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# THREE DIMENSIONAL FRAMEWORKS ON IRANIAN HERBAL MEDICINE ADVERTISEMENT

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#### **Abstract**

Not only are quality and price important features for products, but environmental awareness or social commitment has a critical function in convincing target audiences in buying the products. Therefore, the present study takes into account the language used in the advertisements for herbal medicines in Tehran, Iran. The researcher considers critical discourse analysis (CDA) as the theoretical framework and empirical grounding for the advertisements of herbal medicines. To this end, using a qualitative approach, the data are collected from the words, phrases, clauses, and sentences of the advertisements through a questionnaire in which 45 participants were involved. The researcher used Fairclough's (1992) three dimension framework for the investigation of the advertisements in the cases of textual features, discursive features, and social features. The investigation displays the results of the language used in the advertisement for this study. Findings from the study point to the fact that there is a close relationship between the advertisement discourse and the sale of these products. Considering the social practices, the language in the advertisement has control or power over people. Moreover, the advertisement, not the product per se is the selling point and has control or power over the target audience. The findings of this study can contribute in other areas and offer some implications in the research considering the discourse analysis of advertisements.

**Keywords:** advertisement, CDA, herbal medicine, social practices, textual analysis.

#### Introduction

Since the onset of creation of humans, one of the most important issues for all societies was human health. The subject of herbal medicine has been increasingly paid attention in medical searches in basic health services in the last two decades (Geest, 1997). In the same line, Villarino and Marina (1997) assert that advertisement is regarded as 'persuasive discourse' due to the fact that the language used in it, to a large degree, is impacted by a systematic means of communication. Moreover, Cook (2001) believes that the linguistic components of advertisement manifest the social practices involved in it and the content of this mass media informs or encourages its readers, or viewers to take steps on products, and its services. On the other hand, van Dijk (2003) argues that advertisements can be in many different forms such text, audio, video, photography and graphic designs and can be created through radio and television, magazines, newspapers, stage shows, websites, billboards, posters, wall paintings, cars, etc. On the other hand, the happening of them is a lot as though they have become part of the everyday texts in the lives of most people in Tehran, Iran.



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Carefully analyzed the language in advertisements, we can achieve a variety of methods that the producers of them utilize to manipulate their intended audiences. However, some of them require a deeper reading and understanding. Also, some of them are involved in power differences using misleading techniques to absorb the target audience. Some of the examples are the use of testimonies, the naming of some of the herbs and medicines used, the use of titles such as 'Professor', and 'Doctor', as well as the use of a variety of stylistic devices. These power differences shown in herbal medicines claim to have solutions to all the problems their patients might have (Stillar, 1998).

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) considers ideologies, stated and reproduced via discourse. In Tehran, like many other communities in the world, religious ideology impacts many people's choices to find solutions to some social or health-related problems. Due to this fact, this paper uses CDA to demonstrate how the producers of the advertisements try to deceive their readers and how their advertisers search for ways to impress and convince people to buy their products using language; Foucault (1975) declared that great promises are best shown through language. Based on the aforementioned issues, this paper tries to analyze the discourse used in herbal medicine advertisements in Tehran, regarding their linguistic features, discourse strategies, and the social features used in the advertisements for them.

# 2. Literature review

#### 2.1 Background

Advertisement has a long history going back to 1950s and its objective was hard merchandising products using some techniques (Vahid & Esmae'li, 2012). Harris and Seldon (in Kangira 2009, p.39) considered it as a public notice 'designed to spread information with the view of promoting marketable goods and services'. Based on this view, Lund (in Vestergaard & Stroder, 1985) maintains that most advertisements are based principles in which they draw attention, attract interest, so as to get the attention of the consumer for buying. Therefore, they create a form of convincing communication which, according to Bredenkamp (in Kangira 2009, p. 39), is 'a process of communication in which a communicator succeeds in voluntarily forming, sustaining or changing the attitudes of a recipient in accordance with what the communicator intends to achieve by his or her message'.

Nowadays, advertisement has a significant function in communicating messages. As an inherent component of our daily life, it involves in different affairs, such as the creation of ideas and shared knowledge, dealing with attitudes, values and opinions having roles in cultures (Sinclair, 1987). This social practice interconnects many different variables together whether it is person and object, or symbol. Therefore, we cannot differentiate its content from culture (Jhally, 1987). Also, Ruiz (2014) believes that it has a special genre affecting everyone. On the other hand, Morgenstern (2002) argues that herbal healing has an ancient history in the field of natural medicine through the generations. Herbal medicine, as a system of medical treatment or traditional medicine, improves well-being. This botanical medicine is turning out to be more an accepted beliefs in clinical research in preventing illness.

In addition, Schiffrin (1994) contends that discourse is 'a particular unit of language' or 'a particular focus on language use' (p.20). Critical discourse analysis (CDA) puts emphasis on the manners discourse structures serve, verify, legitimate, or dispute connections of power and dominance in society. Thus, in the case of herbal medicine this kind of analysis can be applied to consider how advertisers put themselves as being more powerful than other clients through the language used in the advertisements. In addition, the emphasis of CDA studies is placed on social problems and political issues. Furthermore, it



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attempts to elaborate on them in terms of characteristics of social interaction, and particularly social structures (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Also, Van Dijk (2003) considers genres as conventional schemas involving in various categories.

Today, herbal medicines as an ideology are created by advertisements. Their advertisements usually convince people to a large degree that what they believe is true (Kaur, Arumugam, & Yunus, 2013). On the other hand, O'keeffe (2001) contends that recipients of such discourse may not respond immediately to the producers because it is a form of interaction between customers and producers thereby we should consider and investigate their discourse critically. Furthermore, Williams (2003) maintains that we should examine intertextual components in advertisements and usually the genres that individuals follow happen purposefully; this shows that advertisers are familiar with the characteristics of their addressees and know how they should form their messages both visually and linguistically.

Many studies are conducted to investigate how different linguistic strategies in advertisements convince viewers to buy the products (e.g., Baykal, 2016; Brown & Knight, 2015; Coupland, 2007; Duncan & Klos, 2014; Jerslev, 2017; Machin & Leeuwen (2007); McLoughlin, 2013; Wilińska & Cedersund, 2010) and online ads (Harrison, 2008; Mullany, 2004). Researchers analyzed different methodologies to consider the multimodal texts of herbal medicines advertising, like social semiotic theory Machin & Thornborrow, 2003; McLoughlin, 2013), and systemic functional grammar (Chander, 2015; Wilińska & Cedersund, 2010). Moreover, due to increasingly wide influence of advertisements, they invokes many methods for analysis such as quantitative, qualitative social scientific approach, critical theory perspective or postmodernist approach (Ahmed, 2000). Besides, Bloomfield and Newmark (1963) argued that through taking into account the historical context, CDA tries to determine wide, socially shared patterns of meaning and identify how social inequalities are shown and produced in language.

#### 2.2 Semiotics in Advertisements

Semiotics is concerned with how visual and linguistic signs and symbols produce "meaning", and it has a significant function in the connection between discourse and ideology. Another point is that the photos used in advertisements act as a system of signs that create form and meaning to real life. The verbal mode and visual modes of communication used in advertisement are interlinked. By using signs such as colors, photos and words, they can express meaning. The rate of this expressing meaning is related to effective uses of these symbols and signs so as to persuade the customer to buy the product (Najafian & Dabaghi, 1991).

#### 2.3 The use of Language to Manipulate

Language is a system of communication that is a useful and capable means of socialization and social intercourse in Bloomfield and Newmark's (1963) opinion. According to Arens, Weigold and Arens (2011), communication scholars, consider an advertisement as "a form of structured, literary text". In the same line, Fairclough (2007) maintains that language is what it is since it enacts in a social structure and this language has functions of the positions in which people use within a specific social system. He further adds that producing messages offers the impression that the more influential and dominant group manipulates language. This is what Van Dijk (2009) regards as *power* in discourse and Wodak and Meyer (2009) take into account *social domination* in CDA. In the same vain, Hall (in Wetherell, Taylor, & Yates, 2001) considers it as putting ideas into practice and modifying others' behaviors through



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discourse. Therefore, it is the power of some groups in order to access to particular forms of discourse and in the case of herbal medicine in Tehran we can see it is the 'power' of its advertisers to persuade and convince people to buy their products.

Similarly, Tabolt, Atkinson and Atkinson (2003) contend that 'power is exercised through language in ways which are not always obvious' (p. 5); it is 'naturalized' and thus acted indirectly and by the generation of 'common sense' through a process of hegemony. Consequently, Tabolt et al. (2003) assert that any text or any use of language show the others special manners deliberately determined by the creator of that text, or by whoever uses that language, such as the reporting in the media for advertisements. This is also true for advertisers of herbal medicines who claim to have the power to solve such problems. Since advertisement in mass media communication is one-sided, the producers of such communication make benefits of their positions to enact and propose their power, attitudes and values over their target audience. They know that the target audiences do not take part in the creation of the messages in the advertisements. Thus, it is not difficult for the creators of media texts to find manners to manipulate their target audiences' perceptions of particular situations.

Due to the fact that in the Tehran context, where the belief in traditional forms of healing and herbal medicine is increasingly improving, it is not difficult for its advertisers to attempt to employ written language in the advertisements so as to manipulate their target audience. The other important factor in discourse, according to Van Dijk (2003), is 'control' involving aspects of the setting (time and place); ongoing action (including discourse and discourse genres); participants in different communicative, social or institutional functions; as well as their goals, knowledge, opinions, attitudes and ideologies. There are some techniques used to gain credibility in claims of herbal medicines so that it can solve innumerable problems. Some cases consist of respectable titles such as 'Dr.', 'Professor' or 'Prophet'. This aspect of discourse happens either at the global level or at contextual level. Thus, Van Dijk (ibid) maintains that 'all levels and structures of context, text and talk can in principle be more or less controlled by powerful speakers and such power may be abused at the expense of other participants' (p. 355).

In the same line, some advertisers use other techniques/ strategies in order to attract the addressee. These techniques/ strategies are pathos, logos, and ethos. By using pathos, they try to elicit an emotional response in the consumer. These emotions can be in positive or negative modes. For example, *a person healed from back pains after buying some herbal medicines*. Logos is a claim to logic or reason, and ethos is a claim to credibility or character. On the other hand, power is not considered as 'absolute'. What's more, Lamb, Hair, McDaniel and Klopper (2008) note that advertisement cannot change society as much as some may dread since it cannot manipulate strongly held beliefs. Therefore, advertisers of herbal medicine in Tehran cannot take it for granted that their advertisements will be accepted and received by their target audience without any question.

Put more simply, the theoretical framework and empirical grounding of the advertisements for herbal medicines can be considered in critical discourse analysis (CDA), which is an analysis on the relationship between language and all the components involved in the usage of language or context of its use. Norman Fairclough (1989) proposed the notion of CDA, believing that the restrictions of discourse analysis are in the lack of a fully refined social orientation to discourse, and little attention to interpretation. Meanwhile, he regards CDA as a type of social practice in which power and ideology are interlinked to each other. This kind of analysis tries to go deeper in language studies together with social theory in which there is a bilateral connection between discourse and social structures due to the fact that discourse has an impact on social agreement and at the same time, these structures affect discourse (Fairclough, 1992). On the

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other hand, van Dijk (2003) described CDA in different ways through the existence of a relationship between discourse and power in CDA, and considered social power abuse, dominance and inequality.

Similarly, any mode of advertisements can use social dominance, power abuse or inequality from a discursive standpoint to modify social practices (Tahmasbi & Kalkhajeh, 2013). However, the language employed in advertisements may delude people either consciously or unconsciously (Bloor & Bloor, 2007). All of these procedures in advertisements may lead to generating frameworks of meaning, modifying understanding and creating social sorting (Vahid & Esmae'li, 2012). Most probably, the study of advertisements is becoming more important as Ahmed (2000) argued. He points out that analysis of advertising and other media tools are growing and different analysis methods have been utilized such as quantitative, qualitative, interpretive perspective, the modern social scientific approach, critical theory perspective or postmodernist approach.

# Methodology

#### 3.1 Participants

Even though it was a difficult task, the study was carried out randomly and 45 persons from different parts of Tehran, Iran, participated in this study. They were people who bought some products of herbal medicines via advertisements. Moreover, the participants signed a consent form for participation in the study.

# 3.2 Research Design

Based on Fairclough's (1992) three dimensional framework, the researcher used a qualitative research approach. In this approach, he investigated the advertisements of herbal medicines in terms of the description of textual analysis, interpretation of production and reception, and explanation of social conditions which influencing production and reception.

#### 3.3 Material

One questionnaire each with a 5-point Likert scale was adopted from Lin (2013) to explore the participants' perspectives and opinions. For the purpose of the present study, the reliability of the scale in each questionnaire was calculated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient estimate; the reliability of the questionnaire was acceptable, i.e., it was .70. This implies that the instrument used in the study enjoyed good internal consistency and therefore high reliability. Moreover, the validity of the instrument was confirmed by expert judgment as five university professors in the field of applied linguistics approved its validity. Next, participants, who voluntarily accepted to participate in the study were ensured that the data they provide to the researchers would be kept confidential and anonymous.

# 3.4 The Procedure and Data Analysis

The researcher used advertisements for herbal medicines distributed in parts of Tehran using Fairclough's three dimensions in CDA to investigate the study. In the first phase, the researcher considered linguistically the analysis of visual texts. Then he studied how the objects are created and obtained. In the last phase, he examined the historical and social processes engaging in the advertisements for herbal medicines in Tehran (Appendix 1).

Data for this study were gathered by collecting advertisements of herbal medicines through documents and content analysis. Then, their content and language were investigated using CDA. This analysis



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included information on different advertisements of herbal medicines in Tehran. The researcher considered CDA using Fairclough's three dimensions of discourse analysis to evaluate various messages in the advertisements in terms of content and style. In this way, the way particular discourse structures were used in the creation of social dominance, and whether the discourses constitute aspects of a conversation, a news report, or other news genres and contexts are investigated; that is, at one level power, dominance and inequality between social groups were examined and at the other level, language use, discourse, verbal interaction and communication predominate were investigated.

#### **Results and Discussion**

As is seen in the figure below, there are three dimensions in Fairclough's model and all of them are closely interconnected to each other. These dimensions are 1) description of textual analysis, 2) interpretation of production and reception, 3) explanation of social conditions which affect production and reception. As Halliday (2014) believes CDA could be said to emphasize language as discourse or social practices – not language per se, but as a system of meanings and practices that construct a particular version of reality.

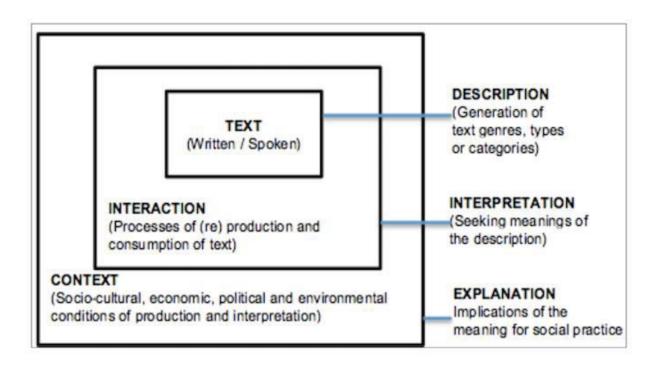


Figure 1. Fairclough's three dimensions of discourse analysis (1992, p.25)

In terms of the first dimension of Fairclough's model, the researcher considered the analysis of visual texts. He regarded the term "text" both in the form of linguistic features as in clauses and sentences, and in the form of images, or colors. The task of the way the object was produced and received by people constituted the second dimension. In this dimension, the researcher took into account the questions such as "Who produced the object? And "For what is the goal its production?". In the third dimension, the researcher determined the social practices which influences the production and reception. That is, he



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investigated the historical and social processes involved in it. Based on type of the text, the sequence of materials, and their visual components, the researcher fully focused on the first dimension. Regarding the second dimension, the connection in various aspects processes at the level of production and reception were put into emphasis. Finally, in the last dimension, the people's culture, and economic and social background in Tehran were investigated.

Based on Titscher, Meyer, Wodak, and Vetter's (2000) views, in the phase of analysis of text, the researcher scrutinized its linguistic features, and content and form used in language. The written mode of language was put into emphasis as analysis of text. As a social practice, the language explains certain realities. The researcher only focused on the use of pronoun, adjective, disjunctive syntax, conjunction, parallelism, repetition, mood choice, and modality in the analysis of the text used in the advertisements. Also, the researcher determined advertisers' standing in conveying their messages in the products through the use of pronoun in the advertisement so as to absorb and convince individual people for using their product. In the same line, they may employ personal or possessive pronouns directly or indirectly in delivering the message to target addressees. This kind of implication of pronoun was considered as relational value which improves a friendly situation to convince the addressees. For instance, advertisers employ personal pronoun we and you, which is in connection of power and solidarity (Fairclough, 1996). He said that the use of the second-persons pronoun (we and you), is the relationships of power and solidarity (p. 127).

In the same line, the researcher considered "adjectives". It is one part of speech playing a significant function in advertisements and delivers a positive or negative affective meaning (Delin, 2000). That is, *adjectives* explain and describe customers' views about the products. Therefore, this outcome using adjectives conveys the evaluation of individuals from an advertisement. It can be in the form of positive or negative evaluation. In the other phase, the researcher examined the different kinds of adjectives in the form of gradable and non-gradable ones. The former explains the qualities that can be measured in degrees, and the latter elaborates on the features present or absent in the advertisement (Kaur, et al., 2013).

In the other phase, the syntax of advertisements is analyzed. It is a sentence without verbs or subjects; this strategy used by advertisers creates a conversational style. These sentences only include one or two grammatical items in order to draw the attention of the customers. Moreover, they display the close connection between advertisers and their addressees (Kaur, et. al., 2013). Finally, the cohesion connecting sentences was examined. Cohesion is utilized to cause the words, opinions, and paragraphs come together closely. (Faiclough, 1996). Fairclough further adds that sometimes, parallelism occurs in the advertisements which is the use of two or more similar grammatical phrases or clauses in sentence. They are used for aesthetic, simplicity, effectiveness, and persuasive goals. On the other hand, the major interpersonal system of the clause is used as the mood involving declarative grammatical question, and imperative. They supply interactants in the dialogue with the resources for offering or demanding a product in the form of information or services (Halliday 2014). This perhaps explains why Wodak and Meyer (2009) conclude that CDA is not interested in investigating a linguistic unit per se, but in studying social phenomena which are necessarily complex and thus require a multidisciplinary and multimethodical approach. The results of descriptive statistics for sections of the general attributes are given in the table below.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Sections of the General Attribute



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I.	General attributes		Poor	Adequa te	Goo d	Excelle nt	Me an	
A	Text analysis		%	%	%	%		
			11.3	20.1	68.1	9.5	2.7	
В	Interaction/ interpretati on							
		C. Social context	9.4	15.6	64.7	10.3	2.7	
			9.8	13.2	59.7	14.3	2.6	

As the table suggests, most of the participants believed that the advertisements meets their needs and chose 'good' as their responses in the questionnaire.

In the advertisements investigated for this study, some categories were determined. They were composed of the headings of the advertisements, the titles and names of the herbalists, categories of problems which the traditional healers claimed to solve, as well as the themes running through each advertisement. Some examples of such topics are: 'The best traditional doctor in town', 'Stop suffering' and 'Get all your problems solved.' The topics obviously have the power to attract the attention of the readers, and are memorable. In CDA, topics formulated in this way create a power imbalance between the herbalists/traditional healers and their clients, in the sense that if someone who is socially inclined to believe in traditional healing sees an advertisement calling on him/her to stop suffering, he/she is likely to give in to such an attraction. These are in line with Tabolt's et al. (2003) assertion that the powerful discourses can modify the less powerful ones by using their power through discourse in ways which are not immediately obvious.

In some advertisements, the painting of a patient before being cured and after it shows the effectiveness of the treatment. In all cases the proposed solution to these problems was to buy the given products, whose name appeared at the advertisement. The use of subtle 'formal' structures also employed to improve the discourse of those producing the advertisements, and seems to aim at achieving the traditional healers' intentions—without the traditional healers explicitly stating those intentions. This is in keeping with some scholars' view (e.g., Downing, 1984; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Nesler, 1993; Wodak, 1997) who argued that CDA addresses social problems and discourse is a form of social action.

# **Conclusion**

According to Ruiz's (2014), advertisements are ubiquitous and impact everybody. Therefore, it is important to investigate them critically, particularly the ones associated with our lives. The advertisements related to herbal medicines in Tehran took into account close efforts on the part of their producers and advertisers in order to draw the attention of target addressees. These deliberate endeavors are obvious notes only in the content and language of the advertisements, showing the understood power mismatch between the producers of the advertisements and their potential customers. The content mostly relates to the individuals' health and social problems in different social classes to persuade them to buy the products. Due to the centrality of some of the cases related to advertisements to everyday human existence, the advertisers carefully determine their ideas in terms of the discourse by demanding to be able to solve their problems. Furthermore, Fairclough (1992) maintains that there is a close relationship between discourse and social structure and the discourse of the investigated advertisements is increasingly tied to the social, historical, economic, and cultural structures of people in Tehran. This is due to the fact that their developers and makers really recognize the characteristics of their audiences and whereby design the advertisements accordingly.

Based on Foucault's opinion, the advertisers use discourses showing the production of knowledge and meaning. These features can be used by the powerful means in society to determine and regulate institutions that identify how people relate to each other. Certainly, parts of these advertisements can convince just the gullible, because parts of them are blatantly ludicrous. However, on the whole advertisements have control or power over the intended customers and addressees. Furthermore, this study can be investigated fully and in other areas to obtain through results. Unquestionably, despite some limitations of the study, in terms of implications, the findings of the study can be thought-provocative; it can motivate the researchers, advertisers and others who involved in them. Likewise, further quantitative and qualitative studies present more obvious and accurate results.

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# Appendix 1:





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