

Increasing Intake of Fast Food and Its Impact on the Physical Health of Teenagers: An Ecolinguistic Analysis of Fast Food Advertisements in Pakistan

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Abstract: *Increasing fast food consumption among teenagers not only causes serious physical and mental problems but also becoming a constant threat to overall physical environment. The present study is focused to analyze the language of fast food advertisements from ecological perspective. However, the main objective of the study is to trace the vocabulary that is being used in fast food advertisements within an aim to boost its consumption up among teenagers. The study is qualitative in nature and Fairclough's (1989) model of critical discourse analysis has been applied as a theoretical framework of the study. As far as the source of data has been concerned, the researcher went for the hybrid mode in the sense that required data has been obtained from two sources which are respectively Google advertisements and YouTube commercials promoting fast food. Meanwhile, a particular sample of fifteen advertisements and commercials including three fast food items (Pizza, Zinger Burger and Nuggets) five from each has been drawn by applying purposive sampling technique. The findings revealed that such type of advertisements and commercials are determined to use very persuasive language and most of the time they seem to use second person pronoun "You" to develop a direct interaction with its consumers and its an attempt to control their eating behaviors.*

Keywords: *Print and digital media, Fast food advertisements, Eco-linguistic, Teenagers, Critical discourse analysis.*

1. Background of the Study

Food has a pivotal role in the life of the teenagers as they go through multiple physical changes in puberty and require extra nutrients that can help them to fuel such sort of changes and repair and maintain their body tissues for the regulation of vital process (Jahan et al, 2019). Hence, the nutrients emphasis to develop a healthy diet plan that must include at least five portions of fruits and vegetables a day but studies show that 63% of the teenagers do not seem to meet this criterion which affect their physical and mental growth (Chaudhary et al, 2020). Rather, the intake of unhealthy food among them is getting increased day by day and in the present

scenario fast food has become a great source of unhealthy diet.

The term “fast food” was introduced by Merriam Webster in early 1951. It actually refers to the mass production of the food which takes few minutes to get ready and is standardized in shape, color, size and taste (Schlosser, 2001). Burgers, pizza, sandwich, noodles and doughnuts and other items that are dispensed quickly at cafeterias, food courts and restaurants come under the category of fast food. From nutrition’s point of view, such items contain high amount of sodium, cholesterol and fat which affect their physical and mental health badly. (Yardimci, 2012). However, despite of its low value, wide use of fast food has become the life style of people across the globe, who take it as a blessing because it satisfies them especially the teenagers in a relatively short period of time. Even the under-developing countries like Pakistan are no more safe from the huge consumption of fast food, approximately twenty years ago, there were no Kentucky Fried Chicken, McDonalds and Donuts in the country but currently one’s can found several chains of fast food in every city (Ismail, 2016). According to Yahya et al (2013), the regular use of fast food items can lead its consumers to face several serious problems like dietary deficiencies, chubbiness, cardiac disorder, increase in cholesterol level, depression, asthma, diabetes and sexual dysfunction.

Thus, increasing consumption of fast food among teenagers not only causes serious physical or mental problems rather than becoming a constant threat to natural food items in Pakistan like fruits, vegetables, meats and whole grains which give a rich array of essential minerals, vitamins and antioxidants that make sure optimal health of teenagers (Shah et al, 2015). Further, consumption of natural food contributes to environmental sustainability and promotes more eco-friendly farming methods such as crop rotation, minimal chemical inputs and better land management which diminishes the negative aspects of food production on the environment (Rahman, 2023). While on the other hand, except of leaving a negative impact on the physical and mental health of teenagers, fast food seems to cause the environmental pollution also in terms of its packaging. Approximately 50% of plastic bags usually made from fossil fuels are being used for fast food packaging and discarded when thrown away but they persistent in the environment and take long time to decompose. As they do, they get broke into down micro- plastics that can easily access the food chain when consumed by, for example fish, leading to bio accumulation (Qadir et al, 2023).

From the above discussion, it is proved that fast food is a great threat to overall physical environment and needs to take practical steps to minimize its consumption. Now question arises what might be the reason behind the huge consumption of fast food among Pakistani teenagers. According to Hussain and Islam (2020), Fast food seems to be focused to target teenagers with great promotion tactics including delicious recipes and most attractive advertisements or commercials. The reason that why children are attracted towards fast food

is that one out of three advertisements promoting fast food aired during the children's programs, that's why not only children but adults also tempted towards eating low nutritional and unhealthy food (Neville et al, 2005). Meanwhile, the world of advertisement, the persuasive role of language cannot be denied as it has a great potential to affect readers, listeners and its watching audience' perceptions and behaviors about a particular product so, it would not be wrong to declare it sharper than knife (Widyahening and Hum, 2021). Critical discourse analysis is a great contribution done by Norman Fairclough (1995) to examine the way language is used within the purpose of getting and exercising power in the society. As he further asserted that language is a powerful tool to control societies. Further, the choice of words, the way these words are uttered and the context in which they are being used, always leaves a strong impact on the mind of their audience. They further argued that an ideology is also embedded with the text and it is the ideology around which the entire context of the situation revolves (Blomaert and Bulcaen, 2000). Importance of ideology in human life cannot be denied at all. In other words, it can be said that all actions done by human beings are the product of a certain ideology whether it is known or unknown. Whatever we think or do, there is always an ideology behind this (Hussain et al, 2022). Ideology is embedded in the advertisements or commercial s also.

In any field of business that an entrepreneur is engaged in, strategic marketing is required to promote that product. Thus in the world of marketing, advertising is considered as the spearhead of not only marking that item or product able to get survival in market rather than to become the main market of the particular society which later acts as the main consumer of that society (Leeuwen, 2015).

Meanwhile, Ecolinguistic is being perceived as an emerging field that deals with the impact of discourse on the system of supporting life on earth and a helpful tool to analyze advertising, consumerism and economic growth (Stibbe, 2014). The term has borrowed the concept of ecology from the natural sciences within a purpose to apply it to the study of language (Li et al, 2015).

Hence, the present study is focused to analyze the persuasive language of three fast food (Pizza, Zinger Burger and Nuggets) advertisements from ecological perspective. However, the research gap of this study is that so far in Pakistan, there is very less amount of work has been done on negative impact of fast food on the physical and mental health of teenagers and still a lot of research needs to be done within a purpose to create an awareness among masses about the negative impact of fast on their lives.

1.1 Research Questions

1. What type of stylistic features are being used in fast food advertisements within a purpose to persuade

teenagers towards the maximum purchase of fast food items?

2. What are the hidden ideologies that the makers are trying to convey through these advertisements?

2. Literature Review

Emodi (2011) asserted that people use language as a device in fast food advertisements within a purpose to promote their business and to gain the attention of the watching audience. Further, he argued that production, style and presentation of language of such advertisements vary from cultural to cultural and country to country. While making an advertisement or commercial, the makers keep in mind that the content should be according to ethics and morals of the particular society. According to Sinclair (1987), there are several ways of advertising that product like Magazines, Newspapers, TV Channels, Radio, Social Media, Posters and billboards. Hence, behind these attractive advertisements, the real purpose is to penetrate the features and ideology of that food item in the minds of its consumers.

Russel (2022) explored the different linguistic features in the fast food advertisements. Qualitative paradigm was applied by the researcher while the collected data was analyzed through the use of textual method. The study revealed that the language used in those advertisements is so powerful that it seems to control the minds of its consumers who find themselves helpless in terms of eating such unhealthy foods.

Akram and Saleem (2022) observed the language of advertisements under the lens of Fairclough's approach of critical discourse analysis and asserted that advertisements are being designed within an approach to convince the audience to buy their products and to fulfil this purpose, the main focus of the developers is to make the vast use of figurative language. The actual qualities of a product are so exaggerated that ultimately the audience gets convinced to buy that particular item or product.

Rahmah et al (2023) conducted a research to analyze the pragmatic aspect of fast food advertisements. The study used a qualitative approach and the source of data was comprised of several English fast food restaurants of Indonesia. However, the findings revealed that the meaning of the words usually depends on the context in which it is used and same happens with advertisements where an implied meaning is adjusted by keeping in view the particular context.

3. Methodology

The study is based on qualitative paradigm and the reason behind the selection of this particular approach is that it is widely acknowledged that the qualitative research is a flexible approach and always enables the researchers to get in-depth understanding of the phenomenon which the study is going to be investigated (Kumar, 2014). Further, fast food advertisements and commercials have been the source of data in this study

and a particular sample of fifteen advertisements of three fast food items such as Pizza, Zinger Burger and Nuggets (five from each) has been drawn through purposive sampling technique. Meanwhile, the collected data has been analyzed by applying the Fairclough's (1989) modal of critical discourse analysis.

4. Data Analysis

Product # A

Advertisement # 1



The ideology emphasized through the language of this advertisement, seems to promote a holistic approach towards the need of increasing the intake of Pizza and its making in a traditional way. The expressions of the girl in the advertisement, shows sensory pleasure and joy which attracts teenagers of her age to feel the same pleasure by its consumption. The word “indulge” from the advertisement refers to eating pizza as a delightful and luxurious act. This word focuses on fostering a mindful and positive relation with food. The phrase “handcrafted pizzas” shows pizza making details and the craftsmanship in its preparation which appeals to those who prefer handmade pizzas over machine production. The line “let your taste buds dance with joy” employs metaphor to make a sensuous experience related to the taste. It describes eating of a pizza as a cheerful and enjoyable experience.

Advertisement # 2



The ideology behind the toppers pizza advertisement is the consciousness, positivity and the moral values to its environment friendly production. The description mentioned on the advertisement; “every time we make pizza a dove is released into the world” by comprising symbolic and nature-oriented images. “Dove is released into the world” is a metaphorical expression that is associated with the peace and conformity. This symbolic sign suggests the eco-friendly practices of pizza making and the phrase “every time we make a pizza” suggests the same ecological techniques and approaches in its making.

Advertisement # 3



Description written on the advertisement seems to convey two distinct ideologies that blend the pleasure of eating pizza with the responsibility of its consumption. The phrase “satisfy your cravings” refers to the desire and pleasure of customers associated with the eating. Pizza satisfies their hunger and gives them inner satisfaction but also adds responsibility to consume it sensibly. The phrase “one slice at a time” suggests to eat it in a moderate way to avoid its wastage and without overindulging.

Advertisement # 4

<https://youtube.be/GUU8hegRfIU?si=sfM6-urD8jsdQBKE>



The ideology behind this pizza advertisement is the power of food to disintegrate the social barriers and to build strong relations with the community. At the start of the video, a couple is showed who goes to their

neighbor's house on the special occasion of 'Eid which indicates a sense of solidarity and collaborative celebration. Couple read the words 'no borrowing, no disturbance, no strangers' inscribed on engrave which indicates the unspoken boundaries within the community and the role of language to create relations. When the old neighbor opens the door and sees his hanged engrave lady says among these words 'no pizza' is not written which shows here the importance of pizza in bringing people closer to each other and transcending social boundaries. The aged man's acceptance and eating of pizza shows the power of pizza to bridge gaps and fostering community bonds.

Advertisement # 5

<https://youtu.be/aeJoVmGpjLY?si=o97VuJZ5C-a0KRPK>



This advertisement throws light on the ideology of societal attitudes towards food consumption. In the opening scene in a restaurant, a boy orders pizza and offers it to her girl friend but she takes one slice by saying that “she is on dieting and will have only one bite” which shows the perceptions of society towards physical appearance and food. The societal views about the body figure effects person's eating habits or behaviour. But after that she eats many slices which shows her going against the society perceptions and enjoying her food. But when she tries to have the last slice after eating all, boy stops her from taking that one which represents the societal etiquettes of sharing food with others.

Product # B

Advertisement # 1



The advertisement shown above, presents the ideology of desirability and conveys a sense of urgency. The word “stare” suggests that the burger is not only visually captivating but also appealing to taste it. The words “too long” urges the audience to take an immediate action to order it. The use of metaphorical phrase “you’ll miss the train” suggests that there is a limited time to avail this great opportunity. A person should not linger to admire this enticing burger but should seize the opportunity to taste it promptly. Moreover, the advertisement is created in such an appealing way that it increases the appetite of viewers and compels them to taste it.

Advertisement # 2



In this particular advertisement, by implying the use of metaphor advertiser draws customer's attention to the objectification of food. In the line "stop staring at me like I'm some piece of meat" there is a shift in perspective from taking burger as a commodity to a more meaningful thing. There is a need to accept its importance for us and to recognize the value of the ingredients which are used to makeup our food. This advertisement throws light on our conventional perspectives related to the food choice.

Advertisement # 3



The phrase “time to be proud” throws light on the eco-linguistic elements by citing a sense of pride related to the presented attributes and values of the product. This represents the making of each burger with the purpose of sustainability and eco-friendly practices while also appreciating consumers to feel proud for making its choice.

Advertisement # 4

https://youtu.be/Zd_Ep3EXbGU?si=VLLtGHdWLcdo0gRK



The advertisement presents the ideology of food choices and social interactions. The video starts with the opening scene of two friends eating burgers in a cafe delightfully which shows that this commercial promotes restaurants food consumption. But it is vital to keep in mind the environmental impacts of these cafes and restaurants such as food sources, packaging materials and energy usage in its making. After asking a wife from her husband if he liked the homemade dish which he and his friend hilariously called amazing which throws light on giving preference of restaurant made food over homemade. They use language facetiously to navigate culinary discussions.

Advertisement # 5

<https://youtu.be/DfRgl3seZis?si=eDljy0Vgr0pes05L>



The ideology which is presented behind this video is the role of language in changing our perceptions and beliefs related to the sustainability. In the very beginning a boy can be seen coming on a motorcycle which sets the stage for viewers to consider their choice of the transportation and its impact on the environment. When the boy tries to go inside the house the gardener's refusal to him shows the owner's pressure on him and the cleanliness and order which boy sees into the house reflects the environmental consciousness related to guests coming into house. After the boy's seeing the girl well dressed and prepared his emotional breakdown shows the impact of societal expectations on human behaviors. At the last when boy realizes the prank everyone enjoys fast food together which reflects the role of fast food in developing social relations. It also catches viewers' attention towards the fast food use, waste material and the variety of ingredient sources in its making.

Product C

Advertisement # 1



This advertisement presents the ideology of sharing food with the people and culinary enjoyment. The phrase “the taste you love” describes the sensory pleasure while consuming it. People feel overjoyed and happy when they taste these nuggets and it provides them with mental satisfaction. The phrase “made for the one’s you love” suggests the care and love with which nuggets are prepared. While preparing quality ingredients are used and ethical considerations are always kept in mind. It encourages consumers to share food and create

pleasant memories with family and friends. Food sharing builds strong relations among people and brings them closer.

Advertisement # 2



This advertisement conveys the ideology of our commitment to environmental responsibility. The phrase “helping the planet” suggests that the use of these nuggets is related to the environment well-being. The phrase “one bite at a time” refers to every consumer’s effort to environment protection. Even a single consumer can contribute in making a positive impact on the environment. It also refers that consumers small intake results in less wastage of food, less trash of boxes and proper use of other sources. It appeals to those who prefer sustainability in their food selection.

Advertisement # 3



This advertisement refers to the ideology of plant based products and their dietary aspects. The phrase “plants in a language we all speak nugget” not only refers to the nature of nuggets and the ingredients used in its production but also to the universal acceptance of these plant based products. The statement “made with plant protein 33% less saturated fat,” catches attention to the health conscious and environment aware consumers.

The line “100% as nugget” suggest that despite using plant based ingredients these nugget still have the same taste of the traditional nuggets. These nuggets are good both for the consumers’ health and the environment.

Advertisement # 4

https://youtu.be/ODaqU80V650?si=gcQ-CnBVgz_TMjND



This nuggets video advertisement starts with a mother picking her kids from the school when her son asks her mother to go to the Macdonald’s for eating something. This highlights the role of consumer’s decision what he wants to eat and where he wants to go for eating. After that mother begins to think about the delicious taste and quality of these nuggets which reflect how our language perceptions shape our food choices. The whole procedure of making nuggets such as using halal breast chicken, quoting with spices and then their freezing raises awareness about the preparing procedure and ingredient sources among eco-conscious consumers. Then mention in the video that when the customers come to eat on fast food points nuggets are freshly fried and served which reflect fast food chains efforts to minimize food waste.

Advertisement # 5

<https://youtu.be/1X-fPHvE87U?si=V2dsHqxlST5zmG1I>



At the start of the video a mother is seen energetically dancing and taking frozen nuggets from the fridge and then cooking in the oven which emphasizes on the convenience of such food. From ecological perspective this emphasis on the use of energy and the packaging waste material used in the frozen and packed foods. Then

the family coming together and enjoying nuggets suggest the importance of food in building strong family relations. The description of nuggets in the video as “crispy and juicy” which is used to commercialize it in the market appeals to the senses of the viewers. It also arises questions about the ingredients used in nuggets making crispy and juicy.

5. Findings & Discussion

The study was conducted to analyze the language of fast food advertisements to reveal the fact that what sort of vocabulary is being used to convince its consumers towards the maximum purchase of such items and from the analysis, it became evident that to boost the persuasive aspect of these advertisements, the makers have made the vast use of figurative language that helped them a lot to trigger the emotions and craving of the teenagers for the maximum consumption of Burgers, Pizza and other fast food items. So, throughout the analysis, hyperbole, simile and metaphor were the three most dominant stylistic features. Further, the second main question of this research was to trace the ideological pattern of such advertisements, where the researcher found that different ideologies were observed to be embedded in those commercials and advertisements including ideology of having a quality time, they get them realized that if the consumers want to spend a good time with their family or dear ones, they have to ensure the maximum consumption of such food items that will make their family happy and will strengthen their bond with each other. Secondly, fast food seemed to be introduced as symbol of luxurious life, in short, to get their economical targets, the developers have tried a conscious attempt by leaving a ground for their consumers to think that, maximum consumption of fast items is the only way that can raise their social status and make them proud among their friends. Thirdly, the makers seemed to make a psychological appeal to their consumers that is if they want to get their food ready in few seconds plus with a delicious taste then only this is the best option in the world. In this way, fast food consumers and specially the teenagers blindly increase the intake of fast food in their lives without caring about how such unhealthy items food affect not only their physical and mental health but the overall environment. Fourthly, fast food items appeal to the consumers’ senses in such a way that they feel that restaurants made food is better than their homemade.

Future Recommendations

1. The study leaves the ground for the future researchers to apply the same theoretical strategies while conducting their research on some other fast food items.
2. The researchers can go for the real data to observe the ration of fast food consumption among Pakistani College and University students.

6. Conclusion

The study has successfully revealed that how persuasive techniques are being used in fast food advertisements and commercials and all these techniques seemed to be shared a common purpose that is to convey a certain ideology or making some sort of psychological appeal to persuade teenagers to make the maximum purchase of Burgers, Pizza and Nuggets. While, behind making the vast use of figurative language is to create a strong effect in their appeals and at the same time, it is a conscious attempt to control their eating behaviour or attitude in a positive way. Moreover, these commercials are advertised in such a way that they appeal even the eco-conscious people and divert their attention from the excessive use of food sources, packaging trash and energy sources and their impact on the environment.

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