

Analysis of the Style of English and Graphics Used on Select Flyer Advertisements of Antiseptic Soap Products

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Abstract

Advertisers tend to pass messages to consumers, using different styles, to draw their attention to the products being advertised. This paper examined the stylistic features used on select flyers of antiseptic soaps in Nigeria. It determined and analysed the lexical, syntactic, graphological, graphitic features and the context of situation as used on the studied flyers. The corpus consisted of four flyer adverts of Dettol and Delta soaps accessed online. The data was analysed using the descriptive content analysis approach, which focuses on linguistic levels such as syntax, semantics, lexis, and grammar. The study reveals that pictures, symbols and colours are used as backgrounds to supplement the context necessary for the interpretation of the written text on such flyers; and that some illustrations of advertisements tell a story themselves. The results also show, font wise, a frequent and deliberate use of upper and lower cases; and that the lexical means used is represented by common, concrete, everyday vocabulary. The syntactic structures in the analysed advertisements mostly comprise of simple sentences, adjectival and nominal phrases. The study concludes that the language of flyer advertisement is highly concentrated with several layers of linguistic processes, devices, and elements in varying proportions to create the desired communicative effects.

Keywords: Flyer Advertisement, Graphetics, Graphology, Style, Stylistics

Introduction

Advertisers tend to pass messages across to the audience to draw their attention to the products being advertised. They do that, mostly, using vague language to manipulate or influence the buyer. This paper explains such language features to deconstruct the vagueness as used on selected flyer adverts on antiseptic soap products.

Vagueness is a common linguistic phenomenon in advertising. Channel (1994) in Cutting (2007) makes it clear that an expression is vague if (a) it can be contrasted with another word or expression which appears to render the same proposition, (b) it is purposely and unabashedly vague or (c) the meaning arises from intrinsic uncertainty. Dyer (1995) points out that the primary aim of advertising is to attract our attention and dispose us favourably towards the product or service. The copywriter works on the charm of language to attract the reader's attention and ensures the accuracy of the information by properly applying vague language. In essence, this explains why vague language helps the advertiser to keep a good balance of exaggerated attractiveness and faithfulness. Vague language is defined as words or phrases 'which deliberately refer to people and things in a nonspecific, imprecise way' (Cutting, 2007).

Advertisement, according to Bittner (1989) is a form of communication intended to promote the sale of a product or service to influence public opinion to gain political support, to advance a particular cause or to elicit some other response desired by the advertiser. James (2002) asserts that advertisement is a salesmanship on mass basis employed when the use of direct person to person is impracticable, impossible, and moreover in-efficient. It is however to be distinguished from other activities intended to persuade the public such as propaganda, publicity, and public relations.

The channels through which advertising messages are disseminated are numerous and varied. In Nigeria, for instance, the major media for adverts include newspapers, radio and TV, billboards, signboards, magazines, periodicals, window displays, handbill posters, and so on. The linguistic techniques applied by advertisers include devices in language such as repetition, metaphors, similes, and graphics on print media. These techniques are employed to create persuasive messages - the language style of advertisement.

The stylistic features of the language of adverts tend to be short and simple. Onochie (2000) observes that every stretch of words in the advertising slogan could be easily communicated and clearly understood as they are serving the public. The language is therefore short, simple, informative, and persuasive.

This paper, therefore, explores the stylistic features of the advertising slogans used on such advertisement flyers to ease the difficulty consumers encounter in the interpretation of the intended messages as used on them.

Style

According to Leech (1969), style is the way in which something is spoken, written, or performed. This definition refers to the word use, sentence structures and figures of speech as manifestations of the person speaking or writing. Leech and Short (1989) believe that the word 'style' has an uncontroversial meaning. It refers to the way in which language is used in each context by a person for a given purpose. Haynes (1992), states that style is a structural choice between alternatives. According to him, style operates in consonance with the context because it is a situation sensitive concept in three broad steps namely: the field, mode, and tenor of discourse.

In its most general interpretation, the word style has a rather uncontroversial meaning. It refers to the way in which language is used in each context, by a given person, for a given purpose. One source of disagreement has been the question "To what or whom do we attribute style?" In the broadest sense, style can be applied to both spoken and written, both literary and non-literary varieties of language; but by tradition, it is particularly associated with written literary texts. If a definition to style be given, it may suffice to say of it briefly as 'the linguistic characteristics of a particular text' (Leech & Short, 1989). Text, therefore, is the most natural starting place for the study of style.

Stylistics

Stylistics is generally termed as the study and interpretation of texts from a linguistic perspective. As a discipline, it links literary criticism and linguistics but has no autonomous domain of its own. Stylistic studies look at texts from the domains of advertising, politics, religion, etc. (Mustapha, 1999). Syal and Jindal (2008) define stylistics as the branch of

linguistics which takes the language of literary text as its object of study. Chapman (1982) views stylistics as the study of language which is adapted to meet the peculiarities of situations, attitudes, and relationships in specific acts. Mode (2015) in Osuji (1982) is of the view that linguistics makes a taxonomic analysis of how language works, while, according to him, stylistic analysis, on the other hand, examines how linguistic devices are used to portray and reinforce the meaning of a text. Widdowson (1975) defines stylistics as the study of literary discourse from a linguistic orientation. According to Freeman (1971), stylistics is a sub discipline which started in the second half of the 20th Century. It is often seen as the logical extension of moves within literary criticism to concentrate on studying texts rather than authors. To Leech and Short (1989), stylistics is simply defined as the linguistic study of style which is rarely undertaken for its own sake. It is an exercise in describing what use is made of language.

Levels of Stylistic Analysis

This paper is concerned with the following levels of stylistic analysis:

- i. **Graphology:** the study of handwriting as a means of character analysis (Wales, 2001). In other words, it refers to the writing system of a language as manifested in handwriting and topography. Writers have, over time, made experiments on the aspect of written medium for expressive purpose and effects.
- ii. **Graphics/Graphetics:** graphics, according to Crystal (2003) is the combination of text, illustration and colour which may consist of deliberate selection, creation, or arrangement of typography alone, as in a brochure, flyer, poster, website, or book without any other element. He further explains that graphics is a branch of linguistics that is concerned with the analysis of the physical properties of shape used in writing. It can be functional or artistic, which can be a recorded version such as a photograph or an interpretation by a scientist to highlight essential feature of an artist. On the other hand, Leeuwen (2002) views graphetics as a synchronic description of colour as a semiotic mode which features like: grammar, lexis, photographs, charts, and illustrations as concrete pictorial means of expression.
- iii. **Lexico-Syntax:** a compound word formed by combination of two words – lexis and syntax. Wales (2001) explains that lexis means words, used more technically for vocabulary or diction – the total vocabulary that make up a language or the body of words known and used by a particular person. Syntax, according to Tallerman (1998) is a ‘sentence construction’: how words group together to make phrases and sentences.
- iv. **Rhetorical Devices:** rhetorical devices are employed in literary works for beautification. They are integral part of language even when they are considered as ornaments in such works. Rhetorical devices abound in advertisements. According to Bai and Shi (2002) rhetorical devices never fail to create aesthetic pleasure in audience while at the same time catch their attention and force the product being advertised into their memories.

Gang (2002) explains that in a complex society such as ours, consumer goods are necessary and very important, and the whole, they have been a welcome development in the modern world. But along with commodities are the needs of information about them, about their price, function, durability, uses, quality, etc. these kinds of information help us to make wise and rational consumer choices. He queries whether consumer advertisement gives enough or

indeed any accurate information, and whether the economic function of advertisement is so vital that one cannot afford to do without it whatever the cultural, social, or personal drawbacks?

Advertising Style

As one of the branches of the media, advertising has its own style with linguistic features that are identifiable from other genres. Bittner (1989) describes advertising style as a mass communication effort to create favourable image or impression of the advertising firm and its products through careful selection of the best suitable language to make their business communicative and persuasive to achieve their desired effect.

Crystal and Davy (1989) outline stylistic features of the advertising slogan at graphitic level such as the title (written in capital letters or bold), pictures, font size, colour and others which are used for the purpose of communication and fast interpretation of special information and clarity.

Methodology

Being a corpus based study of select flyer advertisements on antiseptic soap products, the data was collected by accessing online flyers that advertise the products under study from the websites of the promoters: Reckitt Benckiser Nigeria at www.rb.com/nigeria, Orange Group Limited - Nigeria at www.orangegroups.com. The collection was therefore based on accessibility and availability. This consisted of four (4) flyer adverts on Dettol and Delta antiseptic soap products. The advertisements that made up the corpus were labelled flyers one to four (1-4)

Corpus of the Study

Flyer number	Flyer title
1	'Dettol Re-energize'
2	'Dettol Cool'
3	'Delta Regular'
4	'Delta Herbal Soap'

Data Presentation and Analysis

The data is presented and analysed based on the graphitic and graphological, the lexical as well as the syntactic features used on the selected flyers. This represents a cross-section of variety of pictures depicting various linguistic properties with different persuasive effects used for special purposes. Generally, the language is laudatory and positive, emphasizing the uniqueness of the products. The vocabulary tends to be concrete and vivid. The analysis below demonstrates specific instances of this general view. The data was examined and analyzed according to the linguistic processes, devices and or elements that characterized the corpus. Each appendix was analysed separately and under the headings: Graphetics, graphological, lexical, and syntactic styles.

Flyer number 1: 'Dettol Re-energize.'



Graphetics:

The promotion of ‘Dettol Re-energize’ is spread in a sky-blue shade. It mirrors a bar of Dettol soap with a headline, ‘turn up the energy of your day’ on it, and at the bottom, a clear splashing water. The most noticeable part of this advert is bottom right where two slices of orange, likely to raise the reader’s curiosity, are seen. The close relationship between the visual image and the verbal text is emphasized by the choice of colour: the whole picture is put into a shade of orange and sky blue which represent the fruit flavor and clarity, while the brand name is contrasted in blue colour surrounded by green. The two slices are also seen on the pack dipping in orange-colored water. This, and the color of the writing ‘turn up the energy of your day’, also represents the citrus flavor of the soap. The brand name reinforced on the top right of the bar with the word ‘new’ and below it the word, re-energize.

Graphological style:

Graphological arrangement in advertisements plays a very important role in drawing people’s attention, making it outstanding among other products advertised. In this advertisement of “Dettol”, larger, capital, and bold letters are used in the headline to draw the attention of the buyers, make them curious about what this advertisement mainly says and thus leads them to develop a desire to know more about this product and finally reaches its goal of persuading them to buy it. And at the same time, there is an italicized word “re-energize” on the bar soap, which makes it more conspicuous from those big words and distinguished from other words. These words contain special meaning. They make the headline more like the face-to-face conversation and the advertiser speaks to the readers in a persuasive tone, making the advertisement more reliable and reassuring. The brand name, “Dettol”, and the word “new”, both written on the bar, provide more information about the product and furthermore showcase the product as new with assurance of making the user’s whole day energetic. Compared with the headline, the letters on the bar are the smallest. This shows sharp graphological contrast, making this advertisement eye-catching, clear and in good order.

Lexical style:

The words used in this advertisement are of Anglo-Saxon origin. There are ten (10) legible words in all and one of them, has at least three syllables, not including inflections or compounding (Qian, 2006)). The word is: energy. Since “Dettol” is a brand of antiseptic bar soap, word such as “energy”, a noun which represents the vigour and vitality one needs for

the day-to-day activities on the advertisement, makes this kind of antiseptic bar soap more assuring to prospective buyers from the fear of getting bacterial infections and staying healthy and germs free all day long.

Another feature at the lexical level is that this advertisement uses the affirmative and commendatory words such as “turn up, and “re-energize”. The purpose of showing these words is to impress the potential customer to the quality of the product and make them form a positive image of the product in their minds and win their trust to the product and finally arouse their desire to buy it. Thirdly, possessive pronoun “your” is used: “TURN UP THE ENERGY OF YOUR DAY”. This use of possessive pronoun obviously sounds like face-to-face talk, making the conversation warmer, more friendly, and trustable in tone, and finally strengthens the appeal to the readers. Reading the advertisement, the readers may probably be persuaded and stimulated and finally agree with what the advertisement says with strong desire for the product being advertised.

Furthermore, to achieve the aim of “soft sell”, an adjective “new”, which is also the feature of most advertisements, has been used. It is a comparative adjective used in this advertisement to give the readers the feeling of exaggeration.

Finally, the transitive verb “turn” which is hyperbolic, as used in the advertisement, gives the reader a feeling of a great day ahead when this product is used as the bathing soap in the morning before going out for any business. The noun “day”, as used in the advert is deliberate. This is to manipulate the prospective buyer to believe that he will have a healthy and germs free day at home or elsewhere when he uses the product.

Syntactic style:

In this advertisement, there is only one sentence, and it is a simple sentence. The sentence serves as a convincing sentence, providing related information on the benefit of the product. This sentence is short in length with a total number of seven words only. The average sentence length in English is 17.6 words (Leech & Short, 1981). Sentence length is usually regarded as one of the linguistic markers measuring the degree of formality: the greater the sentence length, the more formal the language. So comparatively speaking, from the respect of sentence length, the language used in the advertisement is a little bit less formal.

Furthermore, the sentence is an imperative one. The subject of the sentence is understood. The complete sentence is “Turn up the energy of your day”. It is a kind of persuasion which makes it easier for others to accept. It is novel, concise, outstanding, eye-catching, and distinct; at the same time, it has achieved its function of inspiration and persuasion.

Flyer number 2: ‘Dettol cool’



Graphetics:

The promotion of Dettol Cool is spread in a sky-blue shade. It mirrors two bars of Dettol soap, one in a pack and the other out of the pack, with a headline on the top right corner, 'FEEL THE BURST OF MENTHOL New Dettol Cool Be 100% sure'; and by its bottom part, a splashing water and lot of ice blocks. The most noticeable part of this advert is the unpacked soap that falls into collection of the ice blocks which may likely raise the reader's curiosity. The close relationship between the visual image and the text is emphasized by the choice of colour: the whole picture is put into a shade of sky blue which represents clarity, while the brand name is contrasted in blue colour surrounded by green. The brand name is reinforced on the top left of the advertisement with the word 'Dettol' with a sword in the background.

Graphological style:

In this advertisement of "Dettol", larger, capital, and bold letters, mixed with smaller letters and figures, are used to draw the attention of the buyers, and make them curious about what this advertisement mainly says and thus may lead the readers to be curious and develop a desire to know more about the product; and finally persuade them to buy it. And at the same time, there is a figure "100" and a percentage sign within the writing, which makes it more conspicuous and distinguished from the words. The words contain special meaning. They make the writing a kind of face-to-face conversation and the advertiser speaks to the readers in a reassuring tone. The brand name, Dettol, and the word 'new' both written on the bar provide more information about the product and furthermore showcase the product as new with assurance of making the user cooler and energetic after, for instance, a hectic day. Compared with the first four words, the fourth, 'MENTHOL', is bigger and more pronounced. This indicates an emphasis that the product, even though an antiseptic soap, is meant to make the consumer feel cool and relaxed when used. It also shows sharp graphological contrast, making this advertisement eye-catching, clear and in good order.

Lexical style:

There are fourteen (14) words in all. The feature at the lexical level here is that this advert uses the affirmative and commendatory words such as "feel the burst, and "be sure". The purpose of using these words is to impress the potential customer to the quality of the product and likely make them form a positive image of the product in their mind and win their trust to the product and finally arouse their desire to buy it. Thirdly, descriptive adjective "cool" is used: "FEEL THE BURST OF MENTHOL New Dettol **Cool** Be 100% sure". This use of the adjective makes the conversation warmer, more friendly, and trustable in tone, and likely strengthens the appeal to the readers. Reading the advertisement, the readers may probably be persuaded and stimulated and finally agree with what the advertisement says with strong desire for the product being advertised.

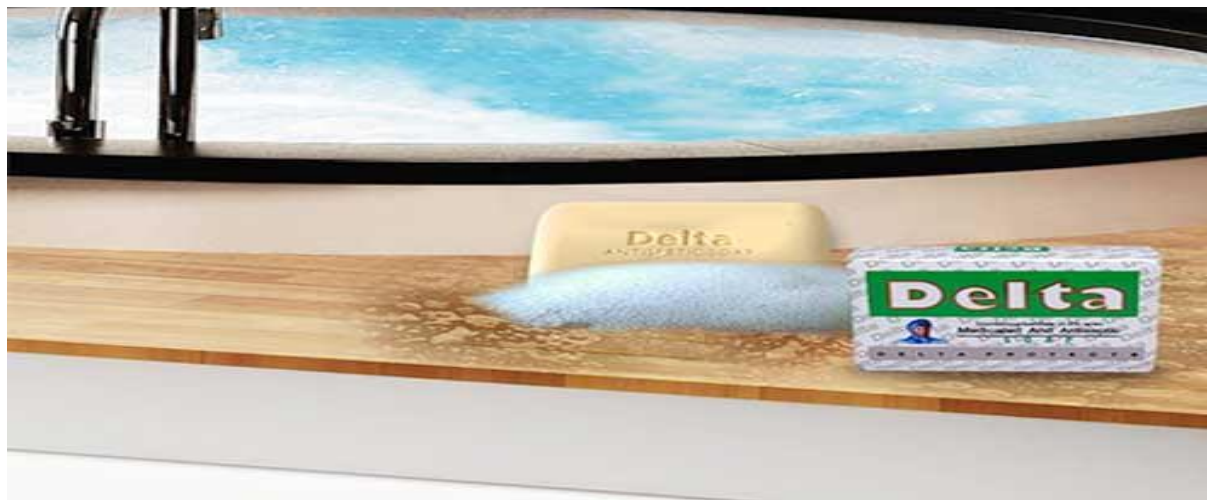
The verb "feels", which is commanding, gives the reader a feeling of great relief when this product is used especially after the business of the day. The noun "menthol", as used in the advert is deliberate. The prospective buyer will believe that he will have a cool day at home or elsewhere when he uses the product. In "Be 100% sure", the verb 'be' assuring the buyer that the product being advertised is designed to make him cool all day or all night long.

Syntactic style:

In this advertisement, there is only one sentence, and it is a simple sentence. The sentence serves as a convincing sentence, providing related information on the benefit of the product. This sentence is short in terms of length, with a total number of ten words only. Furthermore, the sentence is an imperative one – it subtly commands the consumer to use the product and

be cool. The subject of the sentence is understood. The complete sentence is “Feel the burst of menthol Dettol cool, be sure”. It is a kind of persuasion which may be easier for others to accept.

Flyer number 3: ‘Delta regular’



Graphetics:

The promotion of Delta Regular soap shows a bar of Delta soap on a heap of foam near a bathtub. An enclosed bar is also seen adjacent to the one on foam with the name, ‘Delta’ boldly written on it; and by its bottom left, a picture of a queen with the words ‘medicated and antiseptic soap’ written near her. The two bars are on an area called soap holder, a finished Formica. At the background is a bathtub with foamed water that looks like a clear sky. Two taps that run warm and cool water are also seen. The whole scenario depicts an after-bath situation where the water remains as clear as the sky with moving foam. This is probably to raise the reader’s curiosity. The close relationship between the visual image and the brand name is emphasized by the choice of colour: the whole picture is put into a shade of brown and sky blue which represent nature and cleanliness. The brand name is contrasted in white colour surrounded by green.

Graphological style:

In this advertisement of “Delta Antiseptic soap”, larger and small letters are used on the bar to draw the attention of the buyers and likely make them develop a desire to know more about this product and persuade them to buy it. Compared with the brand name, the letters under it, as appeared on the bar, are the smallest. This shows sharp graphological contrast, making this advertisement eye-catching, clear and in good order.

Lexical style:

There are five (5) legible words in all. The two words: ‘medicated’ and ‘antiseptic’ portray this kind of antiseptic bar soap assure the prospective buyers of staying healthy and germs free all day long. The purpose of using these words is to impress the potential customer to the quality of the product and make them form a positive image of the product in their mind and win their trust to the product and finally arouse their desire to buy it.

Syntactic style:

In this advertisement, there is no single sentence but phrase, ‘medicated and antiseptic’. This serves as a convincing phrase providing related information on the make-up and benefits of the product. It is a kind of persuasion which is likely easier for others to accept. It is

outstanding, eye-catching and distinct; at the same time, achieved the function of inspiration and persuasion.

Flyer number 4: 'Delta herbal soap'



Graphetics:

The promotion of Delta Herbal soap shows two bars sandwiched between two fresh Aloe Vera plants, one leafy and the other leafless, with dripping water from it. This signifies bathing with the soap as good as using herbal remedies on one's body. The wrapped bar is also seen with the inscription 'Feel the Herbal Freshness of Delta' boldly written on it; and by the right a picture of a cloth less lady, possibly a queen, displaying a fresh and smooth body which signifies the effect of using Delta Herbal. To the left of the bar is a picture of a growing fresh plant with the words 'luxury soap' running parallel at the edge on the left side. On the unwrapped bar are the words 'Delta ANTISEPTIC SOAP'. The two bars are on green spread with a clear top. This is to conform to the reader's inherent love of natural settings. The close relationship between the writing, visual image and the brand name is emphasized by the choice of colour: the whole picture is put into a shade of green and white which represent nature and freshness. The brand name is contrasted in white colour surrounded by green.

Graphological style:

In this advertisement of "Delta Herbal soap", larger and small letters are used to draw the attention of the buyers and likely make them develop a desire to know more about this product and persuade them to buy it. Compared with the brand name, the letters around it, as appeared on the advert, are the smallest. This shows sharp graphological contrast, making this advertisement eye-catching, clear and in good order. The last two words in 'Delta ANTISEPTIC SOAP' written in upper case give prominence to the nature of the soap as opposed the brand name, for emphasis. Figures are also written, running through the woman's body, to indicate the dates of production and expiry.

Lexical style:

There are thirteen (13) legible words in all. The verb 'feel' is a soft persuasion from the advertiser. The adjective 'herbal' denotes the natural appeal of the product. The nouns:

‘freshness’ and ‘luxury’ complement the natural appeal. The purpose of using these words is to impress the potential customer to the quality of the product and make them form a positive image of the product in their mind and win their trust to the product and likely arouse their desire to buy it.

Syntactic style:

In this advertisement, there is only one sentence, and it is a simple sentence. The sentence serves as a convincing sentence, providing related information on the benefit of the product. This sentence is of average length with a total number of ten words only. Furthermore, the sentence is an imperative one – it subtly commands the consumer to use the product and be fresh. The subject of the sentence is understood. The complete sentence is “Feel the herbal freshness of Delta herbal”. It is a kind of persuasion which makes it easier for others to accept. It is eye-catching and distinct; at the same time, likely to achieve its persuasive function.

Results and Discussions

Graphetics:

It is clear from the analysed data that pictures are used as background to supplement the context necessary for the interpretation of the written message which typically takes the form of block language. However, it has been proved by the analysis that some illustrations of advertisements tell a story themselves. Advertisements of antiseptic soap products seem to be different, in comparison with other aseptic or beauty soaps promoted on flyers, particularly in featuring their protective power against various skin diseases. Moreover, symbols play an important role in advertisement, since they “can be relied on to have predictable associations for particular groups, giving readers a sense of belongings and recognition” (Goddard 2002). In the analysed materials, the colours play a significant role. They depict cleanliness, smooth skin texture, weather condition, nature, emphasis, as well as situational events. In term of brand names and logos, most of them are foregrounded for reinforcing effect.

Graphological level:

In general, texts of advertisements are well known for the use of upper and lower cases; and these features have been identified in the studied materials. The typeface and its layout are not much utilized but rather the power of the antiseptic soap promotion is placed on the picture, where the products are displayed, and the illustrations arouse the temptation to use them.

Lexical level:

Printed advertisements accentuate mostly the visual aspect of the illustration. Lexical means used in printed advertisements is represented by common, everyday vocabulary, rather concrete than abstract. Adjectives are considerably represented words class in the field of advertising. Their function is to describe specific qualities and features of promoted products. The most common adjective, used for different promotions, is ‘new’ with its meaning of innovated or invented. Also in the analysed materials, this adjective was several times presented with reference to improvement. Nouns were also much utilized in the analysed data. Monosyllabic words are primarily used; polysyllabic words, however, are not exceptions.

Syntactic level:

The dominant syntactic structures among the analysed advertisements are simple sentences, adjectival and noun phrases. The head words, in noun phrases, were typically pre-modified by adjectives that are ordered from the most evaluative to the most specific one. The informative function that foregrounds the quality and availability seems to be more powerful in the advertisements than a straight urge for buying. The verb omission together with the colloquial words and expressions creates the impression of an informal friendly atmosphere and a close relationship between the advertiser and the potential customer in conversational style. The pronoun 'you' and 'your' reinforce the closer relationship as they directly address the reader. Another aspect of informality and familiarity is the use of imperative mood that calls the reader's attention and urges him/her to an action. On the other hand, the advertisements consist of full sentences giving precise information and they are characterized using specialized vocabulary which stresses the seriousness of the matter.

Conclusion

This paper shows that flyer advertisements of antiseptic soap products constitute a special variety of English with its own distinctive characteristic features. It presents an interesting platform where the various segments of both verbal and non-verbal language are utilized to achieve different modes and levels of persuasion crucial for positive and gainful advertising. This, perhaps, points to the fact that flyer is a good medium of advertisement because the graphics alone, even when the subject matter of the written text is not understood, allow the prospective buyer to succumb to the appeal of the images and develop interest to the products being advertised. This study concludes that the persuasive language of the flyer advertisement is highly concentrated with several layers of linguistic processes, devices, and elements in varying proportions to create the desired communicative effects.

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