

A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF SELECTED FRENCH FAST FOOD ADVERTISEMENTS

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Abstract

Advertising is a powerful tool used by businesses to influence consumer behaviour, often through carefully crafted linguistic and visual strategies. This study applies Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine selected French-language advertisements for fast food, focusing on how language, imagery, and persuasive strategies influence consumer perception. Using Fairclough's three-dimensional framework, five online advertisements were purposively selected and analyzed to uncover dominant themes and ideologies. Findings reveal that French fast food advertisements employ hedonistic appeals, cultural references, and branding strategies to build emotional connections. The discourse normalizes indulgence while downplaying health concerns. This study contributes to advertising discourse by providing insight into the persuasive power of language in shaping food consumption choices. It also contributes to the field of research in the language used in advertising fast food.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Advertisement, Fast Food, French Language

1.0 Introduction

Advertising plays a significant role in shaping consumer culture by influencing perceptions, desires, and behaviours. Within the fast food industry, advertisements go beyond product promotion to construct meanings that align with broader socio-cultural and economic discourses. Through language, imagery, and semiotic elements, advertisements shape consumer attitudes toward fast food, linking it to notions of pleasure, convenience, affordability, and lifestyle choices (Cook, 2001). According to Shirinboyevna, (2020), advertising language develops harmony with issues of social life thereby creating relationship between social lives. Advertising language also changes styles and break the conventions. Owoeye. (2010) and Irina et al. (2019) established that French language is needed for competitiveness in the international labour market, local and national values. On this basis, language has many roles to play in advertisement. Leech (1966) examines how language is used in British advertising to persuade and attract consumers. He identifies various linguistic strategies, such as the use of superlatives, comparisons, and emotive language which are employed to create positive associations with the product and influence consumer behavior.

Discourse in advertising goes beyond the simple use of language to sell products or services. It involves understanding the broader social, cultural and ideological frameworks that advertisements operate within. Some scholars observed that advertisements do not exist in a vacuum, they reflect and shape societal values, beliefs, behaviours, identities, and power structures (Fairclough, 1989).

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is an approach to studying language, which focuses on how discourse reflects, reinforces, or challenges power and ideology in society. It goes beyond the surface meaning of texts to reveal hidden social meanings and structures. According to Odebunmi (2006), CDA sees language as a form of social practice that shapes and is shaped by its context. Through CDA, researchers are able to dig dip into specific narratives and discourses to ask questions of ‘how’ language and visuals are used and ‘why’ such narratives are created which promotes political intervention and social change (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997).

Existing research and identified gaps in critical discourse analysis of advertising have largely centered on Western markets, where fast food brands often dominate. There is limited research on how French language advertisements construct meaning, reinforce ideologies, and influence consumer behaviour. The existing analyses often focus on stylistic and semiotic features but do not critically examine the power dynamics, social implications, and hidden ideologies embedded in these advertisements. This gap underscores the need to critically analyze the discourse in French advertisements in order to leverage the aspect overlooked. Thus, a critical discourse analysis was chosen to provide insights into how French advertising texts influence and shape consumer behavior and brand perception and ideology.

Fast Food Advertising

Fast food advertisements strategically employ persuasive linguistic and visual techniques to attract consumers and construct positive associations with their products. For instance, euphemisms and positive framing are commonly used to rebrand fast food as an enjoyable and socially acceptable choice (Lazar, 2006).

Moreover, French fast food advertisements often integrate cultural and linguistic nuances to appeal to their target audience. Barthes (1977) emphasizes that advertising is a semiotic system, where visual imagery, colors, and symbols play a crucial role in meaning-making. In French advertisements, this can be observed in the way brands incorporate gastronomic traditions, local flavors, and language-specific rhetorical devices to establish a sense of authenticity and appeal to national identity (Lévi-Strauss, 1966).

Some scholars like; Nigar et al. (2022) critically analyze fifty (50) slogans of the persuasive language of hotel and fast food restaurants advertisements. Their findings posit that common words convey different meaning in terms of vocabulary choice. The linguistic features such as abundance words (*more; less; fast*), empowerment word (*imagine, magic, power*), emotional appeal (*feel, love, smile*) and excitement word (*live, cool, wow,*), convey positive attitude toward the readers and project unique difference among advertisers. Aporbo. (2022) further examines the linguistic features of fast-food advertisement using the three dimensional model of Fairclough to analyze a corpus of fifteen (15) fast-food advertisements. He concluded that, there are propaganda techniques used such as direct address, imperatives, personal pronoun and many more at textual level while celebrity, advertising jingles, and endorsement (etc.) were used to explain its processes as it focuses on individual.

The fast food advertisements reviewed are different from this study, though, related in terms of linguistic features, however, this study focused on discourse, which is a broader way of language use and the linguistic features analyzed, using CDA, Fairclough models.

1.1 Research Aim and Questions

This study aims to analyze the discourse of a selection of fast food advertisements in French, focusing on their linguistic, visual, and ideological elements. By applying CDA, the research was guided by the following questions:

4. How do linguistic and semiotic choices shape consumer attitudes toward fast food?
5. What discursive strategies are used to construct fast food as appealing, desirable, or even “healthy”?
6. How do these advertisements reflect broader societal trends, such as globalization and cultural identity?

1.2 Methodology

This study employs qualitative, interpretive research design, utilizing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the primary analytical framework to uncover the discourses, implicit meanings and ideologies embedded in fast food advertisements. The research focuses on five purposively selected online fast food advertisements in French, ensuring that the selected samples are representative of key discursive themes in fast food marketing. Fairclough (1995) asserts that discourse is socially constitutive, meaning that advertising language does not simply reflect reality but actively shapes consumer behaviors and beliefs. Similarly, van Dijk (2008) argues that media texts—including advertisements—are a form of soft power, subtly persuading audiences through repeated exposure to specific discursive patterns.

ii. Data Collection

Data on fast food advertisements were gathered from the online advertisements of the following restaurants: Burger King, Master Poulet, La Patterie, Chez Louis Poulet et Pizza, and McDonald's, found on slogans website. Each advertisement was downloaded and the linguistic and visual features classified as verbal and non-verbal texts. Also, the discourses in the advertisements were identified.

2.0 Theoretical Framework: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Critical Discourse Analysis, as developed by Fairclough (1995), van Dijk (2008), and Wodak (2001), provides a framework for understanding how language functions as a tool of power and persuasion in different socio-economic contexts. Fairclough (2003) argues that advertisements do not merely describe products but construct consumer identities by embedding messages within wider cultural frameworks.

Similarly, van Dijk views advertising discourse as a form of “soft power” that subtly manipulates consumer attitudes through repetition, emotional appeal, and ideological framing. Machin and Mayr (2012) further elaborate on how visual and textual choices in advertising contribute to discursive power, reinforcing dominant ideologies about food consumption, globalization, and lifestyle choices.

This study is therefore guided by the Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA framework, which consists of:

- Textual Analysis – Examining word choice, slogans, sentence structures, and persuasive strategies used in the advertisements.
- Discursive Practice – Exploring how the advertisements shape and are shaped by broader media and marketing discourses in French.
- Social Practice – Interpreting how the advertisements reflect and reinforce larger social, economic, and cultural ideologies, such as globalization, fast food consumption, and health perceptions.

3.0 Analysis and Results

3.1 Textual analysis

The linguistic features and visual elements used in the five selected advertisements are:

3.1.1 Online advertisement 1 (Burgar King)



Slogan: A deux pas d'ici - *Two steps from here.*

Burger king uses short, simple and direct message, thereby creating a sense of proximity and accessibility.



3.1.2 Online advertisement 2 (Master Poulet)

Slogan: Il est frit, il a tout compris - *It is fried and contains all*

The advertiser used complete and conventional sentences to inform the target customers/readers that all classes of food that make a balanced diet formed the content.

3.1.3 Online advertisement 3 (La Patterie)



Slogans :

1. Nos recettes à emporter ! - *Our recipe for takeaway*
2. Partagent l'amour de la pomme de terre – *Sharing the love of sweet potato*

The advertiser employed possessive adjectives and phrasal verb in the first slogan to strengthen the relationship between the restaurant and its clients. The second is an invitation to share from the love offered through their services.

3.1.4 Online advertisement 4 (Chez Louis Poulet et Pizza)



Slogan :

3. Venez manger en famille, du poulet, on en a pour tous les goûts ! Bonne Action de grâce – *Come and eat chicken of every taste in our family! Grace in action.*
4. Conseil de l'action de Grace. LE POULET, c'est bien meilleur que la dinde – *Simple advice, CHICKEN is better than turkey.*

The Louis Restaurant, used imperatives to send its invitation as well as its advice to the readers.

3.1.5 Online advertisement 5 (McDonald's)



Slogans :

5. Le grand VEGGIE, IMPROBABLE MAIS VRAI ! - *great veggie, improbable but true !*
6. GOURMAND, Sauce au pesto rouge – *greedy, red pesto sauce*
7. GÉNÉREUX, Galette panée aux légumes et à l'emmental français – *Generous, round coated and flat cake with pulses, red sauce and French cheese.*
8. Votre santé, évitez de manger trop gras, trop sucré, trop salé– *For your health avoid eating too much of oil, sugar and salt.*

McDonald, used various qualifying adjectives like: 'gourmand', 'généreux' to attract, bribe and allay fear from the mind of his readers. The use of the verb 'éviter' and the adverb 'trop' shows that the restaurant is concern with the health status of its customers

3.2 Discourse Analysis of Selected Advertisements

3.2.1 Online Advertisement 1: Burger King

- **Slogan:** *À deux pas d'ici*
- **Discourse Features:**
The expression "*à deux pas d'ici*" suggests closeness, which reinforces the idea of convenience, thereby establishing a sense of familiarity and local identity.

3.2.6 Online Advertisement 2: Master Poulet

- **Slogan:** *Il est frit, il a tout compris*
- **Discourse Features:**

This slogan uses rhyme (*frit* and *compris*) to make it catchy and memorable. The phrase humorously implies that fried chicken is a smart and complete meal choice. It persuades consumers by suggesting the meal is both balanced and satisfying.

3.2.7 Online Advertisement 3: La Pâtisserie

- **Slogans:**
 1. *Nos recettes à emporter!*
 2. *Partagent l'amour de la pomme de terre*
- **Discourse Features:**

The use of *nos* fosters a sense of ownership and community. The imperative *à emporter* highlights convenience. Meanwhile, *l'amour de la pomme de terre* adds emotional resonance, framing food as an experience of love and sharing.

3.2.8 Online Advertisement 4: Chez Louis Poulet et Pizza

- **Slogans:**

1. *Venez manger en famille, du poulet, on en a pour tous les goûts ! Bonne Action de grâce.*
2. *LE POULET, c'est bien meilleur que la dinde.*

- **Discourse Features:**

The imperative *venez manger* serves as a direct invitation, while *en famille* appeals to traditional family values. The contrast between *poulet* and *dinde* emphasizes product superiority, engaging in market competition discourse.

3.2.9 Online Advertisement 5: McDonald's

- **Slogans:**

1. *Le grand VEGGIE, IMPROBABLE MAIS VRAI !*
2. *GOURMAND, Sauce au pesto rouge*
3. *GENEREUX, Galette panée aux légumes et à l'emmental français – Generous, r*
4. *Votre santé, évitez de manger trop gras, trop sucré, trop salé*

- **Discourse Features:**

The slogan *improbable mais vrai* builds curiosity. The adjectives *gourmand* and *généreux* suggest richness and abundance. The health advisory message reflects responsibility while calming health-conscious consumers. McDonald's balances indulgence with corporate care.

4:0 Social Practice in the Advertisements

The social practice found in the advertisements analyzed are:

1. Promotion of Consumerism and Food Culture

The advertisements promote food not merely as sustenance but as a lifestyle symbol. Words like *gourmand* and *généreux*, or expressions like *à deux pas d'ici*, promote indulgence, satisfaction, and accessibility, reinforcing consumerist ideals.

2. Persuasion through Linguistic Strategies

Imperatives (e.g., *Venez manger*) and superlatives (e.g., *meilleur*) showcase power dynamics, where advertisers attempt to shape consumer desires. McDonald's health advisory also reflects an effort to align with public health discourse while maintaining commercial appeal.

3. Construction of Cultural and Social Identities

Advertisements reflect and shape social identities. McDonald's emphasizes national pride with *emmental français*, while Chez Louis references Thanksgiving (*Action de Grâce*), reinforcing cultural values, family bonds, and traditional celebrations.

4. Market Competition and Brand Positioning

Each brand crafts its image through contrast and differentiation. Chez Louis promotes chicken over turkey, and Master Poulet promotes its product as nutritionally complete. These strategies reveal how fast food chains compete in a capitalist market.

5. Normalization of Convenience Culture

Phrases like *recettes à emporter* mirror contemporary urban lifestyles where fast service is valued. Advertising not only reflects but helps normalize quick meals and convenience, shaping public dietary behavior and expectations.

5.0 Discussion and Findings

The analysis reveals that French-language advertisements employ persuasive linguistic strategies such as, imperatives, humor, adjectives, and emotional appeal to connect with target audiences. Each ad projects a unique discourse identity:

- **Ad 1:** Establishes familiarity and local presence.
- **Ad 2:** Emphasizes completeness and satisfaction.
- **Ad 3:** Projects warmth and community connection.
- **Ad 4:** Embodies tradition and family values.
- **Ad 5:** Combines indulgence with health consciousness.

These findings align with van Dijk (2008) notion of advertising as a form of "soft power" that subtly influences consumer behavior through repetition, emotional appeals, and ideological framing. By doing so, such discourse normalizes fast food consumption, presenting it as both desirable and culturally embedded.

6.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

The analysis shows that French-language fast food advertisements use persuasive language such as imperatives, humor, emotional appeals, and cultural references to shape consumer behavior and reinforce brand identity. Each ad reflects broader social values like convenience, family, health, and indulgence, positioning fast food as both desirable and culturally acceptable. The following suggestions are for further considerations:

5. **Advertisers** are advised to continue using culturally resonant and emotionally engaging language to strengthen audience connection.
6. **Consumers** are encouraged to critically evaluate advertising messages and recognize persuasive strategies.
7. **Health advocates** should promote balanced messaging in food ads to support informed dietary choices.
 5. Future research could explore how advertising strategies vary across cultures, how social media influences food ads, how different audiences respond to them, and how health and sustainability messages are shaping modern food marketing.

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