

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The creative use of language in advertising is at the most persuasive form in that it allows the ability and dexterity of advertisers and copywriters in manipulating the language with the objective of attracting as well as influencing the targeted audience. Analysing advertisements as a discourse examines the context of communication that takes into account various and specific parameters: text and context identified by Cook (2001). According to Langrehr (2003), this includes paralanguage accompanying advertisements since it “consists of various forms of rich nonverbal communication that serve to make implications. This paralanguage functions to express attitudes and emotions as well as social and cultural sensibilities.” Furthermore, in the words of Cook (2001: 71): “Paralanguage interacts with language and on occasion outweighs it”. An example of this can be found in advertisements where different elements such as voice over, colours, storyline of advertisements and spokespersons play a role in conveying message to the target audience or consumers.

Advertisements are usually perceived as overt manifestations of propaganda with the main aim of promoting a commercial product or service (Nelson, 1996). As men and women tend to have different wants and needs (Vestergaard & Schroder, 1985), advertisers use different propaganda devices in their advertisements to target different genders as their consumers. Past studies carried out on gender and advertisements tend to support this view (Bartsch, Burnett, Diller & Rankin-Williams, 1999). Recent studies have shown that gender stereotypes are still present in the advertisements despite

modernisation and changes in society today (Cejka & Eagly, 1999; Rudman & Kiliansi, 2000). Portrayals of the gender in advertisements seem to suggest the existing presence of the traditional gender stereotyping of the both sexes (Craig, 1992).

In view of the elements mentioned above, this study proposes that to be effective advertisements rely on applying various propaganda devices, paralanguage and stereotyping to influence different gender groups. The influence of gender used in the television advertisements collected will be analysed based on both linguistic and non linguistic elements employed by advertisers who aim to facilitate the connection with the specific target audience thereby allowing their message to pass through.

This study attempts to identify the language used in advertisements by the telecommunication companies (hereafter referred to as Telcos) to target their audience through the application of specific propaganda strategies and stereotyping. The analysis will include the identification of issues pertaining to gender influence used by advertisers in relation to the gender of the target audience. Television advertisements are chosen as corpus as they appear in the most creative forms of both visual and auditory stimuli to tease the consumers.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Advertisements by telecommunication companies make use of various strategies to connect with a specific target audiences, it is therefore relevant to identify these strategies and the elements used by the advertisers. One of the underlying elements in the various strategies used by the advertisers centres on the employment of gender to advertise their goods and services.

This study is carried out for two reasons. First, is to bring awareness to the public as consumers of products and services so that they become informed consumers by being conscious of the strategies of the propagandist via television advertisements and not to be influenced to consume unconditionally. Second, most studies on advertisements are from the perspective of advertisements as a persuasive tool. However, this study will propose that the advertisements are in fact propaganda; one of covert forms of persuasive strategies employed by propagandists to influence their audiences.

1.3 Objective of the Study

The objectives of this study is to identify propaganda devices used in the television advertisements of telecommunication companies and to investigate the extent to which gender is 'propagated' in these local television advertisements. The study of advertisements includes both verbal and visual elements. Therefore, it is essential to identify and understand the linguistic and non-linguistic features used by the propagandists in these Telco advertisements with the underlying aim of persuading consumers.

Therefore, the research questions of the study are:

1. What are the gender influences employed in the advertisements to target audience of specific gender?
2. What propaganda devices are found in advertisements of local mobile phone service providers for male audience?
3. What propaganda devices are found in advertisements of local mobile phone service providers for female audience?

The above questions aim to guide the present study in investigating the use of gender stereotypes in advertisements. The presence and influence of advertisements cannot be denied. In the words of Cook (2001): “Advertising is everywhere and nowhere...presence of advertising seems unshakable and secure.... People grow up with it and grow used to it, so that even it’s perceived as an evil it is also perceived as inevitable and unremarkable.” The influence can be seen in the reactions of the public towards advertisements which fall within the spectrum of indifference to scepticism.

Furthermore, every action, thought or communication can either be positively or negatively influenced by gender stereotypes presented in advertisements. The manner how one gender interacts with another varies based on past experiences and exposures. These past experiences and exposures are socially and culturally bound as they are subjected to the current accepted and expected norms which may reflect the gender stereotyping of the society. As a result, gender stereotypes are socially and culturally prescribed ‘guidelines’ which every member of a community is expected to adhere to as violation of these social and cultural norms may result in one’s segregation from the majority.

1.4 Research Methodology

Television advertisements are chosen as data of this study as they appear as one of the most creative media forms with both visual and auditory stimuli. Advertisements have become a major part of daily television viewing. They have evolved from being a mere source of entertainment and information to a vehicle to influence targeted audience. These functions are made possible with the technical advancements in the media

technology as well as the development in the mass communication studies. The development and multitude of research carried out in the field of psychology on the audience as consumers and on target groups have helped advertisers modify their advertisements. Our consumption habits, life style and the choices are results of influence in one way or another by these advertising campaigns, the ever present giants of our modern society who are investing a considerable amount of resources to understand their potential consumers.

The two main television channels: TV3 and NTV7, were chosen primarily for their national coverage. The recordings of local television advertisements on mobile phone service providers were later rearranged according to the telecommunication companies concerned.

The collected television advertisements will be first identified in view of the gender influence found in the form of the gender of spokespersons, topic of discussion and role portrayal of the two genders. The next level of analysis involves the identification of the individual propaganda devices found in advertisements in relation to specific gender audience. These two analyses will be based on the linguistic and non-linguistic features employed in the advertisements.

From the perspective of gender influences, the analysis will examine the language used by the different genders, the stereotypical roles and attitudes portrayed by the personalities and/or images in the advertisements. In other words, from the linguistic perspective, gendered communicative styles of both male and female personalities in the advertisements will be analysed to identify the influence of gender stereotypes. The study will also identify gender representations found in the data used by advertisers.

Other non-linguistic elements found such as spokespersons or personalities and voice over will be observed as well.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study of advertising strategies in terms of the propaganda devices used is significant for consumers of products and services. With the knowledge and understanding of these strategies and the in-depth understanding of the language, we may begin to analyse objectively and critically this piece of socially and culturally controversial and economically motivated product, created with the expressed intention to increase consumption by changing human behaviours. With the ever changing world due to unceasing technical development and pursuit of excellence, the public have become lax in analyzing and viewing various stimuli encountered in the daily activities. Consumers have become non analytical in consuming products and services without further thoughts or questions. By understanding the language and strategies of advertisements consumers can begin to make informed choices or decisions rather than being persuaded or influenced by propagandists.

On the other hand, a critical study and analysis of advertisements may help future copywriters and advertisers in the pursuance of their occupation. These students who are venturing into the advertising world may begin to understand the intricacies of producing effective advertisements by looking into all the factors involved such as language, strategies, target audience and medium of transmission.

In addition, this study may be used as a platform to bring awareness to the teachers and students both as academicians as well as consumers in that as responsible and rational

consumers we should become more conscious, objective or critical in viewing and understanding advertisements by analyzing them via linguistic and non-linguistic elements used in the advertisements.

Another significant reason is that the study of advertisements is a part of analyzing the language in the real world of advertising. From this linguistic point of view, the study of language used in advertisements brings awareness to the richness and flexibility of language in use by creative and purposeful applicators of the language in the field of advertising. With this awareness safeguards and constraints can be proposed to avoid the manipulation of the mass by a minority. At the same time an analytical and critical study of advertisements is one of the moves one can employ to understand a society and its culture which in turn become a part of sociological studies into the human population. In a broader sense we could begin to understand a society or community through critical analysis of its advertisements as these reflect the current preoccupation(s) and culture(s) of that society. Hence, a better understanding of a particular culture or society will not only create mutual respect between cultures and societies but it facilitates a connection for a more harmonious cooperation across borders.

The results of this study may provide invaluable resources for the purpose of understanding human nature and may provide an example to the public cum consumers' thought processes. The extension of this particular study could be to discover if there exists differences in the different genders due to variation of gendered stereotypes in line with the current direction where the studies on language and gender take into account the context of the exchange or discourse. This present direction observes the multiplicity and fluidity in language use as well as the plurality and

diversity amongst male and female language users (Swann, 2002; Litosseliti & Sunderland, 2002).

1.6 Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the present study are as follows:

1. This study is limited to the data collected from local television advertisements on mobile phone services within the stipulated period.
2. Multimodality of discourse is not within the scope of this present study as suggested by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) via the extended framework used in analyzing social semiotics which includes communication in and across a range of semiotic modes.

1.7 Summary

The existence of advertisements and mobile phones cannot be disregarded. The influence of both advertisements and mobile phones can be observed through various daily activities. Advertisers employ various strategies and means in order to promote their products and services. The ability to identify and understand these strategies will enable the public to choose wisely and not to be influenced unduly in their choices. In this study the strategies found in the sampling of local television advertisements on mobile phone service providers will be analysed based on the use of gender specific elements targeting the different genders as well as the identification of the variety of propaganda devices with gender undertones used by propagandists.