

A STUDY OF DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF WATER CONSERVATION MESSAGE IN TELEVISION COMMERCIALS

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Abstract

In India, TV commercials often highlight various water resource issues and challenges, aiming to raise awareness about water conservation and its importance. These ads typically focus on water scarcity, wastage, and the need for responsible consumption, reflecting the nation's growing concerns about its water resources. Similarly, Television commercials (TVCs) serve as powerful tools for shaping public perception and behavior. In the context of water conservation, TVCs employ specific linguistic and rhetorical strategies to create awareness and influence sustainable practices. This paper attempts to examine the language used in TVCs promoting water conservation, focusing on discourse techniques such as emotional appeals, persuasive rhetoric, cultural symbolism, and visual metaphors.

1. Introduction

India is experiencing an acute water crisis, with millions of people across urban and rural areas facing severe water stress. According to the 2020 National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog) report, 21 Indian cities are expected to run out of groundwater by 2025, which have arrived, affecting over 100 million people (NITI Aayog, 2020). The need for water conservation has never been more urgent. Television advertising, with its mass appeal and emotive power, can play an instrumental role in spreading awareness and educating people about the importance of saving water. Water conservation is a global concern, and media campaigns play a critical role in advocating for responsible water usage. Television commercials, as a popular medium, utilize language strategically to persuade audiences. The study of discourse in these commercials reveals how linguistic choices influence public attitudes and behaviors toward water conservation. Television commercials (TVCs) significantly contribute to public awareness about water conservation, they use persuasive language, emotional appeals, and cultural storytelling to educate and influence behavior. This paper employs discourse analysis, drawing on principles of persuasive communication, semiotics, and sociolinguistics.

2. Literature Review

A literature review is a crucial part of a research paper because it provides context, credibility, and direction for the study

2.1 Discourse Analysis in Media Studies

Discourse analysis is widely used to examine how language and visuals in media shape meaning and influence audiences (Fairclough, 1995). It provides insights into power relations, ideologies, and persuasive techniques in advertising.

2.2 Television Advertisements and Environmental Messaging

Research has shown that television advertisements leverage emotional appeals, narrative structures, and rhetorical strategies to drive behavioral change (Gulas & McKeage, 2000). Effective environmental ads often employ fear appeals, moral responsibility, and social norms to encourage sustainable practices (Kilbourne, 2005).

2.3 Water Conservation Campaigns in Media

Studies on water conservation advertisements highlight the significance of farming techniques, such as scarcity messaging, ethical responsibility, and future consequences (Peattie & Peattie, 2009). Successful campaigns often combine scientific facts with emotive storytelling to enhance message retention and impact.

3. Methodology

Discourse analysis is a broad term for various qualitative methods that explore the structure and expression of language within its social and cultural context. It looks at the linguistic content (what's said) and language use (how it's used) in a given text to convey meaning in different social settings.

The study adopts qualitative discourse analysis as its research design. Three advertisements are selected as primary data telecasted on Television and downloaded from You Tube. A purposive sampling method is used to select a set of TV ads from different regions and time periods. The criteria for selection include relevance to water conservation, frequency of airing, and audience reach. The study applies Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model of discourse analysis, focusing on textual analysis that examines linguistic and visual elements, discourse practice that identify production and consumption patterns and social practice that helps to understand broader ideological and societal implications.

4. Linguistic Strategies in Water Conservation TVCs

In their interview with ETBrand Equity, Kainaz Karmakar and Harshad Rajadhyaksha, Chief Creative Officers-Ogilvy India (West) expresses,

“Unless we understand the value of water, we will not be motivated to save it. This is the simple insight we had, when we started to think of this film. From there came the idea of taking a city shower into a village and showing how almost half a village can drink water, in the time it takes one city dweller to take a shower. If the film punches our conscience, it is meant to. The society needs a mirror to see its behaviour and the film is holding up that mirror.”

Ogilvy Mumbai produced the impactful film "The Shower" as part of Hindustan Unilever's "Start A Little Good" campaign to highlight the importance of water in Indian villages. The significance of a shower is entirely altered when it is taken from a city and placed in a village that lacks water.

Hindustan Unilever has started a number of programs to increase access to sanitation and hygiene in India. Billions of liters of water have been saved thanks to rainwater collecting and other water-saving measures.

4.1. Emotional Appeals and Storytelling

TVCs often evoke emotions to create a strong connection with viewers. For example, UNICEF's "Every Drop Counts" campaign shows children struggling to access clean water, making audiences empathize and rethink their water usage. Advertisements often feature relatable scenarios where people waste water unknowingly, only to realize its importance later. Bisleri's "Samajhdaar Jaante Hain" campaign humorously contrasts responsible and irresponsible water usage, reinforcing the message that conserving water is a sign of intelligence. The advertisement conveys the message that thoughtful consumption is a mark of intelligence, appealing to viewers' self-perception.

4.2. Persuasive Rhetoric and Slogans

Repetitive slogans and memorable taglines are key linguistic devices in TVCs. The Indian government's "Jal Shakti Abhiyan" campaign uses the phrase "Pani Bachao, Kal Bachao" (Save Water, Save the Future), employing rhyme and alliteration to enhance recall and impact. Catchy slogans and repetitive messaging make conservation messages memorable. The Indian government's "Jal Shakti Abhiyan" campaign uses the slogan "Pani Bachao, Kal Bachao" (Save Water, Save the Future) to instill urgency.

4.3. Cultural Symbolism and Localization

Water conservation commercials often incorporate cultural references to make messages more impactful. For instance, some Indian TVCs depict rural women walking long distances to fetch water, reinforcing the scarcity issue and urging urban audiences to value water resources. It highlights the daily struggles caused by water scarcity. This resonates with audiences and encourages responsible usage.

4.4 Rural vs. Urban Perspectives

Some campaigns highlight how water scarcity affects rural communities, making urban audiences more aware of their water usage. This taps into India's strong rural-urban connection, where many urban dwellers still have roots in villages.

4.5. Visual Metaphors and Semiotic Elements

Language in TVCs extends beyond words to include imagery and symbols. A commercial by Tata's Water Mission features a drying riverbed forming the shape of a crying face, metaphorically representing the suffering caused by water shortages while other TVCs provide practical solutions or direct audiences to initiatives promoting conservation. For example, the Tata Water Mission advertisements encourage rainwater harvesting and sensible usage, showing simple steps viewers can take. Water is often depicted as precious, sometimes even equated to life itself. Visual storytelling, such as showing an empty well or a child struggling to get water, evokes empathy and prompts behavioral change.

In the midst of a rural village, the movie opens on an urban shower booth. Curious, a villager enters the building. Instead of having a bath, he switches on the shower and, much to everyone's amazement, begins drinking the water to relieve his thirst. The folks line up one by one to get water from the shower. Thus, the contrast effectively draws attention to the importance of water and the necessity of conserving it. Hindustan Unilever's "Shower Water Conservation" campaign successfully encouraged viewers to reduce water usage while bathing. The TVC included practical, easy-to-implement solutions such as using a bucket instead of a shower and limiting the duration of showers. These actionable suggestions, combined with the brand's strong presence in Indian households, made the campaign particularly effective. Bisleri not only sells packaged drinking water but also positions itself as a responsible brand advocating for conservation. Through initiatives like "Bottles for Change", which promotes plastic recycling, Bisleri integrates sustainability into its brand image.

5. Case Studies of Notable Water Conservation TVCs

In India, TV commercials often highlight various water resource issues and challenges, aiming to raise awareness about water conservation and its importance. These advertisements typically focus on water scarcity, wastage, and the need for responsible consumption, reflecting the nation's growing concerns about its water resources.

5.1. Water Conservation

Reports show that India faces severe water shortages due to overuse, pollution, and erratic rainfall patterns. Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) "The Rainmaker" advertisement depicts a young boy who wishes for rain, symbolizing how vital water is. The message emphasizes the importance of conserving water for future generations and how innovation can help tackle water scarcity. It also focuses on Preventing Water Wastage. Wasting water is a significant challenge, especially in urban areas where excessive water use for daily tasks like cleaning and washing is common. An advertisement by the ministry of drinking water and Sanitation GoI depicts a dhaba where people often use water to wash hands, faces or drink from same pot. Also drain it on larger scale.

Water Shower Advertisements (Dove, Lux, etc. by HUL) shows that brands have used the idea of responsible water usage in their advertisements, showcasing consumers switching to water-efficient products that encourage shorter showers and reduced water wastage. Visuals and punch line of this advertisement conveys message emphatically. Cleaning of polluted water bodies have also used in several advertisements.

5.2 Rainwater Harvesting

Lack of rainwater harvesting systems exacerbates water scarcity in many regions. Jaquar product in one of their advertisement, it brand showcases how people can use water efficiently by installing water-saving products and rainwater harvesting systems, reinforcing the need for sustainable water use. Another advertisement issued in public interest by the center for science and environment, New Delhi about rain water harvesting says, 'rain water belongs to each one of us, but how do we keep and share? Or let it drain into the ocean. The advertisement talk about rain water harvesting. Analysis of the advertisement about rainwater

harvesting using linguistic features involves examining its structure, word choice, rhetorical devices, and overall persuasive strategies.

5.3 Use of Inclusive Pronouns ("each one of us")

The phrase "Rainwater belongs to each one of us" uses inclusive language, particularly the pronoun "us", to create a sense of collective responsibility. This appeals to the audience's emotions and encourages shared ownership of the issue. The word suggests an ethical obligation, reinforcing the idea that water is a common good rather than an individual possession. It subtly implies that failing to act on rainwater harvesting is neglecting a collective duty.

5.4 Context and Function in Discourse

The question appears in an advertisement about rainwater harvesting, meaning it is not seeking an actual answer but rather prompting thought and engagement. It introduces a problem-solution framework, setting up the need for rainwater conservation. The implicit suggestion is that rainwater harvesting is the solution to "keeping and sharing" water.

5.5 Pragmatic and Persuasive Effect

The rhetorical question effectively engages the audience by prompting them to reflect on their role in water conservation. By framing the issue as a choice between keeping and sharing water or allowing it to drain away, the question creates a sense of urgency, emphasizing that a decision must be made. This contrast subtly pressures the audience to consider the consequences of inaction. Ultimately, the question serves as a persuasive tool leading toward a call to action, implying that rainwater harvesting is the solution. Without explicitly stating it, the advertisement guides the audience toward recognizing the importance of conserving rainwater and taking responsible steps to do so. It engages the audience, promotes critical thinking, and reinforces a call to action for rainwater conservation. The advertisement is effective because it uses inclusive language, contrast, rhetorical questions, and emotive words to persuade the audience. It presents rainwater harvesting as a responsible and necessary action while making the issue personal and urgent.

6. Conclusion

These advertisements are a mix of corporate social responsibility and direct consumer messaging, using both emotional and rational appeals to make the audience aware of water resource issues. The intention behind such commercials is not only to promote a brand but also to educate the public about the importance of protecting and conserving water for the future. The discourse strategies in water conservation TVCs demonstrate how language and visuals work together to persuade audiences. Emotional appeals, persuasive slogans, cultural references, and semiotic elements significantly enhance the effectiveness of these messages. Though, several brands spread awareness about water conservation and harvesting but they found failing in putting forward sustainable solutions. Perhaps, in future endeavors those commercials would come up with radical guidelines. Future research could explore audience reception studies to measure the impact of these linguistic choices on behavior change.

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