

1. Media Advertising, Language and Translation

By

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Abstract

The media space is massive with a lot of activities going on. Whether it has to do with print or electronic media, language is the vehicle of communicating meaning. However, there are times when it becomes very difficult for the target audience of media advertisements to make sense of the meaning of what is being communicated. Hence, there is a need for an implicit or explicit mode of translation that will help unravel the meaning of what is being conveyed from a source to a target position. Interestingly, translation is not limited only to texts as it has a dimension that touches on non-textual components like making sense of what meaning an advert intends to communicate. This study is a critical survey of how the target audience of media advertisements can make sense of the meaning intended so that communication is eventually communicated through translation efforts. One of the major findings of the study is that translation plays a crucial role in the dissolution and diffusion of ambiguity and vagueness in language and communication thereby upholding cultural and ethical good.

Keywords: Media, advertising, print, electronic, language, translation, meaning, communication

Introduction

The utilization of various platforms in media advertising, such as print, television, radio, and digital media, enables the targeting of a diverse range of audiences. Language serves as a crucial instrument in conveying intended messages to these different groups. Mackay (2020:152) states that “Language plays a significant role in shaping meaning and facilitating mutual understanding between creators and consumers”. However, due to the diverse backgrounds of audiences, cultural and linguistic disparities can impede effective communication if not addressed appropriately. Translation plays a vital role in overcoming these barriers by transmitting information and meaning.

According to Smith (2021:84), translating advertisements into local languages helps bridge cultural and linguistic gaps between producers and audiences. Translators

interpret and mediate textual, verbal, and visual symbols while considering implied meanings and cultural associations. They then create equivalent representations that resonate with new audiences. As a result, the meaning and reception of advertisements when adapted from one language and culture to another. Understanding this complex relationship between media advertising, language, and translation requires a multidisciplinary approach. Theoretical frameworks such as discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, and translation studies offer valuable insights into this phenomenon.

This study delves into a critical evaluation of the intricate connection between media advertising, language, and translation. Its objective is to unravel the complexities involved in crafting and conveying meaning in advertisements, especially in the face of cultural and linguistic challenges. The study seeks to illuminate the crucial function of translation in bridging the divide between the intended message and the audience's comprehension, ultimately enabling successful communication in the diverse realm of media as it shall be made plain going forward.

What is Media Advertising?

Media advertising is the practice of utilizing various media platforms to promote a product, service, or message for an advertiser (Chandler & Munday, 2020). It encompasses the use of television, radio, print, and digital platforms to reach a wide audience and persuade them to take a desired action. This form of marketing has been around since the 19th century, with newspapers and magazines selling space for advertisements. However, it has evolved over the years to include newer mediums such as social media, online platforms, and billboards. Print media advertising, which utilizes physical publications such as newspapers, magazines, brochures, billboards, flyers, and catalogues, has the advantage of high-quality images and targeted messaging (Dahlen & Rosengren, 2016).

The term 'broadcast media advertising' encompasses the delivery of video and audio messages through various platforms such as television, radio, and streaming services. Local businesses often utilize radio advertising as a means to reach their target audience, with short ads airing during popular programs or peak listening times. These ads are typically short, ranging from 15 to 60 seconds, and are strategically placed during popular TV shows or events to reach a large and diverse audience. Overall, broadcast media has the ability to reach large audiences in real-time through the use of sight, sound, and motion, making it a powerful storytelling tool (McDonough, 2022:14).

Digital media refers to various forms of online marketing, such as websites, search engines, and social media, that have significantly reduced production and distribution costs, provide precise targeting based on metrics, and offer greater opportunities for consumer engagement (Saxena & Viswanathan, 2022:42). A notable example of this is

Coca-Cola, which utilizes viral social media videos and targeted display ads on various websites. On the other hand, out-of-home media advertising utilizes external spaces like billboards, bus shelters, sports stadiums, and product packaging to effectively reach consumers in public areas (Mehta & Saxena, 2020:63). This type of advertising allows for creative executions in public spaces, making it a popular choice for major brands like Apple, Nike, and Pepsi.

However, media advertising is not limited to traditional forms; it has also expanded to incorporate influencer marketing and product placements. Influencer marketing involves collaborating with popular social media influencers to promote a product or service to their followers, while product placements feature a product or brand in movies, TV shows, or music videos to increase brand awareness. To sum it up, the utilization of media advertising plays a vital role in a company's comprehensive marketing plan. It enables businesses to connect with a broad range of individuals through multiple media outlets and can successfully influence consumers to buy a product or engage in a particular behaviour. As technology advances, media advertising also progresses and adjusts to new mediums, highlighting its critical role in helping businesses remain competitive in the industry.

Language

According to Liddicoat and Kramsch (2020:9), language is a sophisticated system of communication that enables individuals to convey thoughts, ideas, and emotions through mutually agreed upon symbols and rules. It serves as the primary medium through which we shape our perceptions of the world and make sense of our surroundings. Language also reflects our intellectual capacity for abstract thinking, problem-solving, and imaginative expression. Beyond just exchanging information however, language serves a greater purpose. Kramsch (2009:3) explains that, it is a tool for representing our experiences and understanding the world around us. It influences how we perceive, classify, and attribute significance to phenomena, capturing the unique values, beliefs, and perspectives of different cultures.

Gee (2015) also highlights the fundamental social nature of language which thrives in authentic discourse communities. The meaning of language is constantly evolving as a result of the dynamic interplay between linguistic elements, non-verbal cues, pragmatic factors, and shared cultural knowledge among individuals. Language therefore, is a crucial resource for constructing meaning, intertwined with the cognitive, social, and political aspects of human life. The mastery of language not only facilitates effective communication but also provides insight into how individuals shape their realities.

Translation

Translation is not just about swapping words between languages. It is a rich and intricate process that demands a profound grasp of both linguistic and cultural subtleties. Munday (2014:1) points out that, successful translation involves more than mere word substitution. It is about conveying the intended meaning, ideas, and emotions faithfully from the source language to the target language. Snell-Hornby (2006:48) emphasized that translation goes beyond literal equivalence. Translators must navigate the broader context, including cultural references and the tone of the original text. Cultural shades and socio-political factors are crucial in achieving accurate translation.

Holmes (2017:18) stresses the significance of considering the target audience. Translators need to ensure that the translated message resonates with the audience as effectively as the original. This entails not only linguistic precision but also cultural sensitivity and emotional impact. The beauty and complexity of translation lie in its ability to navigate the differences between languages. There often need to be perfect one-to-one word equivalents between languages. Idioms, humor, and sarcasm can be particularly challenging to translate as their meaning relies on cultural understanding (Munday, 2014:52). While technology such as machine translation has become more advanced, human translators remain crucial. Their expertise allows them to tackle these challenges and produce translations that are not only accurate but also natural-sounding in the target language. Translation is not simply a matter of substituting words. It is a skilled art form that bridges cultures and ensures clear communication across linguistic borders. It requires a deep understanding of both languages and their cultural contexts and the ability to navigate linguistic differences and accurately convey the intended meaning.

Communicating Meaning in Media Advertising

Meaningful communication is a critical aspect of media advertising, as it has the power to shape consumer perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors towards products or services. This involves the strategic utilization of language, visuals, and messaging to convey information, evoke emotions, and ultimately influence consumer decision-making. A deep exploration of this will reveal valuable insights into the effectiveness and impact of meaningful communication in advertising. In media advertising, meaningful communication serves as a crucial link between brands and consumers, allowing for the establishment of connections that go beyond mere transactions. It enables brands to effectively communicate their values, beliefs, and unique selling propositions in a compelling manner that resonates with their target audience (McCracken, 1986).

A prime example of this is Coca-Cola's enduring appeal, which has been built on themes of happiness, togetherness, and nostalgia rather than just the product itself. These

elements have a profound effect on a global audience. Through meaningful communication, advertisers can create narratives that engage consumers on a deeper level, fostering brand loyalty and long-term relationships.

This is where semiotics, the study of signs and symbols, plays a crucial role in communicating meaning in advertising (Chandler, 2017:1). Advertisers are skilled in using visuals, language, and storytelling to evoke desired associations and emotions within their target audience (Dyer, 2009:118). For example, the Apple brand's use of minimalist design and clean lines effectively conveys a message of simplicity, elegance, and innovation. The field of media advertising has been completely transformed by the use of data analytics, as it provides valuable insights into consumer behavior, preferences, and trends. Through the use of data-driven strategies, advertisers can customize their messages for specific audience segments, resulting in more meaningful and impactful communication (Tuten and Solomon, 2018:29). This personalized approach not only enhances the effectiveness of advertising campaigns but also maximizes return on investment.

Research has shown that incorporating sensory cues such as visuals, sounds, and even haptic experiences (such as the satisfying click of a pen) can significantly enhance the persuasive impact of advertising (Krishna, 2012:332). Also by engaging consumers' multisensory experiences, brands are able to establish deeper emotional connections that go beyond just product features and tap into something more personal (Hultén, 2015:25). For example, the scent of freshly brewed coffee in a grocery store can trigger cravings and influence buying decisions. The digital era has also opened up new opportunities for creating meaning in advertising. Social media platforms, with their two-way engagements, provide a space for fostering audience participation and co-creation of brand narratives. One notable example is Coca-Cola's 'Share a Coke' campaign, where the brand replaced its iconic logo with popular names, encouraging consumers to share personalized cans and stories online. This collaborative approach not only strengthens brand loyalty but also fosters a sense of community among consumers.

The significance of conveying meaning through media advertising cannot be underestimated in its psychological impact. Emotions greatly influence consumer decision-making, shaping their perceptions of brands and products. Through crafting messages that elicit positive emotions such as happiness, nostalgia, or empathy, advertisers can create lasting connections with consumers long after the initial exposure to the advertisement (Arvidsson, 2006:81). In the pursuit of effective communication in media advertising, ethical considerations must not be overlooked. Advertisers bear the responsibility of ensuring that their message is truthful, transparent, and respectful towards consumers (De Mooij, 2019:3). Failure to consider cultural sentiments can result in misinterpretations, insensitivity, and ultimately, loss of credibility. For example, a colour

that symbolizes good luck in one culture may hold negative connotations in another. To successfully create meaningful and respectful advertising messages, it is crucial to understand these subtleties and translation can make a whole of difference to achieving this.

The Role of Translation in Media Advertising

With the increasing globalization of advertising, the importance of effective translation cannot be overemphasized. Translation plays a crucial role in facilitating cross-cultural communication, allowing advertisers to effectively convey their intended messages across linguistic and cultural barriers (Danton, 2019:3). A good translation not only conveys the literal meaning, but also captures the underlying cultural connotations, emotions, and resonances. In the translation of advertising material, special attention must be paid to idioms, wordplay, humor, and cultural references that may not have direct equivalents (Denton, 2007:42). Skilled translators must use their creativity to produce new expressions that capture the spirit, intent, and rhetorical effects of the original text in the target language. The semiotic aspect of advertising also presents challenges for translators. Visual signs, symbols, and design elements that evoke certain associations in one culture may not have the same effect in another (Smith and Klein-Braley, 1997:182). Therefore, translators must carefully analyze visuals to recreate corresponding connotations that are accessible to diverse audiences.

With the exponential growth of digital media, the role of translation in advertising has expanded significantly. User-generated content, social media shares, interactive apps, and websites all require quick, consistent, and culturally sensitive translation in order to ensure real-time brand engagement across multiple platforms and markets (Jiménez-Crespo, 2013). In today's globalized advertising landscape, accurate and effective translation is essential for successful communication and brand building. Hence, translation plays a crucial role in both expanding the reach of global advertising and effectively connecting with diasporas and minority ethnic audiences in domestic campaigns (Takeda, 2019:69). By accurately translating advertisements, emotional connections can be formed, leading to increased brand loyalty within these communities. This highlights the vital role of translation in media advertising, serving as a bridge to maintaining the intended meaning and impact of brand messages as they cross linguistic and cultural barriers on a global and local scale.

Evaluation

Media advertising, language, and translation are deeply interconnected in today's global communication landscape. The effectiveness of advertising relies on its ability to convey

intended meanings and establish emotional connections with target audiences in diverse linguistic and cultural contexts. While the centrality of language and translation in advertising cannot be emphasized enough, Fill (2009:687) states that “Language is the primary tool we use to promote ideas, products, and services to audiences...it shapes how we perceive and interpret things”. The language choices, rhetorical techniques, and cultural connotations embedded in advertising messages significantly influence how audiences interpret and respond to them. However, in the increasingly multilingual global markets, translation is crucial in bridging linguistic barriers. Denton (2007:38) points out that, “the role of the translator is essential in conveying the meaning and persuasive power of advertising messages to new cultural environments”. Skilled translators must not only accurately translate words, but also recreate cultural nuances, emotional tones, and creative elements such as puns or idioms.

The emergence of digital, interactive, and user-generated content further highlights the significance of translation. Cronin (2013:120) observes that, “translation practices directly impact how new media shapes reality for diverse users across different languages”. Efficient and consistent multilingual translation enables real-time engagement with brands across various platforms. Advertising discourse also plays a critical role in shaping societal perceptions of ethnicity, gender, class, and other aspects of identity. In fact, Smith (2008) warns that media representations have the power to either reinforce or challenge cultural stereotypes. This highlights the ethical responsibility of translators to critically examine embedded ideologies. Effective cultural translation is essential in avoiding negative stereotyping and marginalization in media advertisements.

It is crucial to recognize the significant impact that media advertising, language, and translation have in shaping societal narratives, worldviews, and cultural identities. Arens *et al* (2017:45) notes that, advertising is a powerful communication tool that can influence our personal and cultural identities by promoting certain values, roles, and lifestyles. Hence, the language and imagery used in advertisements do not simply sell products, but also convey ideological messages about what is considered desirable, aspirational, or normal. Thus, it is imperative to consider the ethical implications surrounding representation in advertising. Merskin (2018:2) asserts that advertising has the potential to either reinforce or challenge cultural mythologies, stereotypes, and prejudices through the repeated dissemination of dominant narratives. Insensitive depictions and exclusionary practices can perpetuate harmful stereotypes and marginalize certain groups. Therefore, it is important for advertisers as assisted by translators to be conscious of the impact of their language and imagery, and to strive for accurate and respectful representation in all forms of advertising.

The role of translation is crucial as they act as mediators. For Bielsa and Bassnett

(2009:8), “The translator's responsibility includes mediating between cultures and their representations of identity”. Translators must also confront their own preconceptions and prejudices, actively making decisions to ensure that cultural meanings are accurately conveyed without perpetuating biased perspectives with regards to media advertisements. This point to the significance of diversity and representation in the advertising and translation industries.

Involving professionals from diverse backgrounds ensures a deeper understanding of the intricate cultural contexts when creating or translating advertising messages. Furthermore, the interactive capabilities of new media demand continuous ethical engagement. Social media conversations allow for diverse interpretations and adaptations of brand messages within different discourse communities (Jones, 2014). Therefore, consistent and culturally-sensitive strategies are essential for responsibly navigating these multifocal digital environments.

Ultimately, as global communication accelerates cross-cultural exchange, it becomes crucial to have a critical awareness of the language used in advertising and ethical translation practices. This is vital in promoting intercultural understanding and rejecting stereotyping and marginalization. Leveraging this knowledge responsibly can harness the power of advertising to promote representation and inclusion and translation has a lot of roles to play in ensuring that media advertisements is understood by its target audience as well as conveyed in a language that is appropriate and ethically acceptable.

Conclusion

This study has uncovered the complex interplay between media advertising, language, and translation in effectively conveying intended meanings to diverse audiences. Language serves as the primary tool for crafting and delivering advertising messages, utilizing words, visuals, and semiotic associations to shaping consumer perceptions and establishing emotional connections. As a consequence, the linguistic and cultural diversity of global markets necessitates the critical role of translation. Skilled translators act as intermediaries, accurately transmitting not only the literal content but also the underlying tones, rhetorical devices, and cultural nuances across different languages and contexts. As interactive digital media expands advertising into user-generated spaces, the need for target and consistent translation becomes increasingly crucial.

The analysis in the study has underscored the immense influence that advertising discourse holds in shaping societal narratives surrounding identity, values, and representation. As a result, there are significant ethical considerations attached to the language used in advertisements and how it is translated across cultures.

Prioritizing inclusivity, avoiding stereotypes, and amplifying diverse perspectives

must be prioritized. Ultimately, by skillfully utilizing and analyzing language, valuing culturally-aware translation, and promoting ethical representation, media advertising can transcend linguistic barriers. It can foster meaningful connections with global audiences while promoting greater intercultural understanding. This interdisciplinary exploration emphasizes the pivotal roles that language and translation play in the ever-evolving landscape of media advertising tasking translators to up their games of critical stakeholders in the business of communication and meaning.

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