45). He rightly indicates how mass media discourse systematically exercises power.

Results and Discussion

Attracting consumers to sell their products and get benefits is the true purpose of advertisements. They use different propaganda techniques and play with customer's emotions. Every advertisement has double meanings: denotative and connotative. Denotative meaning indicates business idea and connotative ideology of the society. Denotative meaning is explicitly said and easy to understand but the connotative meaning is hidden and difficult to perceive without critical linguistic awareness. However, without any conscious perception, the audiences also internalize connotative meaning. The advertisements that we are analyzing here give denotative meaning related to their business promotion but beyond the surface of the initial message we find a shocking hidden message of patriarchy as connotative meaning. 'Ganapati

Jewelers' is the first advertisement taken for analysis. In the first shot of the advertisement a female character is shown in an angry mood because of the regular delay of her husband from the office. Her angry appearance indicates a possible quarrel with her husband. In the second shot, a male character (husband) appears and calms the angry wife with the jewelry bought from Ganapati Jewelers. The surface message of the advertisement is to attract audiences to buy jewelry from Ganapati Jewelers. However, there we find a very dangerous hidden message related to patriarchy. It devalues females presenting them as individuals whose happiness depends totally on getting jewelry. Other aspects like caring, sharing, equality, identity, career etc. are less important. They are limited within the world of clothes, cosmetics and jewelry. This also indicates the dependency of females on males for fulfilling their needs and desires. It is a perfect example of an advertisement that successfully imparts patriarchal ideology.

The advertisement of the 'Lux bathing soap' is more missionary. We see a beautiful woman taking a bath using Lux soap, with excessive exposition of her body in the first shot. The second shot presents her at a party where a male having his female partner is attracted to the woman bathed with Lux soap. What is its message? Its surface message is to advocate the quality of Lux soap that makes people attractive. However, beneath the surface message there lies a very dangerous message of patriarchy. It shows that the major task of a female is to be attractive to invite the attention of a male. The great success of a female lies in the act of attracting someone's husband toward her. This is done using her outward attraction which is physical beauty. It also assumes she does not need to cultivate her inner beauty, which is her intelligence. How misleading is the inner message? Its hidden motive is to limit females in the beauty world, shadowing them from the issue of identity, career and socio-political, global issues.

Analysis of the advertisement of the food supplement 'Complan' exposes something hidden. The first shot of the advertisement shows some boys in a sports competition. A boy fails to be champion because of his height. In the second shot, there is a mother thinking seriously, who goes to consult a male doctor about the son's height. She returns in a happy mood after getting a suggestion from the male doctor to give Complan to her son for height growth. For surface observation it highlights the quality of the product called Complan and inspires mothers to give it to their children to make them champions. However, beneath this surface meaning there lies a very shocking patriarchal ideology. The children who are competing are all boys. What does it mean? It means only boys are appropriate for such competitions not girls. Who thinks seriously about

the child is the mother or a female but surprisingly the doctor who advises is male. Our critical analysis of the advertisement brings in light the strong biases toward females as an outcome of patriarchy. This advertisement reinforces the stereotypical gender division of labor where female especially are limited to household work.

Our critical observation of Pioneer Cable's advertisement brings out the hidden message. In the advertisement, they present both male and female characters explaining the features of the cable and persuade audiences to buy it. The male character explains the quality of Pioneer cable which is to provide security to his factory and workers. Whereas, the female character highlights the quality of the cable, to provide security to her home. Our general observation concludes that the advertisement is persuading audiences to use Pioneer cable for their factory and home. However, more profound and more critical analysis brings the message hidden beneath the surface level. Why does the male talk about factories, workers, and females talk about home? It is not an accident but an act done intentionally. Beneath the surface level a shocking subtext imparts patriarchal ideology to the audience. It gives the message that a male has to handle the factory and look after the workers but a female just has to think about her home and cannot take other responsibilities. Supporting the patriarchal division of labor, it limits the females to household work and authenticates the males for outside and complex jobs.

When we cast our critical eye on all these advertisements, they have subtext giving the message of patriarchy. Fairclough focuses on only showing what is there is not sufficient; we should advocate for change creating critical awareness among people. If people begin to question such false representations and hidden ideologies with proper understanding, such a mission will be stopped. There is a need to show that females are also equally capable of intellectual works. Being a caring mother is not their weakness but their strength that males lack. We should praise them for the entire burden they bear in raising children. Only then, gender equality can be established.

For our analytical purpose, the ideas of Foucault are equally important. He argues, what is unsaid or not said at surface level is equally or more important than what is said. His Dispositive Analysis Approach, "looks to statement not so much for what they say but what they do" (Catalana and Waugh, 2020, p. 188). The advertisements that we have analyzed have their own business propaganda on the surface level to attract the customers but below the surface level, there is a hidden agenda related to social structure. Here the hidden agenda is to impart the patriarchal

ideology. All these advertisements aim at imparting the message of female inferiority. They are appropriate for household work and caring children. They are never shown to be educated and intelligent which "meant the acquisition of material skill to compete with male in the outside world and hence a loss of feminine virtues" (Chatterjee, 1993, p. 129). The advertisement of Lux is more dangerous as it uses female body exposure or nakedness as a strategy to attract audiences because patriarchy regards the female body as the site of their joyous game. As indicated by Deepa Gautam (2006), "According to (traditional) social norms and values a male represents mind whereas a female represents body, a male public property; and a female a private property (p. 44). This patriarchal body politics is a very dangerous hindrance to establish gender equality.

Advertisements come under mass media discourse and have certain different features compared to other discourses. Norman Fairclough takes mass media discourse as interesting because in them power relationships are not clear but embedded. Another feature is that they do not function individually but collectively. He mentions, "A single text on its own is quite insignificant: the effect of media power is cumulative, working through the repetition of particular ways of handling causality and agency, particular way of positioning the readers". (*Language and power*, 2001, p. 45). In each advertisement, the power relation is hidden and needs critical analysis. Our analysis of single advertisement is not sufficient to see the united effort of the media. Still, we should see the repeated course of action that advertisements follow for imparting specific messages. Only through our individual analysis of certain advertisements like that of Lux nothing comes out. All the above-mentioned advertisements together are imparting a certain message of patriarchy. Our analysis of them together can expose the hidden agenda and foster critical awareness to go against them.

Findings and Conclusions

Our search for the causes behind all this disinformation leads to the patriarchal social structure. Rejecting the ideas that challenge patriarchal ideology, our society only accepts those ideas that approve of it. The analyzed advertisements never inspire female characters to be independent, professional and expert in specific fields. They just limit female characters to loving mothers, beautiful women, seductive girls etc. The female is inspired to decorate with cosmetics and jewelry rather than doing anything intellectual for her career, identity and society. They present female characters as always passive ones as if activeness does not belong to them. They all exemplify how affluent people use media discourse for the domination of others with the use of

language. People lack critical language consciousness and are influenced by certain ideologies.

Critical analysis of different advertisements telecasted in Nepal television leads to the conclusion that beneath the surface message of every advertisement there resides a subtext of patriarchy. These mass media discourses function as a medium to impart the ideology. The public takes these contents easily because they lack critical linguistic awareness. The need of the present time is to expose hidden agendas and advocate action to change the existing situation empowering people with critical linguistic awareness. Until and unless we are critically aware of people, such a system will continue. Critical analysis is nothing if it is not a resource for struggle against domination. Resistance against patriarchal ideology that hinders gender equality and obstacles social progress is the need of the present time.

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I declare that this work has been ethically conducted

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Author's Bionotes

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