

SPEECH ACTS OF WRITTEN TEXTS IN FAST FOOD ONLINE ADVERTISEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

In Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the need for is one of the components in the most important need for human. Thus, making food industry one of the most profitable industries in the world. How do these players in food industries convince the customers to buy their products? What are the traits of these advertisements that influence the consumers' needs in buying? Being the primary factor that contributes the success in food industry, it is important that researcher analyses these advertisements in various aspects. The advertisements was analysed based on the speech acts theory by Simona & Dejica-Cartis (2014). Based on the analysis of 11 advertisements posted on the official page of each of the fast food restaurants, there are only 6 types of speech acts that were identified, out of the 16 types of speech acts proposed by Simon & Dejica-Cartis (2014). The high frequency of direction speech act indicates that the most used technique of influencing the audience to purchase their products is by directly telling them to do so. Meanwhile, the low frequency of promise speech act may illustrate the fact that the action of committing to a promise is the least favourable technique by advertisers, probably due to the risk of not fulfilling their promise.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the study

Advertisements have been an essential part of the components that shape the economic well-being of an organisation and the behaviour of the society towards ideas, products, or services. The importance of advertisement in influencing the decision of the consumers whether to purchase something or not is undeniable. However, what makes these advertisements become very effective? What are the traits of these advertisements that influence the consumers' needs in buying?

One of the most profitable industries in the world is food manufacturing industry, specifically fast food industry. Each year, fast food companies obtain billions of dollars of profit in their sales. One of the factors that contribute to the success of these fast food companies is their advertisements. The advertisements of fast food restaurants are literally everywhere, such as in the radio, television, social media, and through flyers and posters.

In regards of the textual information of the fast food restaurant advertisements, the researchers will use the theory of speech act in analysing them. The researchers will use the theory of speech act by Simona&Dejica-Cartis (2014). There are 16 speech acts altogether. They are *assertion, information, claim, suggestion, advice, argument, evaluation, denial, accusation, directions, persuasion, offer, promise, surprise, thanking, and warning*. This theory is derived from Searle's (1969) 5 types of speech acts.

Statement of problem

The most vital factor of the success of the fast food industry is its advertisement. It is important that these advertisements are analysed in order for us to identify the traits that contribute to the effectiveness of the advertisements.

Research objectives

- To identify the types of speech act used in the written advertisements.
- To identify the patterns that may be contained in the written advertisements.

Research questions

- What types of speech act are used in the written advertisements?
- What are the patterns that may be present in the written advertisements?

Scope of the study

- This study will be based on the 5 most famous fast food restaurants that are i)McDonald's, ii)KFC, iii)Subway, iv)Pizza Hut, and v)Burger King.
- Only the advertisements posted during the period of 13th to 19th of November, 2016 on the official Facebook page of each of the restaurants will be taken.

Significance of the study

This study will contribute to provide the characteristics of the fast food industry advertisements so that it can be used in promoting products and services of other industries too. Furthermore, a deeper research on the written text of these advertisements must be done in identifying the language used in advertisements.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Advertisement

According to Gillian Dyer (1982), advertising can be defined as the method of drawing attention, notifying or informing something (products or services) to somebody. Basically, advertising is a process of communication with the intention to persuade someone to agree with the idea that is conveyed. These acts of 'drawing attention', 'notifying' or 'informing' in Gillian's definition of advertising can be done by an individual to a mass number of audience by using public audience. In order for the advertiser to do that, he may use a medium that can reach a lot of people such as television or radio advertisement, designing a poster or by using local newspaper. Advertisements are also intended to manipulate people's mind into buying into the new way of life or goods (Dyer, 1982). He views advertisements as the medium to arouse emotions and needs of audience to buy the products or services.

Modern advertising is always done by using mass media as the medium of conveying the messages. Advertisement contains the name of the organisation with the message that the company wants to transmit towards the audience, promoting its own products or services. According to Okigbo (1990), advertisement is not only messages merely to promote, inform, persuade and entertain the products or services, but it also has its own economic function in maximising the profit of an organisation.

Christina Slade (2002) supported the above argument by saying that advertisements do not only intend to persuade the audience, but also can be viewed as an argument. Since there are multiple organisations that produce the same products and provide the same services, the competition among these organisations is huge. So, it is insufficient to only say our products are great, but it is also important that the advertisement delivers the message that our products are better than our competitor. This type of heated competition can be seen in the competition between Coca-Cola and Pepsi. Both are enormous organisations that sell products that are almost identical. We can clearly see the message of our product is better than the other in both company's advertisements.

Speech Acts

Speech acts are a group of utterances with a single interactional function. For example: a request, a command, a greeting, a promise, and an apology, to name a few. It is an utterance considered as an action, with regard of its purpose or effect on the listener. For example, the speech or utterance by the speaker is "would you go on a date with me?". The speech act is asking someone to go on a date. There are three types of speech acts, which are locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary. According to George Yule (1996), the most important of the three (locutionary, illocutionary, & perlocutionary) is the illocutionary. Provided that illocutionary means the intended meaning of the speaker, the term 'speech acts' is based on the illocutionary force of utterances.

According to Jolanta (2013), indirectness (illocutionary force) is a powerful tool in persuasion. Indirectness in text acts as the surprise elements in the advertisements as the audience are required to discover the meaning of the messages by themselves. In the research reported by Jolanta in her article "Realisation of Indirect Speech Acts in Online Job Advertisements", she mentioned that the job advertisements that use indirectness in the text will attract more candidate to apply for the interview.

According to Simona & Dejica-Cartis (2014), there are 16 types of speech acts in written advertisements that are assertion, information, claim, suggestion, advice, argument, evaluation, denial, accusation, directions, persuasion, offer, promise, surprise, thanking, and warning. These speech acts have been outlined in their article "Speech Acts in Written Advertisements: Identification, Classification and Analysis" where they analysed 84 written advertisements chosen from ten magazines and nine newspapers. This theory of 16 speech act by Simona & Dejica-Cartis was derived from the Searle's (1969) 5 types of speech acts. The following are the descriptions of each of the 16 speech acts as taken from Simon & Dejica-Cartis.

- **assertions** - positive statements or claims about the world, product/service/issue, addresser, addressee or other facts, usually made without evidence, etc;
- **information**- facts or knowledge about the product/service/issue, addresser, addressee, etc;
- **claims** - assertions of truth or statements of facts concerning the advertised product/service/issue, addresser, addressee and supported by following evidence;
- **suggestions** - statements/arguments presented in an indirect mode;
- **advice** - opinion expressed by the addresser with respect to how the addressee should behave or what s/he should do;
- **arguments** - statements put forth as proof or evidence for claims;

- **evaluations** - final appraisals of the value of something/someone made only if there is an evaluative premise;
- **denials** - objections to previous utterances;
- **accusations** - charges, usually negative, against similar products/services/issues;
- **surprise** - marked by the use of expressions uttered when something unexpected or unusual happens;
- **thanking** - expressions of gratitude;
- **warnings** - statements about what might happen in the future, usually with unpleasant connotations;
- **directions** - requests for an action or information;
- **persuasion** - the act of persuading, of convincing by emphasising the credibility and attractiveness of the addresser/endorser, of the advertised product/service/issue, by appealing to the addressee's feelings, emotions, needs, wishes, desires, to the friendly relationship established between addresser and addressee, and, finally, by using plenty of directions. All these means of persuasion may be repeated several times in the same advertisement, thus increasing the persuading degree of the advertisement in question.
- **offers** - the addresser's commitment and capability to stand to the information presented in the advertisement. Firm offers are expressed by using the modal auxiliary *can* to show capability to fulfil a need, by using figures to refer to price, guarantee, etc., in a word by giving very specific details about the advertised product/service/issue, details that can be easily checked out by the addressee.
- **promises** - commitments of the addresser that something will happen in the future. Firm promises are expressed by recourse to the modal auxiliary *will*.

Through the literature reviewed, it can be seen that the indirectness (illocutionary speech act) is important in ensuring the effectiveness of the advertisements. The written text of the advertisements will be analysed through the 16 speech acts by Simona & Dejica-Cartis (2014). Further description of the analysis will be elaborated in Chapter 3.

METHODOLOGY

The nature of this study requires the use of qualitative method. The qualitative method is used in order to analyse the written text in the advertisements.

Context of the study

- The research will be done on advertisements of the five most famous fast food restaurants that are McDonald's, KFC, Subway, Pizza Hut, and Burger King.
- The researcher will identify the posts from the official Facebook page of the respective fast food restaurants during the time period of 13th until 19th November 2016.

Sample & data collection

Purposive sampling is used in selecting our sample. The samples are taken based on the list of the most famous fast food restaurants by Forbes magazine in 2014. Based on the five samples, the researchers will collect the data from the Facebook posts of the restaurants.

Research procedure

The researchers will collect the Facebook posts regarding the products of the respective fast food restaurants. The Facebook posts that are not product-related will not be selected. Then, the written messages in the posts will be extracted and these written messages will be analysed by using the speech acts theory by Simona & DeJica-Cartis (2014).

ANALYSIS

McDonald's

- *Every bite is a delightful mix of fragrant coconut bits and crispy pie crust (assertion). Try it today! (direction)*

This advertisement promotes a product, Young Coconut Pie, by describing the ingredients or the elements contained in it. The use of the adjectives *delightful*, *fragrant*, and *crispy* illustrates the attempt to project the positive values of the product. The description is then followed by a direction by the advertiser by the use of the imperative verb *try*, which implores the audience to try the product.

- *Delicious goodness are all wrapped up in the Chicken McWrap! (assertion) Served with the new chicken patty that's 20% bigger and made from 100% breast meat. (information) Have it today at McD! (direction)*

The advertisement promotes a product named Chicken McWrap by describing the ingredients contained in the product. The advertisement also projects a positive image of the product by the use of the phrase *delicious goodness* in referring to the content of the food. It also highlights the improvement in this presumably new product by mentioning *20% bigger* and *100% breast meat*. The advertisement is ended by asking the readers to purchase the product, by the use of the imperative verb *have*.

- *Your favourite Malaysian breakfast is now at McDonald's. (information) Try our NEW crispy, golden cakoi today! (direction)*

The advertisement announces the selling of a new product, cakoi, at their fast food restaurant chain. It also attempts to appeal to the customers in Malaysia by implying that they are now selling a type of food that has always been a favourite food to Malaysians, by the use of the phrase *Your favourite Malaysian breakfast*. The advertisement projects a positive image of the product by the use of adjectives *crispy* and *golden* while also imploring the readers to *try* (imperative verb) the product.

Pizza Hut

- *Complete your Wow! Take-away Pizza with Sides. (direction) #Wow! - 1 Large Pizza, 1 Garlic Bread, 2 Soups for 4 persons. (information)*

The advertisement is made to promote a package deal, *Wow!*. It implores the readers to add side purchases along with the take-away pizza by using the imperative verb *complete*. The second sentence in the advertisement gives the readers information by listing the products offered in the *Wow!* package deal.

- *QUIZ: How does one enjoy 4 slices of pizza with different toppings, by paying only RM5? (suggestion)*
HINT: 1 PERSONAL PIZZA = 4 SLICES OF PIZZA (information)

This advertisement is originally written in Malay and it is translated to English for the purpose of being analysed in this paper. The advertisement is made up of two sentences that form a question and an answer. The question, explicitly labelled as *QUIZ*, asks the readers on how to enjoy a variety of pizza slices with different toppings for a low price. The question is used to suggest to the readers the attractiveness of the package deal, while the second part, which is the answer to the question or *HINT* (originally labelled as *TIPS* in Malay version), gives information to the readers about the package deal.

KFC (Kentucky Fried Chicken)

- *It's been a long ride, but you've studied hard to get to this point (persuasion). All the best in your SPM examination guys! (persuasion) P.S.: Don't forget to grab a hearty breakfast first (suggestion), because a full belly helps you concentrate better (assertion).*

This post, retrieved from the official Facebook page of KFC Malaysia, does not promote any product in particular, at least not directly. Given that, it can still be perceived as a good way to persuade the readers to choose their restaurant as the post appeals to the readers by touching on the current situation taking place in the country. It appeals to students who are taking SPM examination by showing them appreciation about their hard work and also by wishing them well for their examination. The post also contains a sentence that suggests the readers to have breakfast first before sitting on the examination, presumably at their restaurant.

- *The holidays are on with Crispy Prawns! (assertion) Introducing the KFC Holiday bucket – with a bucket of chicken, whipped potato and 10 pieces of crispy prawns, (information) the holidays have never been better for you and your family (assertion)*

The advertisement promotes a meal set, KFC Holiday bucket, which contains several food items including a special item, Crispy Prawns. The advertisement first asserts that the holidays get to life with their new product, which is Crispy Prawns. It then gives to the readers information of the meal set by listing the food items contained in it, while making another assertion about the positive quality of their product, which will make the holidays better for the readers. Looking at it as a whole, the advertisement also appeals to the readers in a way that it takes into account the current season during which the promotion takes place, which is the holiday season. This can be seen by the repeated use of the word *holiday*.

Burger King

- *Fresh Grilling starting today @ Bestari Jaya. (information) Come visit us anytime you want! (direction) We are now open to serve you our delicious signature burgers :) (persuasion) See you there! (direction)*

The advertisement does not mention any specific product. It informs the readers of the opening of their new branch at the time of the post was retrieved. The second sentence implores the readers to *come visit* (imperative verb) their new branch. There is also an element of persuasion in the third sentence where it appeals to the desire of the readers by offering to *serve* the customers with *delicious burgers*. The use of smiley face also indicates the friendliness of the restaurant.

- *We [will] be grillin' with our BBQ sauce and Beef patties all day every day. (promise) For RM7.90 to get a meal with fries and coke, (information) you are being pampered here! (persuasion)*

The advertisement promotes a package deal, which unlike other advertisements, the name of the package deal is not mentioned. The advertisement mentions that they will be preparing their food all day every day, which can be interpreted as a promise to serve the customers with freshly grilled burgers. It also contains the information of the package deal by stating the price and the accompanying items, which are *fries and coke*. The advertisement may also imply that their price is better than other fast food restaurants, mentioning that the customers are *being pampered* by the low price.

Subway

- *What to have for Saturday's brunch? (suggestion) How about Subway® Roasted Chicken (advice) - sink your teeth into one now! (direction) See you in stores! (direction)*

The advertisement is made to promote Roasted Chicken, a product by Subway. The first sentence asks the readers about what food to eat during a brunch over the weekend, giving a prelude to the second sentence which advises that their Roasted Chicken is a good meal to eat during that time. The imperative verb in the phrase *sink your teeth* implies that the readers should go eat the product.

- *Buy any sub with 22oz drink and get a 6 inch sub free! (persuasion) We're celebrating 9 Avenue, Nilai - 1st Anniversary Sale on 14th November 2016! (information) Don't miss out on this promo and enjoy your favourite Subway® with your friends! (direction) Valid in Subway® Malaysia only. (information)*

The advertisement appeals to the readers' desire of free items by highlighting a *6 inch sub free* in its first sentence. It then informs the readers of the sale held in spirit of celebrating the first anniversary of one of its branches. The advertisement also reminds the readers to not miss out on the promotion and appeals to the supposedly established relationship between the customers and their restaurant by the use of the word *favourite*, implying that there are customers who have found a favourite meal in their products.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis of 11 advertisements posted on the official page of each of the fast food restaurants, there are only 6 types of speech acts that were identified, out of the 16 types of speech acts proposed by Simon & DeJica-Cartis (2014). The identified speech acts include assertion, information, direction, persuasion, suggestion, and promise. The type of speech act that recorded the most usage is direction while the speech act that was least used is promise. The high frequency of direction speech act indicates that the most used technique of influencing the audience to purchase their products is by directly telling them to do so. Meanwhile, the low frequency of promise speech act may illustrate the fact that the action of committing to a promise is the least favourable technique by advertisers, probably due to the risk of not fulfilling their promise.

Apart from that, there are also several other findings that have been made during the analysis. From the analysis done on the collected samples, it is found that KFC's advertisements are noticeably the most responsive towards the current season in which the advertisements were posted. This can be seen in its advertisements that touched on the SPM examination and the holiday season that took place. It is perceivably a good strategy to appeal to the readers or customers in a way that they can relate to the advertisements. It also shows that the advertiser or the company is aware of the environment and this helps the company project a positive image of themselves onto the customers.

Another finding that is also worth mentioning is that McDonald's has a consistency in their advertisements. All of the advertisements by McDonald's that have been analysed in this paper are ended with a direction speech act, which explicitly ask the audience to try their product by the use of the imperative verbs *try* and *have*. The use of this strategy may be effective in a way that the advertisement actively influences the readers to take action upon seeing the product.

CONCLUSION

This paper has analysed a number of written advertisements which were retrieved from official Facebook pages of fast food restaurants. From the analysis we have identified 6 out of 16 speech acts that have been outlined by Simon & DeJica-Cartis. Out of these 6, direction speech act recorded the highest usage. This answers our first research question which asked on the speech act used in written advertisements. Our second research question regarding the patterns that may emerge from the analysis of the sample has also been answered by the findings that have been discussed in Discussion section, which are the responsiveness of the advertisements towards current season and the consistency of the advertisements in directing the readers.

LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

However, in retrospection, there are several limitations that have been identified in this paper. One of them is the lack of the variable that could decide the effectiveness of each of the speech acts used in written advertisements. This limitation may perhaps be overcome by conducting a survey on the readers of the written advertisements, one that explores the level of acceptability or attractiveness of the advertisements. This information will perceivably be useful in guiding the company in advertising their products through written advertisements posted online.

Another limitation in conducting this study is the fact that the frequency of written advertisements posted by the Facebook pages of these 5 fast food restaurants varies considerably. Some of them post quite rarely, making it difficult for the researchers to collect samples in order to be analysed. This problem can be overcome by prolonging the period in which the advertisements are posted. Given that, it is also important to note that the lack of advertisements posted by the fast food restaurants may also be looked into, under a study that looks at the preference of the social media users of fast food restaurants based on the interactivity of their official social media pages.

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