Discourse of advertising

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Corpora and the Discourse of Advertising

1. Introduction

It is not an overstatement to say that these days we are saturated with advertising. We do not even need to enter a commercial space such as a shopping mall or flick through a glossy magazine where we can reasonably expect some advertising practices taking place; public spaces that traditionally had nothing to do with commercial activities such as university buildings, clinics and hospitals all display adverts of many kinds. Every time we do searches on Google, read an online newspaper, or open a social media site, we are immediately bombarded with adverts or branded content of some sort that try to attract our attention and make us click, like, share or download something.

In times of late capitalism, mass production and information overload, advertising has become the key marketing tool for attracting attention and converting non-consumers to consumers, making it an all-pervasive form of discourse. Although advertising has a well-defined and easily recognizable purpose (generating revenues), it comes in a variety of discursive, generic and semiotic manifestations. This makes advertising an important and fertile but also challenging ground for a corpus-based (critical) discourse analysis.

This chapter reviews contributions of corpus-based research to our understanding of the discourse of advertising. It begins by a brief overview of some of the major developments in advertising including some of its controversial practices. Subsequently, research studies that have used a corpus approach to investigating aspects of advertising are reviewed. This is extended by a focal analysis, which demonstrates how corpus tools can be effectively adopted to explore discursive practices of new forms of digital advertising. The focus is on native ads.

The chapter concludes with observations regarding opportunities and limitations of a corpus-based discourse analysis to study advertising and discusses avenues for future research.

2. Advertising: developments and practices

In business terms, advertising is an activity which intends to encourage people to buy, rent, subscribe or increasingly just pay attention to a certain product or service. As such, it is part of a wider conglomerate of corporate marketing and branding practices that aim to attract non-consumers and turn them to consumers of the specific goods or services which a company sells.

Given the new technological advances and various digital formats of advertising, we might be inclined to think that advertising is a new form of discourse which was not prevalent in past centuries. While indeed the rapid expansion of advertising happened more recently in the second half of the 20th century, advertising is not an activity exclusive to the modern era. It has a long history that can be traced back to ancient times and specifically new trading practices and forms of transport that developed following the rise of cities (Shaw, 2016).

Two major forces have influenced modern developments beginning in the 19th century: the mass production of goods and advances in information technologies. The mass production of goods and the rise of consumerism brought about the need to differentiate between similar products and advertising became the prime tool of this 'differentiating'. Gradually, not the product itself and its practical usefulness were emphasized, but what the product could offer in terms of social experience (Lischinsky, 2018). Underpinned by research in psychology and psychoanalysis, advertisers increasingly sought to tap into consumers' social and cultural needs, specifically the need for status, affiliation and authenticity thereby allowing them to display a particular identity, rather than just turning them into 'simple' consumers of products.

Most of modern advertising is based on this 'enhancing' of identity and social experience (Simon, 2009).

Developments in information technology are too a key force behind the rise of advertising. In fact, each milestone in information technology brought about new ways in which we communicate and access information. This in turn significantly influenced advertising practices and their circulation. Digital technologies in particular offered a whole host of new possibilities for people to communicate and share information, and consequently have created novel opportunities for advertisers. Before the digital age we had limited access to information and it was therefore easier to attract our attention. Digital media reverted the situation in that we now have access to a multitude of contents (information overload), while it is more and more difficult to grab our attention. The economist Herbert Simon (1971) summarised this new development with the term 'attention economy', an economy in which the main target is not information but attention. In response, advertisers have begun developing new and sophisticated ways (often underpinned by research in neuroscience) to grab our attention and persuade us to by buy, rent, click or like something. Yet, consumers do not like to be directly persuaded. As the Persuasion Knowledge Model proposed by Friestad and Wright (1994) explains, the more people recognise that the purpose of a message is to persuade them to do something, the less likely they are to be persuaded by it. Advertisers are well aware of consumers' dislike for direct persuasion and often try to disguise the persuasive intent by redirecting readers' and viewers' attention to something else. A good example of this redirecting practice enabled by the digital technology is the increasingly pervasive form of native ads also known as branded or affiliate content. Native ads are simply paid commercial messages that mask advertising goals through non-commercial content; it could be a serious news story, an online quiz or a humorous message with gifs and other multimodal elements (Wojdynski & Golan, 2016).

New technologies also enable advertisers to use a whole range of media and senses, including touch, sound, and vision, to trigger powerful sensations and associations in the audience. One of the techniques that is gaining popularity in the advertising industry is the so- called Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response or in short ASMR technique adopted in videos that use specific sounds to stimulate haptic sensations, for example, tickling across the body. Companies such as IKEA and Citroen have advertised their products using ASMR videos.

The increasingly sophisticated efforts to 'hook' consumers emphasise the key rhetorical dimension of advertising – its *persuasive intent*. Persuasion or persuasive discourse refers to the use of language and other semiotic resources with the intention to influence and/or change someone's attitudes, beliefs or behaviour. It is not a good or bad thing, but it can be both and if it is the latter, i.e. bad, it is normally referred to as *manipulation*. Whereas persuasion in a positive sense is understood as a form of asymmetrical interaction in which the persuader attempts to alter the hearer's attitude or behaviour with the view to benefit the hearer, manipulation does the same thing, but the difference is that its outcomes benefit only the persuader (Harrè, 1985). From this point of view, advertising can be a form of manipulation, since it is the advertiser/persuader who almost always benefits, while the benefits to the hearer may not always materialise. For this reason, critics see advertising as a parasitic form of discourse and a form of exploitation and deception, which brainwashes people to spend money buying something that they most likely do not need (Breeze, 2013). Therefore, some see advertising as the ultimate engine of excessive consumption perpetuating and celebrating materialism (Baudrillard 1998), while simultaneously reinforcing uniform tastes and social stereotypes (Bell & Milic, 2002; Machin & Thornborrow, 2003).

While the criticism of advertising has a good basis, there are also some counter arguments. For example, advertising is used to sponsor activities that people enjoy, including arts and film. There are also forms of advertising known as *advocacy advertising* that are used by many non-

profit organizations to promote good causes and to call attention to pressing social issues. Although advertising may seem to be off-limits, there exists advertising authorities that develop standards and codes of rules, and vet adverts before they are broadcast across media. Finally, advertising is a public display of practices and values that corporations endorse. Once in the public domain, these values and practices can be scrutinized and critiqued, and their ideological underpinnings exposed. The practice known as *subvertising* (combinations of two words 'subversive' and 'advertising') does precisely this (Davis et al., 2016; Jones at al., 2020). Thus, we cannot view advertising solely as a brainwashing activity; while advertising has high manipulative and exploitative potential, it is a domain of discursive struggles, in which different interests, agendas and stakeholders compete for attention. The role of the consumer is fundamental because they do not have to accept everything that advertisers 'throw' at them. They too can talk back, raise awareness and influence rules and regulations.

3. Corpus Research into Advertising

Advertising as a form of discourse has been of interest to discourse analysts for some time now (e.g. Leech, 1966; Vestergaard & Schrøder, 1985; Myers, 1994, 1999; Cook, 2001). Scholars have been primarily interested in identifying lexico-grammatical and other semiotic features that advertisers employ for the purpose of persuasion. Specifically, types of metaphors, similes and other forms of figurative language (e.g. Forceville, 2012; Littlemore & Pérez-Sobrino, 2017), generic structures and moves (Bhatia, 2005, 2016) as well as rhetorical questions, hedging devices and alliterations (e.g. Fuertes-Olivera et al., 2001) have been documented and analysed in detail. Those working with the approach of Critical Discourse Analysis extend the analysis by exploring the ideological functions that language and other semiotic resources perform in ads in a variety of contexts and formats (e.g. Fairclough, 1993;

Thibault, 2000; Machin & Thornborrow, 2003; Van Leeuwen, 2005; Ledin & Machin, 2019). Corpus-based research on advertising occupies a smaller place in otherwise vast discourse-analytical research on the subject. The section summarises the key studies that adopted a corpus-based approach to study aspects of the discourse of advertising.

One of the very first studies in the area is Shalom's (1997) research into personal ads. As any other adverts, personal ads are goal-oriented. Yet, the ultimate aim is not to sell or buy a product, but to attract attention of a desired other and form a social, romantic or sexual relationship. Shalom explored specifically the use of adjectives in a corpus of 766 ads. Her analysis has shown that seemingly simple and conventionalised adverts can be quite interactive and carefully composed with vague lexis chosen deliberately to set off certain expectations and resonance.

Baker (2003) extended Shalom's analysis by focusing on gay male personal ads and a much larger diachronic corpus containing data from a UK's popular gay magazine *Gay News/Time*. Studying the most frequent nouns and adjectives as well as their collocations, Baker's (2003) research revealed considerable shifts in the ways in which gay men described themselves and the desired other over time. He observed a rise in descriptors that construct gay male identity by downplaying any signs that others may identify with being gay (e.g. 'straight-acting', 'no effems') and an increase in the use of attributes stereotypically associated with heterosexual masculinity. This appropriation of stereotypical heterosexual masculinity, the author argued, had to do with the negative portrayal of gay men in the 1980s and was possibly a form of distancing from 'obvious' gay identity in order to cope with the stigma.

Moving on to the area of commercial advertising, there are several corpus studies that have explored the use of lexico-grammatical devices in various advertising contexts. Utilising the multi-dimensional (MD) framework developed by Biber (1988), Koteyko (2015) investigated patterns of linguistic variation in a large corpus of commercial ads sampled from major national

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newspapers and magazines widely read in the UK. 32 features were identified prior to the study and analysed using factor analysis. The study has shown that persuasion and information are complex multi-dimensional entities that interact with each other and are differently distributed across the identified dimensions. For example, features of persuasion (e.g. intensifying adverbs, imperatives, and superlative and comparative adjectives) are prevalent in four dimensions marking four different mechanisms of persuasion: Involved Concerns, Static Evaluative Description, Exhortative High-Promise Discourse (Hard-Sell), and Beneficial Performance. The study has also shown that linguistic variation in adverts is very much conditioned on situational parameters, specifically the gender of the addressee. Koteyko demonstrated that adverts directed at women tend to employ more semi-scientific terminology and are much more elaborate in style, while those targeting men include mostly disjunctive verbless sentences. The author argues that the identified differences might have to do with gender biases prevalent in society though further research is needed to establish the causes of the different advert styles.

Slogans and headlines are some of the most important textual devices used in adverts to grab readers' or viewer' attention. Marketers use a whole array of lexical resources to create catchy slogans ranging from morphological alternations (e.g. adding *-ology* to words to sound more scientific), neologisms, alliteration, synthetic personalisation (the frequent use of *you*) to elaborate stylistic devices such as metaphors or similes. Despite the prominence of slogans in adverts, there has been little linguistic research into their persuasiveness (e.g. Fuertes-Olivera et al., 2001). Work by Musté et al. (2015) is the first corpus study offering new insights into the linguistic choices employed in slogans. Using a corpus of 353,075 brand slogans, the authors identified repetition and metaphors as the key feature of slogans with repetition including phonological repetition (alliteration, assonance, pararhyme and rhyme) and syntactic repetition (e.g. parallelism). Repetition is a key cognitive element that assists in memorising

information and thus, it is not surprising to see it employed frequently in brand slogans. On the other hand, metaphors help build associations and stimulate imagination, which, in turn, helps to grab attention.

Corpus-based research has made some contributions to our understanding of advertising as a distinctive cultural and linguistic activity. Labrador et al. (2014) investigated rhetorical structures and devices of persuasion in a corpus of online advertisements of electronic products in English and Spanish. Adopting Bhatia's (2005) framework of the prototypical generic structure of advertisements, adverts were tagged with rhetorical moves using a tailor-made tagger. The study found that adverts in both languages had a very similar rhetorical structure and included almost the same steps and moves. This highlights that the practice of writing adverts is, in some ways, transnational and independent of the cultural context.

Advertisements produced in the realm of tourism have also attracted considerable attention from corpus linguists. Since tourism relies on 'luring' non-tourists and converting them into tourists, advertising lies at the heart of its business practice. Manca's (2008) investigated qualifying adjectives in two corpora of British and Italian adverts promoting British farmhouse holidays and Italian *agriturismi* (agritourism). The study revealed that the British adverts seemed to be more content-oriented and contained more explicit and detailed descriptions, whereas their Italian counterparts tended to be more form-oriented, focusing more on the creation of a dreamlike atmosphere and containing many references to the past. In a similar vein, Jaworska (2013) explored lexical differences in the ways in which tourist destinations are advertised on popular British and German tourist websites. The analysis focuses on the most frequent adjectives and nouns. The comparisons across the two cultural contexts showed that the German ads focused more strongly on factual and historical details, while the British ads included references to history and heritage only in the descriptions of tourist places in Britain. British ads gave more prominence to *gastrolingo* (discourse about food) and wellbeing,

particularly in references to places in Europe and in faraway destinations. This suggests that outside the home country, alongside the usual beach experience, German tourists might be primed to 'discover' places of historical and cultural interest, whereas British travellers are 'conditioned' for a more physical and sensual experience (wellbeing, health, food). Considerable differences were also identified in the portrait of tourist places located in the home countries as opposed to those in Asia, Africa and Pacific region. The study found that generally the descriptions of places *at home* in both British and German data focused more on factual information and were more-content orientated, while adverts promoting faraway destinations drew heavily on emotive and visual references, implying a sensual, almost dreamlike atmosphere.

Metaphors have been identified as a prominent persuasive feature in the discourse of advertising (Breeze, 2013) and investigated in detail using qualitative discourse analytical techniques (e.g. Velasco-Sacristán & Fuertes-Olivera, 2005; Abuczki, 2009; Koller, 2009; Mattiello, 2012) and experimental methods (e.g. Phillips & McQuarrie, 2009). Corpus-based insights into the use of metaphors in advertising are modest despite the now large body of corpus research into metaphors in other discursive contexts such as health, media and education. Pérez-Sobrino's research is pioneering in that it adopts corpus tools and methods to study metaphors and metonymy in multimodal ads. Specifically, the study analyses a carefully designed corpus of 210 commercial and non-commercial advertisements of products and services sourced from several advertising databases. Because corpus tools are not able to automatically identify metonymic and metaphoric-related images, manual annotation preceded the corpus analysis and was based on coding both the verbal and pictorial elements. The most frequent type attested in the corpus was metaphtonymy (metaphor–metonymy compounds) followed by a metonymic chain, which involves a metonymic projection in several steps. The use of metaphtonymy is a 'condensation' strategy - a kind of two in one - in the otherwise

limited space; the author argues that metonymy provides a vantage point of access to advertisements, while metaphorical mapping ascribes desirable features from a positively connotated domain. Overall, metonymy was found to be more prominent in the studied ads than metaphors; the source domains of both tended to be mostly cued by pictures, which highlight the persuasiveness of images in ads.

Building upon previous corpus-based work on textual metaphors (e.g. Koller et al., 2008), Jaworska (2017) compares the use of metaphors in three corpora of English adverts produced by large tourist companies promoting tourist destinations in Britain, Europe and in Asia and the Pacific region. Supported by Wmatrix (Rayson, 2008), the study found a greater use of metaphors in tourist adverts of destinations in Asia and the Pacific region than in Britain and Europe. Whereas metaphors used in adverts promoting British destinations were mostly examples of conventional figurative expressions from the domain of BODY, instances of metaphors in the two other corpora drew heavily on other domains including RELIGION, NATURAL SUBSTANCE and the sensory experience of COLOR, VISION and TASTE. Jaworska has shown how metaphors from these domain work collectively to evoke images of unspoilt, luxurious, and colourful places of rare beauty and with plenty of resources and attraction. They appeal simultaneously to imagination, vision and taste creating sensory fusions that could potentially increase the 'appetite' for 'consuming', that is, buying a trip to a tropical destination. While the metaphors increase the persuasiveness of the adverts, they also do ideological work. The powerful imaginary associated with the deeply entrenched metaphor of paradise in combination with the jewel and colour metaphors conveniently erases serious ecological and social problems that affect the advertised destinations making them more appealing and open to explorations.

While most corpus research on advertising has to date explored lexical properties of adverts, Hundt's (2006) diachronic study into the use of mediopassives turns to grammar.

Mediopassives are grammatical constructions in which the subject of the sentence both performs and is affected by the action described with the verb as in: *The book reads well*. Exploring a large corpus of adverts produced by an American mail-order house over the course of nearly 100 years (1897-1986), Hundt (2006) has shown a significant rise of mediopassives at the expense of passive and other related constructions, for example, the *able*-adjectives. In the author's view, mediopassives emphasise properties of advertised goods in a condensed way and hence it is not surprising to see a greater use of these constructions in advertising.

As discussed in section 2, critics of advertising see it as a form of parasitic discourse, which has invaded and colonized other non-commercial discourses including professional, academic and even personal types of discourse (Fairclough, 1993; Bhatia, 2016). This 'invasion' has been observed in the emergence of new hybrid genres that began adopting discursive features associated with promotion and advertising. A good example of this new hybrid genre is *press release*, which maintains a look of a factual news story, while promotion work is done through the use of endorsements or testimonials (Cantenaccio, 2008). Corpus research into generic hybridity and promotionalism has been sparse. To date one area has been considered, that is, promotional materials produced by higher education (HE) institutions. Although HE institutions are non-commercial entities, the global dominance of neoliberalism has had a considerable impact on universities turning them into educational businesses that are increasingly governed by market forces and principles. Investigating a large corpus of HE materials, Mautner (2005) traces this macro-level trend in HE by examining the discursive profiles of salient key expressions in which structures and processes of marketization crystallise such as 'entrepreneurial', 'entrepreneur' and 'enterprise'. Mautner's analysis shows that the terms are frequently used in HE discourse; on par with businesses discourse, they are almost always associated with positive attributes such as dynamism, innovation and creativity.

Using a corpus-driven approach, Sauston and Morrish (2011) studied the ways in which British universities market themselves in a corpus of universities' mission statements. Studying frequency lists and a selection of the most frequent nouns and adjectives, the authors show that universities across the spectrum draw heavily on empty lexis associated with marketing discourse. Words such as 'excellence', 'leading', 'world', 'vision' and 'high-quality' occur frequently in the statements replacing concrete achievements with a kind of "symbolic avowal of the values of business and industry" (Sauston & Morrish, 2011, p. 83). Conversely, lexical items that imply a more critical and intellectual stance such as 'intellectual', 'liberal' or 'freedom' are very rare suggesting that resistance to the neoliberal discourse is minimal in these texts. The dominant construction of the university is that of a global and business-facing neo-liberal institution.

As the overview has shown, corpus-based research into the discourse of advertising presents a niche in the otherwise large body of corpus work on other discourse domains. Contributions to the understanding of the discourse of advertising are therefore modest but not insignificant. Using larger data sets and a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches, this research has shown that, for example, features thought to be prominent in advertising are not necessarily so (Koteyko, 2015; Pérez-Sobrino, 2016) or structures that were believed to be absent are actually used in ads (Hundt, 2006). It has also contributed to a better understanding of advertising practices across cultures and linguistic contexts showing how through the choice of specific lexis advertising perpetuates cultural stereotypes (Manca, 2008; Jaworska, 2013). Furthermore, corpus research into advertising has contributed important critical insights by showing how this seemingly superficial and 'small' discourse type reflects wider societal changes in attitudes (Baker, 2003) and 'big' ideologies including colonial legacies (Jaworska, 2017), gender stereotypes (Koteyko, 2015) and neo-liberal agendas (Mautner, 2005; Sauston & Morrish, 2011). Yet, the scope of the analytical tools used to date

to interrogate advertising has been limited not exploiting the full range of opportunities that a corpus-based approach can offer.

The use of larger data samples has enabled researchers to provide empirical evidence for the preference of certain lexical or grammatical choices over others, while the use of quantitative corpus tools and methods have added more precision and rigour to the ways in which data is collected and analysed. Most studies reviewed above use a combination of quantitative corpus methods with qualitative discourse-analytical techniques providing both a bird's eye and street level view of the studied phenomenon. The quantitative tools can point to salient patterns in advertising discourse, which can then be explored qualitatively adding more nuance, depth and detail.

4. Focal Analysis

To demonstrate further uses of corpus tools and methods to study the discourse of advertising, this section presents a sample analysis of a smaller corpus of native ads. Exploring native advertising is important for many reasons; native ads are the fastest growing form of digital advertising generating nearly 20 billion in revenues globally (BI Intelligence, 2015). They are a pervasive feature of most online news and social media platforms (Lynch, 2018). Enabled by digital technologies, native ads come in a variety of forms and formats combining textual and other semiotic resources. They also rise a number of ethical concerns. Since native ads resemble the non-commercial content of the site on which they are published ('native' to the site), the question arises whether consumers are aware of their commercial and essentially persuasive intent. Consumers clicking on native ads might think that they are accessing contents recommended by the site's publisher or the editorial team whereas, in fact, they are exposed to paid commercial messages. Research has shown that indeed consumers find it

difficult to distinguish between sponsored and non-commercial messages rendering this practice highly problematic (Wojdynski & Golan, 2016). It is for this reasons that many critics argue that the success of native advertising is largely due to deception and manipulation. The sheer amount of textual native ads available online presents an opportunity for a corpus linguist to reveal the discursive features of this form of advertising and to contribute to a better understanding of the fine lines between information, persuasion and manipulation.

For the purpose of the focal analysis, a small corpus of native ads sourced from BuzzFeed was created. BuzzFeed is a global digital news platform, which was created in the US in 2006. It is one of the most popular news and entertainment websites with some 130 million unique visitors per month. The decision to include just one news platform was determined by achieving a degree of homogeneity in the otherwise very diverse landscape of native ads that can range from serious scientific contents to a more tabloid-like style of news. Buzzfeed's style resembles a tabloid in that the main focus is on news related to celebrities, entertainment, pop culture and generally content that is considered viral. In the advertising industry, Buzzfeed is seen as a pioneer of native advertising, to which largely its (financial) success is attributed. From the start, BuzzFeed's strategy was to reduce obvious digital advertisements and use native ads instead. Hence, the site presents a wealth of examples including some novel forms and formats.

4.1.Corpus building and analytical procedures

Native ads were selected after browsing the BuzzFeed website. Two dominant forms of native advertising were identified: affiliate content and promoted content. Affiliate content is part of affiliate marketing which is based on the concept of revenue share. To put is simply, it is a way to earn commission by recommending products or services of a third party and it mostly involves sharing recommendations on social media platforms. Promoted content is a

form of content which was paid by a company to be displayed on social media platforms with a wide research.

To have an equal share of both types of native ads, 25 affiliate and 25 promoted contents were downloaded and compiled into a corpus. All of the examples contained stock images, gifs or videos which were converted to url links when copied into a plain text file. The links were automatically removed from the texts using Notepad++ and regular expressions. All other textual and numerical data were retained. Once compiled, the corpus was uploaded onto the Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff et al., 2014). To understand how this new form of advertising differs or is similar to more conventional ads, the corpus was compared to the subcorpus of written adverts (BNC_Ads) extracted from the British National Corpus (BNC_Ads). Table 1 shows the sizes of corpora used in the present case study.

Table 1: Corpus size

Corpus	Size in words
BNC_Ads	510,045
Native_Ads	31,804

Corpus tools offered in Sketch Engine enable us to approach a genre, such as that of native ads, from different angles; frequency lists and parts of speech tagging allow us to establish its lexico-grammatical profiles, while keywords can highlight dominant themes that could be explored in more depth using collocations and concordance lines. Since we do not know much about the language of this new form of advertising, it was deemed relevant to retrieve first its frequent lexico-grammatical features and compare them to the features of conventional advertising. To this end, Native_Ads was tagged with parts of speech using the English Penn Treebank available on Sketch Engine. The top 10 parts of speech (POS) identified in this corpus were compared to the top 10 POS in a corpus of conventional adverts in BNC_Ads. To reveal

PoS distinctive to native advertising as compared to BNC_Ads, a keyword list of tags was created. Selected POS were investigated in more detail using concordance lines and collocations.

4.2 Results

Table 2 shows the top 10 PoS identified in Native_Ads and BNC_Ads. The first thing which springs to mind is the relative similarity of the most frequent PoS in both corpora. Both seem to make use of a nominal style as evidenced by the prominence of nouns, prepositions,

Table 2: The top 10 parts of speech in Native_Ads and BNC_Ads

Native_Ads			BNC_Ads		
PoS	Freq.	Norm. Freq. per 1 million	PoS	Freq.	Norm. Freq. per 1 million
NN (singular nouns)	5,955	144,908	NN (singular nouns)	93,926	147,789
IN (prepositions)	3,422	83,270	NP (proper nouns)	70,094	110,290
DT (determiners)	3,033	73,805	IN (prepositions)	69,457	109,288
JJ (adjectives)	2,664	64,825	DT (determiners)	54,706	86,078
NP (proper nouns)	2,002	48,716	JJ (adjectives)	48,803	76,789
CD (cardinal numbers)	1,979	48,157	NNS (plural nouns)	37,832	59,527
NNS (plural nouns)	1,945	47,329	CC (coordinating conjunctions)	24,445	38,463
PP (personal pronouns)	1,837	44,701	RB (adverbs)	19,940	31,375
RB (adverbs)	1,759	42,803	VV (verbs)	15,869	24,969
VV (verbs)	1,432	34,846	PP (personal pronouns)	14,601	22,974

determiners and adjectives. Since both types of adverts were published in written news sources, it is not surprising to see the saliency of a nominal style, which has been identified as a feature of increasing importance in news discourse (Biber & Gray, 2012). Specific searches on tags and tag combinations conducted using the Corpus Query Language (CQL) show that in

Native_Ads there are 1,778 (43,265 per million) instances of nouns modified by attributive adjectives, of which 174 include two adjectives and 2,131 (51,855 per million) nouns modified by other nouns. Table 3 shows the top 10 nominal phrases with attributive adjectives and top 10 noun-noun phrases (raw frequencies in brackets). In BNC_Ads, the top attributive adjectives

Table 3: The top 10 adjectival and nominal premodifiers of nouns in Native_Ads

Native_Ads		BNC_Ads	
Nouns with adjectival premodifiers	Nouns with nominal premodifiers	Nouns with adjectival premodifiers	Nouns with nominal premodifiers
average rating (39)	nail polish (8)	wide range (223)	colour tv (81)
promising review (19)	etsy price (7)	double bed (47)	swimming pool (69)
positive review (8)	shower head (6)	free parking (45)	city centre (41)
great way (8)	battery life (6)	sandy beach (44)	travel agent (39)
easy way (7)	water pressure (6)	central heating (44)	star hotel (34)
good reason (5)	knife sharpener (4)	English breakfast (37)	wine list (30)
handy tool (4)	tablet holder (4)	private bathroom (36)	town centre (30)
exact amount (4)	sheet masks (4)	high quality (36)	post office (30)
dead skin (4)	food waste (4)	single room (33)	gift shop (28)
hard water (4)	keyboard cover (4)	private bath (33)	sun terrace (26)

describe specific services and facilities mostly from the domain of tourism, while in Native_Ads, they mostly modify items pointing to external forms of evaluation such as 'rating' and 'review' and general nouns. This does not mean that native ads do not advertise services and facilities, but it suggests a much higher importance given to external validation – mostly consumers' reviews and ratings obtained from third-party shopping platforms such as Etsy or Amazon. Interestingly, when sorting the concordance lines to the right of 'review, it becomes evident that the item is mostly followed by a colon ':' and then by a direct quote from a consumer taken from Amazon or other platform (44 instances out of 117) expressing their delight or a high degree of satisfaction with the product. Some indicative examples are shown below:

(1) Promising review: "These sheet masks are legit. I use one every night, it has been week one and my skin has never looked better!"

(2) Amazon review: "Amazingly cute! I was very excited upon receiving these magnets."

Sorting it to the left, it shows mostly cardinal numbers indicating how many reviews a product received (65 instances out of 117). Thus, online native ads seem to be dominated by references to forms of aggregated 'digital word of mouth' and ratings. Conventional ads too use testimonies and endorsements but to a lesser extent. The digital interdiscursivity established through references to forms of quantification and aggregate online testimonies seems indeed a dominant feature of native ads and a key technique of establishing credibility and trust in advertised products. It is no longer the one expert or one consumer but many if not thousands of them that endorse the products. Since ads are based on positive evaluations, negative online reviews are not included.

Both corpora make a greater use of personal pronouns (see Table 1), which are the key linguistic devices of persuasion in ads (Cook, 2001). Yet, when we consider the normalised frequencies of personal pronouns, we can see that they occur much more frequently in Native_Ads than in BNC_Ads. Features that occur with a much higher frequency in the focus corpus as compared to a reference corpus can point to distinctive lexico-grammatical elements and these are always worth of investigating in more depth. The keyword function offers a systematic way of retrieving this kind of features. Sketch Engine allows us to identify distinctive lexical as well as grammatical features based on words, lemmas and tags. The key features are identified using a ratio with 'add-N' or simplemaths parameter to account for the problem that

Table 3: The top 10 distinctive PoS in Native_Ads as compared to BNC_Ads

PoS	Norm. Freq. Native_Ads	Norm. Freq. BNC_Ads	Keyness score
RP (particle)	5,426	2,256	**2.4**
CD (cardinal numbers)	48,157	21,058	**2.3**
UH (interjections)	876	406	**2.2**
PP (personal pronouns)	44,701	22,974	**2.0**
RBR (comparative adverbs)	2,020	1,043	1.9
VH (verb have)	1,436	793	1.8
PPZ (possessive pronouns)	22,144	12,342	1.8
VHD (verb have past tense)	438	266	1.6
VVZ (verbs, 3rd person sing. present)	13,286	8,190	1.62
WRB (wh-abverb)	5,280	3,446	1.53

we cannot divide by zero. Using the attribute 'tag', Table 3 shows PoS that are distinctive in Native_Ads. These are particles, cardinal numbers, interjections and personal pronouns – all of which occur twice as often in native advertising as opposed to conventional ads. We can explore these features in more detail when selecting the concordance option and calculating frequencies of all forms of identified PoS. Table 4 demonstrates the top 5 particles, interjections and personal pronouns.

Table 4: the top 5 lexical items in RP, UH and PP category in Native_Ads

Particles			Interjections			Personal Pronouns		
Item	Freq.	Norm. Freq.	Item	Freq.	Norm. Freq.	Item	Freq.	Norm. Freq.
up	88	2141.38	yes	11	267.67	you	629	15,306
out	64	1557.37	oh	11	267.67	I	194	4,720.77
off	25	608.35	no	5	121.67	they	155	3,771.75
down	16	389.34	omg	4	48.67	them	95	2,311.72
over	12	292.01	boy	2	48.67	we	40	973.35

The particles identified in the corpus are part of multiword verbs, mostly phrasal verbs. The most frequent ones are 'take up', 'pick up', 'brighten up' and 'take out'. Phrasal verbs have been long considered a typical feature of informal conversations and fiction (Biber et al., 1999)

though they have started occurring in formal written genres too (Alangari et al., 2020). Their higher usage in native ads suggests a higher degree of conversationalisation or colloqualisation of this form of advertising and possibly something of a novel feature of ads in general, as this kind of verbs are less frequent in conventional ads included in the BNC. The higher degree of conversationalisation is also evident through the increased use of interjections, which are typical features of spoken informal language (Biber et al., 1999). These mostly occur in editorial evaluations or in quotes from consumer online reviews and are intended to create a sense of excitement, as the extracts below show:

1) Omg! These are so cute! Bought these as a set for my succulents.

2) Oh, and a lot of their clothes are unisex, too!

3) Next time? No, NOW!

Another striking feature of the native ads produced by Buzzfeed is an extensive use of personal pronouns, especially 'you'. The pronoun 'you' is a classic feature of advertising, which, as a form of synthetic personalisation (Fairclough, 2001), is used to give an impression of personal address and connection. Research in cognitive narratology has shown that readers feel more emotionally involved if they are addressed personally (e.g. Brunyé et al., 2011) and higher emotional engagement and connection can stimulate viral sharing (Nikolinakou & King, 2018). This is precisely what platforms such as Buzzfeed are after and using the pronoun 'you' might be one of the linguistic strategies to increase the likelihood of a content becoming viral. In native ads, 'you' occurs 15,306 times per million words, as compared to 9,583 in BNC_Ads. It also has different collocations, one of which is the verb 'are' in its contracted form ''re', which is not listed on the collocation list of 'you' in BNC_Ads. In fact, ''re' occurs in the vicinity of 'you' 78 times in the corpus and it is the second strongest collocate, after the verb 'can'. ''Re' can be a marker of present or present continuous tense and can create a sense of

immediate personal address, which can heighten involvement and influence purchase decisions or sharing. Below are some indicative examples of the collocate pair 'you' + ''re':

1) This bun maker is perfect if you're short on time but still want to look chic

2) A boba tea light because I know you're always looking for any excuse to treat yourself to bubble tea

3) Perfect if you're reading on the tube while holding onto a pole or for pretty much any situation where you want to read without having both hands free

Cardinal numbers are another distinctive feature of native ads as shown in Table 3. On the one hand, greater use of numbers is not surprising given that native ads include prices of the advertised products as well as counts of reviews and ratings. Yet, cardinal numbers seem also salient in headlines as concordance searches revealed. In fact, most of the native ads start with a cardinal number pointing to either a number of products that perform a particularly 'amazing job' or recommendations, as the following examples demonstrate:

1) 10 Mind-Blowing Benefits of Playtime That Every Parent Should Know About

2) 22 Products That Might Look Regular But Have Dramatic Results. We love a drama queen.

3) 15 Bands That Probably Wouldn't Exist Without Led Zeppelin

4) 11 Ways to Cool Off Without A Pool

The products, recommendations, or other pieces of information are subsequently presented as a list with further details. This format is known in journalism as a listicle and is the dominant design of native ads, at least in the ones circulated on BuzzFeed. As Ledin and Machin (2015) observe, lists have a specific semiotic function. They are normally used to present information in an organised, systematic and logical way to show or create the perception that the listed belong to one paradigm. In the case of the studied native ads, the paradigm is indicated in the

headline with the cardinal numbers and the mention of products or suggestions. The paradigm is then broken down into separate components that are presented one by one with further details. In the digital overload of information, producers of native ads capitalise on the affordances of quantification and lists to grab and retain consumers' attention through the appeal of logic, systematicity and easy read.

This preliminary corpus-based exploration into a sample corpus of native ads sourced from BuzzFeed has shown how corpus tools and methods can help us reveal features that are pertinent to this new form of digital advertising. Although by no means exhaustive, the analysis has demonstrated that native ads produced by BuzzFeed retains many of the features of conventional advertising, while simultaneously expanding on others. Native ads are comparatively much more colloquial, conversational and personal, which reflects the style of BuzzFeed in general and makes it difficult to distinguish them from other contents on the site. They are also more systematic, logical and data-driven as indicated by the omnipresence of digital interdiscursivity in forms of ratings and reviews and the heavy use of numbers. Native ads are mostly based on lists with descriptions in a nominal style, which creates a sense of systematicity and usefulness. Often the contents presented have nothing to do with the advertised product and are only loosely related, when, for example, the Dunkin' Donuts attempt to attract consumers by listing '11 ways in which to cool off without a pool' and only at the very end their own product is mentioned as one of the ways 'Drinking a frozen Dunkin' Coolatta, duh!'. However, the analysis captured only one dimension of the native ads – the text, while multimodal elements were excluded. The appeal of native ads works precisely by skilfully combing textual and visual information to create humours or light-hearted contents. Future corpus-based work on digital advertising would need to develop an analytical framework to capture this important multimodal dimension.

5. Conclusion

The discourse of advertising is everywhere. It can be artistic, creative, emotional, rational, funny and responsive to societal trends; it can also be manipulative. It is for this reason that it needs to be explored and critically scrutinised. The field of (critical) discourse analysis has significantly enhanced our understanding of the discourse of advertising. Although much smaller in scope, corpus-based research too has offered new and important contributions. The use of larger data samples has enabled researchers to provide empirical evidence for the preference of certain lexical or grammatical choices over others, while the use of quantitative corpus tools and methods have added more precision and rigour to the ways in which data is collected and analysed. Most studies reviewed above use a combination of quantitative corpus methods with qualitative discourse-analytical techniques providing both a bird's eye and street level view of the studied phenomena. The quantitative tools can point to salient patterns in advertising discourse, which can then be explored qualitatively adding more nuance, depth and detail.

Yet, advertising is a complex semiotic aggregate, and this complexity poses challenges for corpus linguists. A corpus analysis of discourse works best on textual data, but text has often a minimal occurrence in adverts that tend to draw on a variety of semiotic resources. Features of multimodality cannot be retrieved automatically unless the data has been annotated accordingly. Semiotic elements are complex but not impossible to analyse through a corpus-based research as work by Pérez-Sobrino (2016) has shown. Work is currently being conducted on developing tools that can assist with a semiotic analysis. For example, the visualisation tool *Kaleidographic* (Caple et al., 2018), created for a multimodal analysis of news values, offers new possibilities to represent (but not automatically capture) text-image relations.

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Critical discourse studies concerned with advertising have primarily focused on the ads themselves, while the reception of their contents is rarely considered. Often, the readers or viewers are constructed as passive consumers prone to manipulation, although they might not be so. Social media sites offer possibilities for consumers to respond critically to ads and they often do so by commenting or tweeting their opinions and attitudes. Since this kind of data is mostly textual, here too corpus tools can contribute new empirical insights into the ways in which consumers receive and engage with advertising. Corpus-based work by Vasequez (2014) on online reviews and Collins and Nerlich's (2014) research on user comment threads provide here useful directions.

6. Further Reading

Cook, G. (2001). *The discourse of advertising*. (2nd edition). London: Routledge.

This is now a classic introduction to the discourse of advertising. The volume is divided into three parts, each exploring a different dimension. The first part – materials – is concerned with the materiality of ads and the ways in which different modes interact with each other. The second part focuses on the text and discusses features such as parallelism and prosody as well as devices of cohesion and coherence. The final part is centred on people, specifically the voices of those who speak in ads and those who receive them. The book was published in 2001 and it therefore does not include newer forms of advertising such as the ones brought by digital technologies. It is nevertheless a comprehensive and informative introduction to features of advertising that are still widely used.

Breeze, R. (2013). *Corporate discourse*. London: Bloomsbury.

Breeze's work situates advertising within the whole conglomerate of corporate discourses and shows how adverts reflect corporate values and identity. She approaches advertising from a critical discourse-analytical and genre perspectives but also shows how corpus tools and methods can be useful in exploring promotional texts produced by corporations. This volume is an excellent introduction to corporate genres and the kind of work that they do in the business world and society more broadly.

Pérez-Sobrino, P. (2016). Multimodal metaphor and metonymy in advertising: A corpus-based account. *Metaphor and Symbol*, *31*(2), 73-90.

This study meticulously investigates the use of metaphor and metonymy in multimodal advertising. It not only provides novel insights into the use of multimodal metaphors in ads, it is also an excellent example showing how features that are normally difficult to capture using corpus tools can be systematically annotated and explored in a corpus-based research. The occurrence of multimodal metaphor is carefully correlated with other variables including product type and multimodal cue demonstrating important correlations between the conceptual, discursive and communicative dimensions of multimodal advertising. The study can be recommended to anyone who is interested in studying features of multimodality using a combination of a quantitative corpus approach with a manual analysis.

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