Anti-Aging Cream Advertisements: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract: In this era of capitalism, advertisements are often used for constructing and magnifying problems for consumers in order to sell products. The commodity culture has been highly influenced in recent days by advertisements, in which language has an overshadowed but subtle role in communication with consumers. This paper examines several advertisements of anti-aging products by famous international brands from a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) perspective. The main focus of this paper is on the use of language in advertisements in order to manufacture consent from target audience. The selected advertisements are analyzed based on Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional framework. It demonstrates how language is used in advertisements to exercise power over consumers who are led to believe that they are buying products on their own accord. The findings indicate that advertisers use various strategies to manipulate women, and their success is largely based on women's socially constructed insecurity about getting old.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Language in advertisements, Communication, Media influence in language

1. Introduction

We are living in perpetual exposure of advertisements. In this age of capitalism, adverts do more than just promote particular products – often they are used for constructing and/or magnifying problems in order to sell. While everyone is more or less aware of the audiovisual tactics of adverts, the significant role of language in advertising is often concealed in the clear vision. Anti-aging products, despite being new in the sub-continent, are quickly picking up pace. In case of Bangladesh,

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anti-aging products were virtually unheard of even a few years ago. However, nowadays companies can reach potential customers regardless of geographical location by using electronic media. Television, fashion magazines, online blogs and social media are a way of promoting certain ideas of beauty, and potential customers believe they need to adapt by buying certain products. While visuals are the first thing customers notice, language have to be convincing enough to establish the product's credibility. Language is not limited to one-line slogans only- its grammatical and stylistic properties are employed in many different ways to make an advert stand out. One interesting fact about the advertisements of anti-aging creams is - they are almost identical in terms of strategies and approaches, yet, they are quite successfully grabbing their intended customers' attention. This paper concentrates on the relationship between discourse, power and ideology, and how the elements were addressed in the advertisements I chose to analyze. Based on this idea, I have come up with two research questions -

- 1. What are the linguistic strategies used in the advertisements of anti-aging cream in order to manufacture consent?
- 2. Are the customers really aware about these strategies? If so, why are they continuing to use these products?

2. Background

The global market for anti-aging products is growing rapidly. A study done by Orbis Research (Orbis, 2017) says that the global skincare market was worth \$250 billion in 2016, and estimated to have a volume of \$331.41 billion by 2021. While North America dominated the anti-aging market in 2016 owing to the high awareness about signs of aging and increasing obesity in the region, Asia is likely to experience utmost growth in the near future, the study concludes.

An article published in The Jakarta Post in 2018 also supports the aforementioned study. The article says that Asia is set to have the oldest population in the world in the next few decades. Among other countries, Bangladesh will see an increase to 11.5 by 2030 (DataLEADS/ANN, 2018). With the progress in life expectancy, the demand for anti-aging products is inevitably going to increase among

adults age group of this region as well. Since cosmetics and skincare products mainly aim at women customers, the primary target for producers of demographics is not difficult to predict.

Anti-aging products are relatively new in Southeast Asia, and so far, women from only a specific socio-economic background are using those products. However, with the ever-expanding reach of advertisement, the market is bound to reel in more customers. Considering the context of the sub-continent where a woman is worth is still largely determined by youth and fertility, the socio-cultural ramifications of the integration of anti-aging products needs to be studied and evaluated. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a study that views language as a form of social practice, making it a suitable tool to assess the aforementioned situation. This research uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as an analytical tool for illustrating the use of language in advertisements in order to manufacture consent from target audience.

3. Literature Review

In the discourse of advertising, women are encouraged to examine themselves for physical "flaws" which can be improved or removed by certain products. Jhally (1990) has noted, "in modern advertising, gender is probably the social resource that is used most by advertisers" (p. 135). The aim of these advertisements is not only selling a product, but also establishing a socially constructed idea of beauty, especially towards women. In the past, the narrative largely excluded aging woman. They were reduced to matronly figures, with responsibility for the household, with little emphasis on physical beauty. According to Frida Furman (1997), aging brings the feeling of failure amidst women as their worth in society is perpetually measured by appearance; their self-appraisal conditioned by the male gaze. They tend to see the natural aging process as a loss of femininity; a femininity that is exemplified by the ideal image of the young, passive, white, healthy, heterosexual, thin woman. As a result, they are under constant pressure to conform, to fit the mold of ideal beauty. The booming market of anti-aging product is targeting this neglected demographic, and promising them the eluded dream of turning back the clock, to be a part of the spectrum of youthful beauty once again.

The bait for hooking mature woman tends to be a mishmash of scientific words and hyperboles. Moreover, M.H. Smirnova (2012) describes the term "cosmeceutical" as a combination of the terms cosmetic and pharmaceutical, "enabling advertisements to treat the cosmeceutical as though it were a 'drug' curing a disease". According to her, cosmeceutical is part of the recent line of over-the-counter skin care products that are directly marketed to those women who seek to either "defy" or "prevent" aging. By doing so, advertisements makes women victim and hero simultaneously- by treating the natural progression of aging as a disease, but also giving women the sense of empowerment where they can "fight" or "defy" this disease simply by making a choice of buying a product.

4. Methodology & Theoretical Framework

The data analysis is based on Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework (1989). Advertisements often employ language and social context to perpetuate their message. This framework allows a thorough analysis of the relations between language, ideology and power. It includes a conception of discourse as text (micro level), discourse practice (meso level) and sociocultural practice (macro level). By using this framework, this paper aims to show how language is used in the advertisements of anti-aging products to manufacture consent from the target customers, and how social context, ideology, gender roles considered in the language of these advertisements. The selected advertisements are analyzed for their linguistic choices that have been employed to heighten the effect of language.

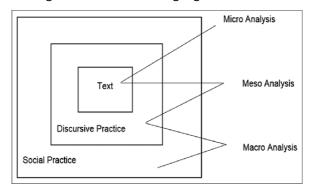


Figure 1. Fairclough's three-dimensional model

The study has employed a qualitative approach. As most anti-aging products use similar kind of linguistic, visual, and marketing tactics, qualitative method is more appropriate than quantitative in this context. Data is collected from both print and online media — One local magazine (Mirror), three international fashion magazines (Femina, Cosmopolitan, Elle) which are available in Bangladeshi market, and several websites. I have used 12 advertisements for the analysis (see appendix).

Along with the qualitative approach, two online surveys are used in this paper which includes the current consumer base as well as the prospective one. The group of current consumers consist of 22 women between the ages of 35-50, whereas the group of prospective consumers are made of 20 women between the ages of 25 to 30. All of the participants are from upper middle class to affluent socioeconomic background, level of education ranging from HSC to post-graduation and Dhaka- based. Comparison of the answers of the study shows how both groups react to the language used in the advertising campaign.

5. Findings and Discussions

I have divided this section into three categories based on Norman Fairclaugh's three-dimensional model: (a) textual analysis, (b) discourse practice analysis, and (c) social practice analysis. The first research question of this paper, which is about the linguistic strategies, will be discussed within textual analysis and discourse practice analysis.

5.1 Textual analysis/Linguistic strategies

In this level of analysis, various linguistic features such as – vocabulary, headline, pronoun and imperatives, use of numbers, adjectives, tense etc. are discussed.

a. Second person pronoun and imperatives: The use of the second-person personal and possessive pronouns such as 'you' and 'your' implies a personal one-on-one connection to the customer(s). This handling of people on an individual basis is referred to as 'synthetic personalization' (Fairclough, 1989:62). In order to influence the potential customers to buy or take certain actions, advertisements use imperatives to make customers believe they are taking action themselves with the help of a certain product. It places them in a

position of power, with the product taking a secondary position. There are some instances below -

- Challenge what's possible Olay Regenerist (Photo 1)
- Join me in the battle against aging Olay Total Effects (photo 8)
- Boost your anti-wrinkle and whiteness regime Ecollagen 3D+ (photo 12)
- Fight 15 sign of aging L'oreal New Revitalift white (photo 3)
- Reverse the signs of photo-aging every single day Loreal revitalift complete. (Photo 10)

Instead of saying this cream fights signs of aging or the cream can reverse the signs of aging , the advertisements imply that it is the customers who can fight, reverse or control their wrinkles (if they buy the advertised products). Thus the customer is resulted to think that they participate actively in this process, but only buy and use these products in fact.

b. Vocabulary: Two different vocabulary sets are used in the advertisements. On one hand, technical and scientific sounding words have been used to give the product validity. On the other hand, hyperbolic words, exaggerated claims and expressions are employed in order to grab the audience's attention. A table containing two separate types of vocabulary found in the advertisements is bellow —

Table 01: Vocabularies us as scientific "sounded" words and hyperbolic words/phases in the advertisements of anti-aging cream

	Scientific "sounded" words		Hyperbolic words/ phases
a)	Smart Whitening complex , Tri -	a)	Relentless age fighter (photo 7)
	peptide complex (photo 9)	b)	Gravity defying cream (photo 4)
b)	Pro Retinol #A Elastin (photo	c)	A Miracle will happen in 7 days
	10)		(photo 2)
c)	Stimulift (photo 6)	d)	As if deep wrinkles are pushed
d)	Amino peptic complex (photo 1)		up and out (photo 11)
e)	Anti-aging molecule pro -	e)	Lift away 3 signs of aging (photo
	xylaneTM (photo 11)		9)
		f)	Battle against aging (photo 8)

c. Numerals: In advertisements, numbers are used to compete against other advertisements. As most of the advertisements are dealing with similar kind of products, they have to point out their specialty. Using

numbers is another way of showing the audience how quickly the product can work. Numbers are often used for categorizing signs of aging as well. The advertisements try to outnumber each other in order to prove that they can fight the most number of symptoms in the shortest period.

- See even deep wrinkles reduced in two weeks Garnier agelift (Photo
 9)
- A miracle will happen in just 7 days ponds age miracle (photo 2)
- Fights 15 signs of aging L'oreal New Revitalift white (phot 3)
- 10 signs of aging L'Oreal Revitalift Clinical Repair 10 (photo 5)
- Skin look 5 years younger in 4 weeks L'oreal New Revitalift (photo 6)
- 1 simple solution to lift away the 3 signs of aging Garnier agelift (photo 9)
- Visible reduction of dark spots after 12 weeks L'oreal New Revitalift white (photo 3)

d. Headlines / slogans: Headlines and catchy slogans are among the first things that people notice in an advertisement. Therefore, the adverts try to make the headlines catchy and informative. In the advertisements, I have noticed two patterns in terms of headlines — using number/ facts, and using exaggerated expressions —

- A miracle will happen in just 7 days ponds age miracle (photo 2)
- Fights 15 signs of aging L'oreal New Revitalift white (photo 3)
- 1 simple solution to lift away the 3 signs of aging Garnier agelift (photo 9)
- Now defend against photo aging, the number # 1 cause of wrinkles-Loreal revitalift complete. (photo 10)
- Join me in the battle against aging Olay Total Effects (photo 8)
- Skin look 5 years younger in 4 weeks- L'oreal New Revitalift (photo 6)
- For skin so tight so toned, it defies gravity- Garnier Ultra Lift Pro (photo 4)
- Imagine younger looking skin without syringe or scalpel O'lay Regenerist (photo 1)

e. Adjectives: In the adverts, adjectives are often used to exaggerate the product being advertised, as well as to amplify the "flaws" that require the use of the products. I have noticed repeated used of the following adjectives in most of the adverts I looked into for this paper:

- Adjective to describe skin before using the product: *Dark, dull, sagging, uneven, damaged, rough.*
- Adjective to describe skin after using the product: Firm, lifted, plumped, gravity defying, younger-looking.

All the adjectives used to describe naturally aging skin are blatantly negative, whereas the adjectives used for describing skin after using the products are generally positive and uplifting. All adverts used both types of adjectives generously.

- f. Tense: In all the advertisements, present indefinite tense has been used frequently in order to give a general idea about the products and their benefits/ results. Due to its simple structure, this tense is more likely to convey the information properly to the intended customers, as well as maintain the "newness" of the products. Present Indefinite tense has been used to describe the present (Now defend against photo aging, the number # 1 cause of wrinkles- Loreal revitalift complete) (Photo 10), present with future meaning (Skin looks 5 years younger in 4 weeks- L'oreal New Revitalift) (photo 6), as well as hypothetical situations (Imagine younger- looking skin without syringe or scalpel O'lay Regenerist) (photo 1).
- g. Sentences types: The advertisements have used various types of sentences to achieve different goals. For example, declarative sentences are used for big claims such as "A Miracle will happen in 7 days" (photo 2), whereas imperatives imply that the customer and the product can work together to get the best result when it says "Fight 15 signs of aging with L'oreal New Revitalift white (photo 3)". Some of the adverts also used rhetorical questions, which assumes only one possible answer: "Impossible? Not with Olay (Photo: 1)"

5.2 Discourse Practice analysis

The strategy of using language in order to manufacture consent is a commonly practiced method in advertisements. In the following table, several of such strategies are discussed –

Table 2: strategies of manipulation in the advertisements of anti-aging cream

	Strategies	Examples
a.	Manufacturing consent through implication	 "Reverse the signs of photo aging every single day" – Loreal revitalift complete. (Photo 10) "Olay total effect has everything that will make your skin glow and give it a youthful appearance". –Olay total Effect (photo 8) "Imagine younger looking skin without syringe or scalpelImpossible? not with Olay" – Olay
b.	Celebrity endorsement	 Regenerist (photo 1) "It's not a facelift, it's revitalift – Rachel Weisz" (photo 6) "Finally, a multi-tasking cream that works as hard as I do- Araya A Haggart" (photo 3) "Reverse the signs of photo aging every single day" –Andy Macdowell" (photo 10)
c.	Scientific research/ clinical proof	 "A formula enriched with anti-aging molecule Pro-xylanetm, skin lightening vitamin CG - Garnier Agelift (Photo 9) "Our first clinical-grade formula : for actual clinical research- L'Oreal Revitalift Clinical Repair 10 (photo 5) "Patented formula ,clinically proven activeness) – L'oreal New revitalift (photo 6)
d.	Invoking inadequacies, creating the need to repair flaws	 Visibly reduces your toughest lines and wrinkles – Olay Regenerist (photo 1) Crow's feet, frown lines, forehead wrinkles, laugh lines, neck folds L'oreal New Revitalift white (photo 3) Rough texture, dryness L'Oreal Revitalift Clinical Repair 10 (photo 5) Open pores, fine lines, dark spots – Olay Total Effects (photo 8)
e.	Self-representation as "the" solution of multiple problems	 Only possible by the number one wrinkle brand- L'oreal New Revitalift Complete (photo 10) 1 simple solution to lift away the 3 signs of aging - Garnier agelift (photo 9) Our first clinical-grade formula for actual clinical repair- L'Oreal Revitalift Clinical Repair 10 (photo 5)

6. Social Practice Analysis

6.1 Online Surveys

6.1.1. Outcomes and discussions: from the current consumer base: The participants of this group were asked the following questions:

- 1. Do you feel pressure about looking younger? If so, what are the main sources of the pressure?
- 2. Does your anti-aging product live up to its promise of reversing the clock? If not, why are you still using them?
- 3. Are you influenced by the clinical/ scientific data presented in the advertisements? If so, are you familiar with the scientific words, or did you check out their validity afterwards?
- 4. Are you influenced by the hyperbolic words used in the advertisements?
- 5. What other elements of language attract you to the advertisements?

A total of 22 Bangladeshi women- between the ages of 35-50, from upper-middle class to affluent social backgrounds, with education levels ranging from HSC to Post graduation- responded to the survey. All of the participants admitted that they are under the pressure of looking younger, and pointed to societal pressure as well as media portrayal as the main sources. They were asked how do the anti-aging products fare in terms of living up to their promises, to which all the participants said that none of the products they use lived up to their claim of reversing the clock, but they still continue using these products. All the participants were adamant that these products are still better for their aging skin than the "cheap products"/ non-age specific cosmetics from local brands available in the market. Asked about their view on the clinical data / scientific formulas mentioned in the advertisements, 90 % admitted "new scientific formula" attracts their attention and often influence their decision to try out a new product even though they do not actually check out whether these scientific sounding words actually mean anything. Among the other elements of language used in the advertisements, use of numbers (for instance, number of flaws the product can cover, number of other skin benefits such as fairness) grab the attention of 83% of the participants. When it comes to the use of hyperbolic words, 72% of the participants said that while they do not completely believe those words, they made

them notice the ads, whereas 10% said they do not take those words seriously.

- *6.1.2. Outcomes and discussions: from the prospective base :* The following questions were put to the respondents from the prospective consumer base:
 - 1. What are the sources of the pressures about looking younger?
 - 2. From what age do you think the pressure begins?
 - 3. What kind of claims will make you interested about an anti-aging product?
 - 4. Do you believe in the scientific sounding words and hyperboles used in advertisement?
 - 5. What other elements of language attract you to the advertisements?
 - 6. In your mid 30's or early 40's, will you keep using anti-aging products even if there's no visible effect, or will you switch to using non- age specific skin care products?

A total of 20 women of upper middle class background and educational level ranging from graduation to post graduation participated in this survey. Unlike the first group, this group of women who are currently between the ages of 25 to 30 and not using any anti-aging product yet, were quite diverse in their responses. While 71% have pointed to society in general as the main source of pressure of looking young among women, about 50% of all the participants chose to ignore the pressure. About 50% of them identified mid -20s as the peak time of these pressures, whereas they rest were an equal split between the early 20s and late 20s. However, 50% have admitted that they will be interested in a product if it claims to visibly reduce the signs of aging, whereas 37% said they will only consider anti-aging products if they claim to contain legitimate skin boosters such as vitamins.

A staggering 66% do not believe in the scientific sounding/ hyperbolic words at all, while 33% believes some of the claims, but still holds doubt. Of the other elements of language, interesting headlines and catchy slogans grab the attention of 44% of the participants, while 22% are also interested in the numbers. Sixty percent of the participants said that they might try out anti-aging products in their mid-30s-early 40s, but if there is no visible change, they will revert to non-age

specified skin care products. Only 22% said that they would change the brand, but keep using anti-aging products.

From this survey, we can reach the following decisions:

- Majority of both groups point to societal pressure about looking younger.
- The prospective consumers are largely dismissive, or at least skeptical about the scientific claims perpetuated in anti-aging advertisements, whereas the majority of the current consumers chose to believe them without verification.
- 3. The current consumers are mostly attracted by the numbers used in the adverts, whereas the prospective customers notice the headlines/ slogans first, which indicates a sense of urgency among the first group.
- 4. Both groups are quite aware of the exaggerated claims and hyperbole used in the advertisements, still willing to try the products.
- The current customers almost unanimously agreed to use the products even when there is no visible change in their skin, whereas majority of the prospective customers claim they would go back to non-age-specified products.
- 6. Even if the anti-aging products do not live up to their claims of reversing the clock, the older customers continue using them for their brand value.

6.3 The Fair factor

An interesting fact that came up from analyzing the adverts is that the products targeting the Asian market lists "whitening" as one of the main benefits. Out of the 12 adverts I have analyzed, 5 were focused on Asian market. In three of them, we can see that skin whitening is given as much importance as anti-aging-

- Boost your anti-wrinkle and whiteness regime Ecollagen 3D+ (photo 12)
- In just 4 weeks wrinkles and dark spots are, as if, lifted away. Skin is visibly fairer and younger looking Garnier Agelift (photo 9)
- Anti-aging + whitening day cream SPF 18 L'oreal New Revitalift white (photo 3)

Obsession with fairness is a much discussed factor in Asian context. By inserting the fair factor in the advertisements (which is completely

absent in western ads, even of the same brand), the international brands are taking advantage of the fairness obsession.

6.4 Sociocultural Context

One common thing that both groups of recipients admitted that there is a certain degree of social pressure on women about retaining their youth. We have seen that the older women are willing to continue using the products despite experiencing any visible result. All these findings lead to the answer of the second research question of this paper - are the users aware of these manipulative strategies employed in the language of advertisements? Largely they are. Culturally, in Asian context women are expected to get married to older men not only because of financial security and fertility issues, but also due to the common belief that women age faster than men. This belief largely stands on the belief that female skin is much thinner than male skin, making it more prone to wrinkles.

However, many factors such as genetics, lifestyle, food habits etc contribute to aging. Men also have their fair share of signs of aging-balding, receding hairline etc can make men look significantly older. However, in most parts of the world looking beautiful or younger is mostly attributed to women. The advertisements are tapping into this societal pressure by categorizing natural progression of ageing as "symptoms." In the advertisements analysed in this paper, several stacks of these "symptoms" or "flaws" as well as their "remedies" are seen repeatedly. According to David Amstrong, "These newly constructed "symptoms" of old age demand constant self-surveillance of the circumscribed "at-risk" aging population" (Armstrong, 1995). So, the obsession for looking younger is socially constructed, and women are carrying it out without questioning it.

Another form of covert manipulation is largely perpetuated by the media. From movies to soap operas - the image of today's women is being overly sexualized regardless of age groups. Women in their 40s are no longer confined within the roles of mother or aunts - they are being cast as lead in different genres of programs. Though this is a positive trend, we cannot overlook the fact that these actors are redefining the way people viewed middle age in the past. According to Susan Bordo, "Cher, Jane Fonda, and others have not made the aging female body sexually more acceptable. They have established a new

norm- achievable only through continual cosmetic surgery-in which the surface of the female body ceases to age as the body grows chronologically older" (Bordo, 1990, pp. 25-26). These glamorous portrayals are creating a new, unattainable standard of beauty for mature women as well.

5. Conclusion

Advertisements of anti-aging creams are not only promoting products, but also setting new standards of beauty across the world. In this paper several strategies of manufacturing consent have been discussed which show that it is the advertisements, not the customers who have the power of taking decisions. This power is very much interconnected with the social context where the pressure of looking younger or fairer is always looming over women. Using language and ideological context, advertisements of anti-aging cream are successfully reaching out to potential customers.

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Appendix

Photos used in here for the Critical Discourse Analysis. All these photos have been collected from online, using Google Image. Download period: 2013-2018.

POND'S



Photo 1: Olay Regenerist





Photo 3: L'oreal New Revitalift white



Photo 4: Garnier Ultra- Lift Pro



Photo 5: L'Oreal Revitalift Clinical Repair



Photo 6: L'oreal New Revitalift



Photo 7: Naked Skin Beauty Balm



Photo 9: Garnier agelift



Photo 11: New Ultra-Pro Lift, Garnier



Photo 8: Olay Total effects



Photo 10: L'oreal New Revitalift Complete



Photo 12: Ecollagen 3D+