

An analysis of English used in alcoholic beverage advertisements in Thai magazines

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Abstract

This study was conducted to investigate what verbal and non-verbal techniques were used in English in alcoholic beverage advertisements published in Thai magazines. For Him magazine (FHM) was selected to participate in this study. In addition, the types of Thai cultural aspects appearing on alcoholic beverage advertisements in Thai magazines were also investigated.

Verbal techniques were analyzed using Cook's foregrounding and Zakia's intimate interaction techniques. In addition, non-verbal techniques were analyzed using Zakia's Gestalt technique, figure and ground techniques, intimate interactions, eye leading techniques, signs, colors, camera shots, and composition.

Findings from the analysis of verbal techniques revealed that foregrounding and intimate interaction techniques played an important role in alcoholic advertisements in this study. In terms of foregrounding techniques, it indicated that wordplay was mainly used to construct the messages. Wordplay is a rhetorical device that often relies on different meanings of a polysemous word, the literal and non-literal meaning of an idiom, or on bringing two homonyms together in the same utterance to produce a witticism. In terms of intimate interaction, it showed that sentence types were used. These sentence types consisted of interrogative and imperative sentences. Interrogative and imperative sentences were frequently used in the advertisements to create face-to-face interaction.

As for non-verbal techniques, the findings indicated that color, figures, and ground techniques were mainly used to persuade the viewers. The color in alcoholic beverage advertisements is used to influence the viewers' perception and evoke a particular feeling. In addition, figures and ground techniques are used to attract the viewers to the product, which is separated from the background. Moreover, the findings also revealed that the advertisers tried to persuade consumers through an indirect appeal such as changing negative aspects of the alcoholic beverage into positive ones.

In terms of Thai culture appearing in the advertisements, it was found that advertisers used indirect information to persuade consumers to buy their goods. It was also found that advertisers tried to make consumers feel that their products were a part of Thai culture.

Keywords: Alcoholic beverage, advertising, Thai magazines

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Introduction

Background of the Study

Thailand has been identified as one of the 'emerging markets' for both the domestic and international alcoholic beverage industry. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Thailand ranks fifth worldwide in consumption of alcoholic beverages, behind the Republic of Korea, the Bahamas, Taiwan, and Bermuda (Thai Health Promotion Foundation, 2009). While domestic companies remain the key operators, multinational companies have expanded their area of profitability into this market in recent years.

In addition, Thailand is the largest market for alcoholic beverages in South East Asia and is one of the fastest growing markets globally. In 2005, about 16.20 million HL (Hectoliter = 100 liters) of beer were consumed in Thailand with the compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 10.10%, twice the rate of Asia Pacific and quadruple the world average (Thai Beverage Public Company Limited, 2011).

The alcoholic beverage industry is expanding rapidly all over the world, leading to fierce competition. Their emphasis is on more investment in new markets, especially in developing countries, with Thailand being one of its top targets. The Association of Alcoholic Beverage Producers within the European Economic Community mentioned that, in terms of quantity, in 2010 the Thai market had the 8th ranking. On the other hand, in monetary terms, Thailand is ranked 18th, with its market value of 72 million euros or more than 3,000 million baht. Thus, international alcoholic beverage companies have Thailand as their target for market expansion, by giving support in sales, product labels, and patterns of drinking alcoholic beverage. Moreover, according to The Thai Health Promotion Foundation (2009), alcoholic beverage assumption of Thais will be increasing.

In business, alcoholic beverage companies have to compete with one another to increase their market share. Advertising is a strategy that the companies use to increase their sales. Advertisers have to make advertisements that can

attract customers in order to increase their sales volume (Kleppner, 1983).

In alcoholic beverage advertisements, there is a wide range of media available such as television, radio, the Internet, billboards, and printed advertisements. In this study, printed media were chosen to study. The reason is that printed advertisements differ from broadcast advertisements on radio and television in several ways, for example, printed advertisements can be recorded and memorable of all historic accomplishments (Freeouf, 2007).

Furthermore, the most important characteristic of printed advertisements is that it is an accessible means of sharing information and retrieving at a consumer's request (Burnet and Moriarty, 1998).

There are different types of printed media such as newspapers, newsletters, brochures, posters, and magazines. However, magazines are a source of media, which have the most influence and attract target customers. Magazines also offer advertisers an opportunity to incorporate various new techniques and ideas. Moreover, magazines are one such form of printed media that provides a more specific target group of customers (Manovich, 2001).

Besides, printed advertisements do not disappear quickly as on television and radio advertisements do due to their limited time and space in offering detailed information (Pleshette, 2003). In most cases of printed advertisements, advertisers use both verbal and non-verbal techniques in expressing their ideas to make their products more appealing to the public. The differences between verbal and non-verbal techniques are as follows:

The verbal techniques focus on words, texts, or phrases that advertisers use in advertising. Advertisers use verbal techniques as a tool to manipulate a hidden message to persuade potential consumers. Basically using the verbal method just provides information and also plays an important role in anchoring the advertising text, including descriptive information about the product and other texts to get attention from the consumers (Cook, 1992).

Non-verbal (wordless) messages can be sent or received through any sensory channel such as visual perception by using Gestalt techniques, to attract the customers. The Gestalt theory first arose in 1890 as a reaction to the prevalent psychological theory of the time - atomism. Atomism examined parts of things with the idea that these parts could then be put back together to make the whole. Moreover, non-verbal techniques can also be sent to figure and ground, eye leading, signs, colors, camera shots and composition. There are many examples of the usage of non- verbal techniques in advertisements such as logos, with bright colors to captivate the consumer's eyes, a romantic picture in advertisements for women's alcoholic beverages, and a colorful packaging to engage female customers (Zakia, 1997).

The Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to examine how verbal techniques, non-verbal techniques, and other types of Thai culture were used to construct persuasive messages in alcoholic beverage advertisements in Thai magazines. The study was also conducted to demonstrate how alcoholic beverage advertisements shapes viewers' perceptions in alcoholic beverage drinking.

Research Questions

In response to the purpose of the study, three research questions were proposed:

- 1.What verbal techniques were used in English for alcoholic beverage advertisements in Thai magazines, printed in the year 2011?
- 2.What non-verbal techniques were used in English for alcoholic beverage advertisements in Thai magazines, printed in the year 2011?
- 3.What other types of Thai cultural aspects appeared in English alcoholic beverage advertisements in Thai magazines, printed in the year 2011?

Significance of the study

The results of this study revealed factors that influenced alcoholic beverage advertisements in Thailand. Additionally, this study also clarified the use of language techniques of advertising, as well as interpreted how verbal techniques could work in Thai alcoholic beverage advertisements. This information may be beneficial to all foreign liquor companies

to understand alcoholic beverage advertisement in Thailand and to create effective advertisements. This research may also be useful to alcoholic beverage manufacturers and advertising companies, in assisting them to execute a more effective marketing strategy.

Methodology

Selected magazines

The data were collected from all alcoholic beverage advertisements printed in FHM magazines from January to December 2011. FHM is a very popular male magazine, having more alcoholic beverage advertisements comparing to any other magazines sold in Thailand, and all selected data of 18 alcoholic beverage advertisements were published in English. FHM or For Him Magazine is an international monthly men's lifestyle magazine. The magazine began publishing in 1985 in the United Kingdom under the name For Him and then changed its title to FHM in 1994 when Emap Consumer Media took over the magazine (Allan, 2008).

In March 2003, FHM was launched, and published in Thailand by Inspire Entertainment Co., Ltd. Today, FHM is a popular glossy magazine in Thailand. The magazine, meant to cater to regular men, responds to the question "What do men really like and what do they talk about in the company of other men?" (Barnes, 2012).

Data collection

Eighteen advertisements from FHM magazines printed in Thailand in the year 2011 were selected as the data of this study. There were 22 alcoholic beverage advertisements on FHMs in the year 2011, but 18 of them were chosen for detailed analysis because it was the best-represented alcoholic beverage advertisements; and comparing to others, they contained a variety of verbal and non-verbal techniques. The analysis was done with both verbal and non-verbal elements in order to find out the persuasive messages being conveyed by the advertisements and how the advertisers used verbal and non-verbal techniques to construct the messages.

Data analysis.

Theoretical framework was used to analyze the data of this study (Cook, 1992 ; Zakia, 1997). Verbal techniques include foregrounding techniques and intimate interaction. Foregrounding techniques are divided into three main categories: (a) prosody, (b) parallelism, and (c) word plays. Prosody is the patterning of sound, a text, an extra dimension that can reinforce, contradict, or add to its meaning. Prosody used in advertisements can be divided into poems, jingles, and prosodic. A poem signifies the reader to identify, and rhythmically read the writing as poetry. A jingle is a short tune that explicitly promotes the product being advertised, usually with one or more advertising slogans. Prosodic considers how rhythm, stress, intonation, tempo, and related features of speech contribute to a speaker's meaning. An example of prosody can be found in the slogan for Glenfiddich Chopin whisky: "A day is chopsticks. A year is Chopin."

Parallelism is a balance of two or more similar words, phrases, or clauses, and occurs when the form of a sentence or clause repeats the form of another clause or sentence. This technique is useful for creating emotional impact and evoking memorization. Wordplay is a rhetorical device that often relies on the different meanings of a polysemous word, the literal and non-literal meaning of an idiom, or on bringing two homonyms together in the same utterance to produce a witticism.

Intimate interaction in this study was used to catch the customer's eyes and increase their trust by creating a customer's interaction through verbal elements. Intimate interaction is divided into two main categories: (a) cohesive devices and (b) sentence types. Cohesive device is the grammatical and lexical relationship within a text or sentence. Cohesive devices analyzed in this study consisted of ellipses, connectors, references, repetitions, and the use of pronouns. Additionally, sentence types for data analysis were divided into two categories, interrogative and imperative sentences. Interrogative sentences are the sentences that form a question and imperative sentences are the sentences that make a command or request.

Additionally, non-verbal techniques in this study were concerned with the Gestalt technique, figure and ground techniques, eye leading techniques, signs, colors, and camera shots. For the details, Gestalt is a psychological term, which means, "unified whole." It refers to theories of visual perception developed by a German psychologists in the 1920s. The theories attempt to describe how people tend to organize visual elements into groups or unified as a wholes when certain principles are applied (Carlson *et al.*, 2010). Moreover, the figure and the ground techniques help viewers to see an object, which is separated from a background. In other words, they help the viewers to identify the positions of people or objects in a frame easily. Furthermore, the eye leading technique is a simple technique that helps advertisers bring the viewer's eyes to a focal point, and gives a picture of an overall structure in terms of layout. A sign is an object, a word, or a picture, which has a particular meaning to a person or a group of people, and the use of color in alcoholic beverage advertisements is designed to influence the viewers' perception and evoke a particular feeling. In case of camera shots, the advertisers use this technique to capture pictures of an object in a frame. This technique can communicate an emotion within the frame to the viewers because the distance between the camera and an object will inspire and relate to an emotional response of a consumer to a product. This technique is divided into four categories: (a) an establishing shot, (b) a long shot, (c) a medium shot, and (d) a close-up shot. In addition, composition refers to the way the elements in a camera frame is made to relate to each other in order to create a meaningful whole. This technique is divided into three categories: center and margin, left and right, and top and bottom.

The data were analyzed from verbal and non-verbal techniques used in advertisements for alcoholic beverages. Several qualitative data analyses were used. Verbal and non-verbal techniques were collected from 18 alcoholic beverage advertisements printed in 12 copies of FHM from January, 2011 to December, 2011.

Results and discussion

Research Question 1

What verbal techniques of English were used in alcoholic beverage advertisements in Thai magazines, printed in the year 2011?

According to the foregrounding techniques and intimate interaction, the findings showed that foregrounding techniques played an important role in alcoholic beverage advertisements. Foregrounding techniques are a prominent portion of a text that contributes to the total meaning, and are divided into three main categories, namely: prosody, parallelism, and wordplays. Intimate interaction is used in some advertisements that catch the customer's eyes and increase their trust by creating a personal interaction through verbal elements. Intimate interaction techniques are divided into two main categories: cohesive devices and sentence types. Results showed that the wordplays were used 5 times out of 18 in all advertisements analyzed. Wordplay is a rhetorical device that often relies on the different meanings of a polysemous word, the literal and non-literal meaning of an idiom, or on bringing two homonyms together in the same utterance to produce a witticism. In addition, the most common intimate interaction also played an important role in alcoholic beverage advertisements in this study. Results showed that this sentence type was used 5 times out of 18 in all advertisements analyzed. The sentence types for data analysis were divided into two categories; imperative sentences and interrogative sentences. The finding revealed that imperative sentences were used three times and the interrogative ones were used twice.

Verbal techniques, foregrounding techniques and intimate interaction were used to analyze the data. The use of wordplay creates advertisements in an unfamiliar way from the norm in order to make the product seem new and noticeable. Obscure words meanings, and clever rhetorical excursions are seen in advertisements, for example, Corona beer and Bud Light. Moreover, wordplay is frequently used in commercial advertisements because it promotes a given product by creating humor, attracting the reader's attention, and adding persuasive force to the message. As we can see from Absolut Vodka advertisement, and from the slogan : "IN THE

ABSOLUT WORLD." , this advertisement attempts to draw attention of itself through a technique of wordplay by using misspellings, for example Absolute and Absolut (name of a product) to attract the viewers' attention . Moreover, wordplay was used in other way, such as in the advertisement of Bud Light beer with the slogan: "Live the Good Life with Bud Light!" The advertiser uses wordplay techniques in this advertisement. The words "Light" and "Life" and their respective meanings are used to catch the reader's attention.

The results of this study also points out that the advertiser frequently uses sentence types and wordplay in advertisements because they serve to create face-to-face interaction. The usage of these sentences is another way to attract the viewer for more involvement in the advertisements.

Additionally, sentence types make the viewers feel that the verbal element provides only one half of the conversation and it is their obligation to supply the other half by answering the questions or doing what the imperative sentences order them to do. For example, in Bud Light beer advertisement, the advertiser uses an imperative sentence, "Live the Good Life with Bud Light," to catch the consumers' attention by giving them instructions that express either a request or a command. The advertiser uses every opportunity to exhort potential customers to act, buy and consume. The slogan "Live the Good Life with Bud Light" is the 'battle-cry' of the advertisement. Another sample is from Smirnoff Vodka advertisement. An interrogative sentence was used: "Who made the orange more tempting than the apple?" It was only used as a rhetorical device, not to actually pose a question, but to make a point. Interrogative sentences take different forms to suggested answers to the questions, and provided design to further highlight the product and attract the viewers' attention.

From Geis's (1982) previous study, it revealed an important aspect of communication involving verbal techniques presented. In the printed advertisements mentioned in this study, verbal techniques are also an important component of the overall message. In summary, verbal techniques are necessary preconditions for the processing of any communication.

Research Question 2

What non-verbal techniques were used in English alcoholic beverage advertisements in Thai magazines, printed in the year 2011?

From the investigation of 18 alcoholic beverage captions, the findings revealed that eleven advertisements used color techniques to persuade the viewer. In addition, the use of color was outstanding because it appeared in the majority of advertisements, namely, 10 out of 18 advertisements from this study used color to persuade and make the advertisement more appealing to the consumer.

Moreover, the study also found that the use of figure and ground was often applied in alcoholic beverage advertisements captions. It was ranked second in non- verbal techniques in this study.

The use of non-verbal communication is a part of advertising language. Non-verbal language is widely used in advertisements as Gestalt such as Gestalt's techniques, figure and ground, eye leading technique, sign, color, camera shot and composition. The findings revealed that for the usage of non-verbal techniques, color ranked first in this study, and figure and ground ranked second.

The advertiser's usage of color techniques in alcoholic beverage advertisements is designed to influence the viewers' perception and evoke a particular feeling. The use of color has a considerable influence on the viewer's perception, as well as on their decision to buy a particular product. Moreover, color can be interpreted differently in many cultures. In some cultures, some colors show luck, like red in China and black in Japan. Other colors also have certain interpretation. For example, green is acknowledged as a special color in Islam and some other colors have tribal affiliations in parts of Africa. Regarding an example in this study, Singha beer advertisements employed the technique of colors to present the product. The advertisement used gold color to refer to wealth and prosperity in Thailand. As a result, it

puts Singha on a higher level than other beers that use less culturally significant colors (Singha beer product Analysis, 2012). The color gold refers to success, achievement, and triumph. Associated with abundance and prosperity, luxury and quality, prestige and sophistication, value and elegance, the psychology of the color gold implies affluence, material, wealth, and extravagance (Bear, 2007). Additionally, Bud Light beer advertisement used a color technique to draw attention from young women by depicting a woman with a sexy pink T-shirt. This color technique suggests a sense of femininity and affection. As Bud light beer is lower in calories than other beers, this additional factor may encourage women to buy the product.

With figure-ground techniques suggested by Cook (1992), the advertiser uses this technique to catch the viewer's attention instantly. Their eyes are drawn to a certain point in the advertisement, usually the main figure or item of the product. This works in favor of the advertisement because viewers are accustomed to seeing the background as passive and unimportant to the dominant subject. For example, in San Miguel beer advertisement, this technique features a picture of a large group of people on a beach and a huge bottle of San Miguel beer on one side, placed there to attract the attention of the consumers. The same as the samples mentioned, Corona Extra beer used the beer bottle as the main figure of the advertisement in order to attract consumer attention and direct their focus on the product. The background of this advertisement, showing the beach, further emphasized the feeling of relaxing and enjoying vacation on a beach, as well as the idea that the more you consume the product the calmer the tides will become.

Research Question 3

What other types of Thai cultural aspects appear on English alcoholic Beverage advertisements in Thai magazines, printed in the year 2011?

The results indicated that alcoholic beverages had a negative appearance in Thai culture. Advertisers in Thailand do not persuade consumers to purchase their products by giving direct information or using logical appeal. However, the advertisements try to persuade consumers through indirect appeal. A consumer who is exposed to a specific culture committed that cultural style of thinking and feeling. Moreover, alcoholic beverage products are known as having negative aspects. Accordingly, they are minimized or ignored in advertisements which try to make consumers feel that their products are a part of Thai culture and a part of Thai heritage.

Do alcoholic beverage advertisers in Thailand outstandingly understand Thai culture? Are advertisers consistently challenged to foster messages by sending them to Thai consumers by minding the cultural rules and legal business practices? In most cases, advertisements reflect attitudes and personalities of a culture and religion. As a result, articulations for advertisements in Thailand are different due to cultures and religions. The results of this study can enable foreign advertisers to understand how advertising strategies are employed in Thailand. Besides, advertisers are likely to use familiar images to promote products and to make Thai consumers take interest in the products advertised.

In brief, they have to be careful for the feelings and religious beliefs of all Thai consumers. The alcoholic beverage companies try to change customers' attitudes by using many types of positive appeals instead of the negative ones, such as Thai styles, friendship, celebration, new experiences, promise of reward, relaxation, sexual attraction, and trendy lifestyle. For example, Singha beer advertiser used a technique in telling the viewers from negative image to positive image due to a long connection with Thai society. Chang beer used the same technique by informing the viewers that Chang beer is a must with the ingredients in harmony with Thai culture. Moreover, 100 pipers used the slogan "Give Friends 100%," the concept of friendship as the persuading way of their advertisement. Bud Light beer used sexual attraction and trendy lifestyle techniques by

presenting a picture of an attractively popular girl in a dark pink dress with the slogan: "Live the Good Life with Bud Light!" to motivate the consumer with a trendy lifestyle.

Recommendations for Further Studies

1. This study was based only on advertisements in magazines, so further studies should be carried out with advertisements on other media, such as television commercials, billboards, sport sponsorship, banner, ads, newspapers and cinema advertisements.

2. The influential factors used in alcoholic beverages advertisements in this study were verbal and non-verbal techniques; so the researcher suggests that a further study should be focused on other linguistic techniques such as the use of presupposition in the alcoholic beverages advertisements.

3. For further study, advertisers should be interviewed to find out what techniques they use in writing advertisements to persuade customers to purchase their products. The data obtained from the interviews will be useful for the area of advertising development.

Conclusion

The results revealed that intimate interaction was essential verbal techniques in alcoholic beverage advertisements. In addition, the most common foregrounding technique used in this study consisted mainly of wordplay. Wordplay was used in five out of sixteen advertisements, and the intimate interaction techniques used were sentence types, which were also used in five of the sixteen surveyed advertisements. In terms of non-verbal techniques, the results revealed that the advertisements used color techniques to persuade the viewer. In addition, the use of color was also significant because it appeared in the majority of advertisements. It was found that 11 of the 18 advertisements used color techniques, and figure and ground techniques were also used in the captions of 11 of the 18 alcoholic beverage advertisements. According to Thai culture, alcoholic beverages have a negative social impact, so Thai advertisers do not attempt to persuade consumers by giving direct information

or using an appeal to logic. Rather, advertisers persuade consumers through an indirect appeal. Moreover, as alcoholic products are known to have negative aspects, these aspects are minimized or ignored in these advertisements.

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