

A Dynamic Analysis of Advertising Strategies in Establishing Implications Based on Linguistic Adaptation Theory

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Abstract. Based on the corpus from the latest advertisements, this paper adopts Linguistic Adaptation Theory as the framework to explore the dynamic application of strategies in establishing implications in modern advertising. The analyses of adaptation will be conducted from three perspectives, namely, the adaptation to the receivers' mental world, social world and physical world in the selection of advertising language and aesthetic elements. The study aims to promote deeper understanding of modern advertising from a sociolinguistic perspective.

Keywords: Linguistic Adaptation Theory, advertising strategies, communicative contexts, implications establishment

1 Introduction

With the rapid development of commercial economy, advertisements have permeated every aspect of people's lives, and have gradually become one indispensable part of the modern society. According to the definition provided by American Marketing Association: "Advertising is the non-personal communication of information usually paid for and usually persuasive in nature about products, services or ideas by identified sponsors through the various media". And the purpose of advertising, according to The Concise British Encyclopedia, "is to sell goods, services, influence public opinions, gain political support, to promote a business, or cause other published readers want to reflect." In designing advertisements, advertisers must follow the following principles: attracting consumers' attention; inspiring consumers' interest; stimulating consumers' purchasing desire; deepening consumers' memory; pushing consumers' actions. The development of digital technology and the internet has a profound influence on the modern advertising designs, which has echoed more space for the creative designing of advertisements.

Studies on advertising abroad have made revolutionary steps through the past sixty years. Al Ries and Jack Trout^[1] coined the term "positioning", as related to the field of marketing, and authored *Positioning: The Battle For Your Mind*, which has become an industry standard on marketing. In China, studies have been conducted to explore the aesthetic value of advertising and the creation of originality and transmission of cultural values, such as Zhao Huixia's^[2] study "Advertising Aesthetics" and Wang Xiaochuan's^[3] article "On Advertising Positioning and Advertising Creativity". Most of the previous studies on advertising are lack of theoretical explanations and systematic analyses in China.

2 Theoretical Framework

The research is mainly conducted within the theoretical framework of Linguistic Adaptation Theory, which is initiated and elaborated by Verschueren^[4]. Verschueren posits three hieratically related key notions—variability, negotiability and adaptability. Variability is the property of language that defines the range of possibilities from which choices can be made. Negotiability is the property of language responsible for the fact that choices are not made mechanically or according to strict rules or fixed form-function relationship, but rather on the basis of highly flexible principles and strategies.

Adaptability, then, refers to the property of language which enables human beings to make negotiable linguistic choices from a variable range of possibilities in such a way as to approach point of satisfaction for communicative needs.

In discussing contextual correlates, Verschueren^[5] lists the ingredients of the communicative contexts. Language users including the utter and the interpreter, are a part of the contexts themselves. The utter makes choices in producing the utterance, while the interpreter makes choices in interpretation. Their linguistic choices are affected by the mental, social and physical world consciously or unconsciously. The mental world refers to the participant’s personalities, emotions, beliefs, wishes and intentions. The social world means the social settings. The physical world mainly includes temporal reference, spatial reference and other material conditions. All communicators will try their best to adapt their linguistic behavior to fit the conditions of these factors.

On the basis of this approach, the paper ventures to apply it to the study of advertising appeal strategies, in the hope of exploring how the advertisements adapt dynamically to the receivers’ mental world, social world and physical world in selection and usage of advertising language.

Appealing is the spirit of advertising, and its meaning is to emphasize and publicize the objects of advertising—products or services. The objects of appealing should be accurate and appropriate, the expressive strategies of appealing should be flexible, and the emphasis of appealing should be impressive. Only in this way can advertisement meet the demand of the rapid business development. Higher requirements have been raised on the planning and production of advertising at present. According to the expressive strategies of appeals, advertising can be classified generally into two aspects: emotional appeals of advertising and rational appeals of advertising. Rational appeals of advertising are comparatively direct and simple, which can impart effective information quickly to the receivers in a short time. But as the receivers’ appreciation levels are upgrading continuously, the communication effects of those rational appeals of advertising are declining. In this era of information explosion, the soaring amount of advertising has caused the severe overloading of the personal information. Therefore, those mediocre advertising products may flash away easily. On the contrary, the emotional appeals advertising tend to stimulate the consumers’ active emotional experience by way of arts and humanity. It resorts to different emotions such as joy, affection, excitement etc. which can effectively affect the mentality of the receivers, and generate their recognition and trust towards its brand, so as to obtain the best advertising effects.

3 Dynamic Adaptability Analysis Scheme

Advertising is mainly a dynamic adaptation process in the selection and usage of language which aims to realize its ultimate purpose of products promotion. The adaptability scheme is shown as follows:

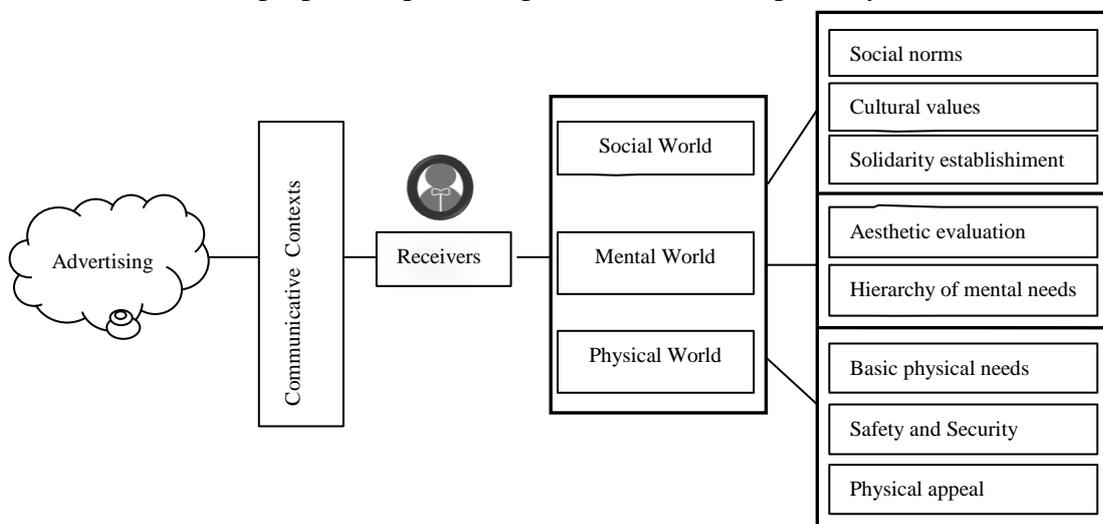


Fig. 1 A Model of Adverting Adaptability to Receivers’ Communicative Contexts

As shown in the Figure 1, the making of advertisements is a process of choices making with adaptability as its basic characteristics. In order to pursue its object of promotion and ensure the successful effects, advertising language must adapt to the receivers' communicative contexts, namely, the receivers' social, mental and physical world. But as advertising is a kind of special communicative behavior in which both of the communicative partners are not present in the contexts, the adaptation of the advertising language to the linguistic contexts is revealed through establishing implications for receivers. Therefore, this paper mainly focuses on the adaptation of the advertising language to the social and cultural mentality of the receivers.

3.1 Adaptability to the receivers' social world

As one kind of communicative behavior, the selection and usage of the language in advertising should be in accordance with the social norms. Social norms are the means which humans adopt to realize their aims in the social life, and they are the criteria people abide by in social activities. The social world refers to social occasions, social environment, and culture atmosphere, etc. such as social culture, customs and conventions, codes of conduct, values and so on. Generally speaking, the objects of advertising appeals are always the groups of people in a specific time and space. Since the same group of people bears relatively constant social and cultural mentality, the advertising language must adapt to the social and cultural mentality of the receivers.

Take the advertisement of *Motorola GPS Ming8* products for instance. A stranger asked for direction, and he got quite various answers from four adults and a girl when they showed him the ways by pointing to the five strikingly different directions. This advertisement can catch your attention quickly and impress you deeply since it vividly presents one of our familiar experiences when you ask for direction when traveling or going outside. The implications have been established by the shared feelings we have when traveling, that is, the inaccurate information may confuse you greatly. *Motorola GPS Ming8* can solve your problem and perform quite well by offering accurate directions for you. The creative advertising is inspired by the modern popular notions of exploring the world around with the booming of the tourism industry.

Another example comes from *FedEx Corporation*, when the advertising shows a passer-by standing near a bicycle watching the arrival of a truck of FedEx Corp which is loading a fire engine on a fire scene. The loading of a fire engine in a FedEx Corp truck implicates the high capacity of the truck, and furthermore, the fast speed of FedEx delivery system can even match the speed of a fire engine in emergency. The implications of high speed and high capacity of the FedEx Corp transportation tools are established by comparing them with fire engines. The audience's visual impression has been strengthened by the comparison which adopts fire engines as objects of reference to highlight the effects. In creating the advertising, the designer takes a person standing near a bicycle as a witness of the miracle, which adapts to the social mentality of great availability of fast and convenient service provided by FedEx Corporation for any individual.

3.2 Adaptability to the receivers' mental world

In social intercourses, the speaker's selection of the words is just a dynamic process of adapting both to his/her mental world and to the receivers' (including their characters, emotions, wishes, recognitions, intentions, etc). As a kind of one-way communicative behavior, the advertising language mainly adapts to the receivers' mental world. Hence, the advertising designers must understand the receivers' mental needs. Advertisers will often spare no efforts and try to figure out the mental needs and concerns of the consumers, and then make careful, rigorous selection of the language for the purpose of adapting to the mentality of the receivers.

In the modern world, with the advanced technology and highly developed commerce, humans' living conditions have been enhanced dramatically. In order to cater to the ever-growing demands of the modern consumers, advertisers must adapt dynamically to their psychological needs. In the field of food advertising language, the linguistic choices related to rational appeal are made to adapt to the needs for nutrition, credibility, flavor and low prices. The linguistic choices related to emotional appeal are made to adapt to personal needs for fashion and social status.

Here is an outstanding advertisement from a cake maker: *Mr. Kipling*. The two halves of a cake is placed to form two eyes, and meanwhile the curving advertising words “Trick or treating is better with cake” take the place of a mouth. The advertising originally combines the Halloween image with trick-or-treat together, which can easily attract the receivers’ attention and successfully promote the publicity of the cakes. The advertiser depicts the image by adopting the funny Halloween costume image is quite extraordinary. Another good advertising is from *Weight Watcher Ice-cream*: Spoil yourself and not your figure. “Spoil yourself” means “enjoy yourself to heart’s content”, while “spoil your figure” means “destroy your shape”. In order to adapt to the females’ mentality of keeping their figures, this advertising reassure those females that eating this kind of ice-cream will not add weight to their bodies. This advertising has successfully attracted the female consumers by using the smart emotional appeal strategy.

In 1943, Abraham Maslow^[6] proposed a new theory in psychology—Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow used the terms "physiological needs", "safety", "belongingness" and "love", "esteem", "self-actualization" and "self-transcendence" to describe the pattern that human motivations generally move through. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is often portrayed in the shape of a pyramid with the largest, most fundamental levels of needs at the bottom and the need for self-actualization at the top. According to Maslow, humans need to feel a sense of belongingness and acceptance among their social groups, regardless whether these groups are large or small. Deficiencies within this level of love and belongingness can impact the individual's ability to form and maintain emotionally significant relationships in general, such as friendship, intimacy and family. Hence, knowing how to adapt dynamically to the consumers’ needs of love and belongingness is vital to the advertisers to gain loyal clients back for them. If the advertising products can adapt to these humans’ basic needs and then guide, persuade the receivers to trust them, and then ultimately, their goals will be reached.

With the upgrading of people’s living standards, their mental world becomes more colorful in this new age. People advocate individualism, personal freedom, personal lifestyle, and etc. The digital technology advances have aroused the interests extensively among people of different ages. In advertising *iphone 7 Plus*, the designer presents a girl comes back home with a new iphone 7 Plus, taking wonderful photographs for her neighbors and relatives, all of whom feel greatly delighted. The harmony and happiness conveyed by the advertising impresses the receivers and promotes the selling of the new product.

3.3 Adaptability to the Receivers’ Physical World

According to Verschueren, language or linguistic choices should be inter-adaptable with the physical world in communication. The physical world mainly includes temporal reference, spatial reference, utter and interpreter, and ‘material’ conditions. Besides, the communicators’ posture, gestures and superficial images and psychological characteristics are indispensable parts of the physical world, which will affect their linguistic choices in the communication. So in producing advertisements, advertisers should take the receivers’ physical world into consideration and fit the specific context.

With their physical needs relatively satisfied, the individual's safety needs take precedence and dominate their behaviors. The pursuit of safety and security is a general mentality of consumers. “Safety” here refers not only to the safety of bodies, but also to the security of the goods, properties of consumers. Now a rich supply of the products is available for the consumers to select, the receivers are more concerned about the durability and warranty of the products. Many advertisers have realized that it is sensible to adapt to the safety needs of the consumers through advertising. Here is the advertising from *Luthansa Airlines*: You feel secure. You feel taken care of. Another example from *China Pacific Insurance Company*: Pacific Insurance Company insures your Safety.

Take the famous diamond maker *Chow Tai Fook*’s latest advertising as an example: “A diamond is like water, pure and eternal”. This advertising successfully draws the consumers’ attention to its symbolic meaning, such as eternity and durability. The advertising language makes the consumers be aware that the value of the diamond is beyond its price, and then successfully stimulate the consumers’ desire.

4 Conclusions

Through analyzing the advertising strategies collected from the media, this paper explores how the advertisers adapt to the receivers' mental world, social world and physical world in establishing implications. This adaptation process is a basically dynamic one in which advertisers are making linguistic choices constantly to cater to the hierarchical needs of the receivers. Linguistic Adaptation Theory provides a solid theoretical foundation in analyzing of the effects of advertising in the communicative contexts in the new era. From the analysis, we can conclude that the advertising language must adapt to the communicative contexts so as to realize its' ultimate goal of products promotion.

Thus, Linguistic Adaptation Theory can not only help us to understand advertising better, but also inspire basic principles for the production of original and impressive advertisements. This study has testified its adaptability and has offered a new perspective for the further dynamic study of communicative behaviors.

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