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TACTICS AND MEANS OF PERSUASION IN DIGITAL EDUCATIONAL ADVERTISING

This paper aims at comparing persuasive strategy in Chinese-, English- and Russian-language digital educational advertising. Tactics of emotional appeal, rational appeal, authority appeal and value appeal are determined, and the linguistic means (lexical and syntactical) that support the realization of each tactic are further analyzed, as well as the nonverbal elements of the message. The results show that advertisements in three languages are roughly similar in both the choice of tactics and the preference in specific verbal and nonverbal means, which can provide a reference for the selection of effective tactics and means of persuasion while creating digital educational advertising.

Key words: *digital educational advertising; persuasive tactics; emotional appeal; rational appeal; authority appeal; value appeal; verbal and nonverbal means of persuasion.*

ТАКТИКИ И СРЕДСТВА УБЕЖДЕНИЯ В ЦИФРОВОЙ ОБРАЗОВАТЕЛЬНОЙ РЕКЛАМЕ

Цель работы – сопоставить реализацию стратегии убеждения в китайскоязычной, англоязычной и русскоязычной цифровой рекламе образовательных услуг. Определяются тактики апелляции к эмоциям, разуму, авторитету и ценностям, устанавливаются языковые средства (лексические и синтаксические), способствующие реализации каждой тактики, а также невербальные компоненты сообщения. Результаты демонстрируют, что рекламные тексты сходны в трех языках как в плане тактик, так и в выборе конкретных вербальных и невербальных средств. Полученные результаты могут служить ориентиром для отбора эффективных тактик и средств убеждения при создании цифровой образовательной рекламы.

Ключевые слова: *цифровая образовательная реклама; тактики убеждения; апелляция к эмоциям; апелляция к разуму; апелляция к авторитету; апелляция к ценностям; вербальные и невербальные средства убеждения.*

The emergence and development of digital technology is changing the marketing mode of educational institutions, and traditional advertising, such as print media, is gradually being replaced by more dynamic digital advertising. As one of the main promotional methods of modern educational products and services, digital advertising has received more and more attention from scholars, and the pragmatic strategy involved in it has naturally become one of the important research objects in linguistic field.

As the name suggests, digital educational advertising is the application of digital mode of advertisement in education industry. D. A. Shevchenko defines digital marketing as “the promotion of products and services by using digital channels to reach consumers”, which in its essence is “luring potential users into purchasing a company’s products and services” [1, p. 29]. In terms of an educational institution, the goal of digital advertising is “to attract new and retain existing customers (applicants and students), to increase sales of educational products and services, as well as to improve the image and boost name recognition in the market” [2, p. 19], which requires that advertising content should be attractive and able to persuade consumers to make a purchase. Therefore, the study of marketing strategy in digital educational advertising from a linguistic perspective is meaningful.

Being both a form of marketing communication and a type of discourse, advertising can be studied with the help of discourse analysis methods. There are many approaches to discourse analysis, such as systemic functional approach, semiotic approach, cognitive approach, pragmatic approach and so on. The core of advertising is to use promotional strategies that lead to persuading consumers to make purchases, so strategic approach as a type of pragmatic approach is preferred in advertising. Specifically, the theoretical basis for our pragmatic analysis of digital educational advertising is viewing persuasive strategy as a global strategy of communication. Still, its manifestation is unique depending on the sphere of application.

The *Cambridge Dictionary* defines the verb *to persuade* as “to make someone do or believe something by giving them a good reason to do it or by talking to that person and making them believe it” [3]. Educational advertising aims to attract the attention of potential students and their parents and persuade them to choose a specific educational institution or curriculum. In practice, the use of persuasive strategy in advertising is a comprehensive, complex and diverse process. For example, it can be done by promoting a limited offer to stimulate consumers’ anxiety or by introducing preferential prices to arouse their rational thinking. All the various methods that serve the realization of the overall persuasive strategy can be considered as specific tactics. According to N. I. Formanovskaya, a strategy is connected with the ultimate goal of communication, while tactics are specific speech moves corresponding to the general strategy [4, p. 72].

Tactics are expressed in a multitude of forms. Based on our analysis, the commonly used persuasive tactics in digital educational advertising are emotional appeal, rational appeal, authority appeal and value appeal. Emotional appeal is “one kind of advertising appeals, which stimulates consumer’s emotional attitude towards the product by adding emotion to the advertisement as well as creating the specific advertising image” [5, p. 40]. Rational appeal conveys the advantages of product in terms of price, quality, technology and function as the core content, focusing on the expression of the product’s material satisfaction to consumers, so that consumers decide whether to buy or not through rational thinking [6, p. 160]. Compared

to emotional appeal, rational appeal pays more attention to the product itself rather than consumers. Authority appeal cites opinions, recommendations and endorsements of experts, celebrities or well-known institutions to enhance the credibility and attractiveness of products, as “reference to authority automatically strengthens the speaker’s position in the eyes of the recipients” [7, p. 39]. Finally, value appeal attempts to get consumers to comply by pointing out the central and joint beliefs that guide their actions [8, p. 12]. This tactic targets shared ideals or life principles, common for the whole society, such as *success, tradition, patriotism, beauty, loyalty*, etc. As B. S. Erasov pointed out, “any classification of values by type and level is invariably arbitrary due to the fact that social and cultural meanings are introduced into it” [9, p. 65]. Besides, it is difficult to fit a value into a specific category (vital, social, political, moral, religious, or aesthetic) due to its own multiple meanings. Nevertheless, B. S. Erasov makes an attempt to itemize values. Taking this classification into account, on the one hand, and relying on the empirical material, on the other hand, we identify value orientations, relevant for digital educational advertising. Among them are *professional success* and *future and dreams* (or *future orientation*), illustrated below.

The means supporting specific tactics in advertising can be divided into verbal and nonverbal. Verbal means convey information by using linguistic elements, which can be written or oral. Moreover, attention should be paid to both lexical and syntactical levels since “verbal communication uses human speech and natural language as a sign system, that is, a phonetic sign system that includes both lexical and syntactical principles” [10, p. 118]. As for nonverbal means, they can be categorized as visual and graphic (size, colour, composition, etc.). “They perform informative and expressive functions, and also act in close relationship with verbal components” [11, p. 178]. It is worth noting that not all nonverbal manifestations accompanying verbal messages can be viewed upon as nonverbal means, but only those that are meaningful and act as signs [12, p. 240]. In digital advertising, verbal and nonverbal parts that constitute the text are neither independent nor homogeneous. They combine with each other in order to be effective, merging into a single whole [13, p. 180]. Nonverbal elements strengthen and somewhat correct the verbal message, making the advertisement more persuasive [14, p. 160]. Such advertisements are called creolized texts.

The material of this study are Chinese-, English- and Russian-language digital advertisements that promote educational institutions and services, which are posted on the websites of universities, schools and training institutions in China, the UK and Belarus respectively. 50 ads were randomly selected in each language, of which 20 are creolized ads. The methods of contextual analysis, comparative analysis and quantitative analysis were used.

The analyzed lexical means are words and phrases with persuasive meanings. Their main groups describe feelings and emotions (positive and negative), price, time and distance, convenience, teaching staff, future and dreams, success, etc. Syntactical means work together with lexical means to create the persuasive effect,

and their main types are questions, imperatives, parallelism, emphasis, and so on. The involved nonverbal means are represented by static visual elements (images, color, font). In total, 179 verbal markers of persuasive strategy are found in Chinese-language advertising, 166 in English and 162 in Russian, and there are respectively 55, 56 and 60 nonverbal elements used to enhance persuasion in each language (see table below).

Now let's look at specific figures. In emotional appeal, the number of lexical means used in Chinese (73) and English (68) are higher than that in Russian (47). In rational appeal, the situation is reversed, with the number of lexical means in Chinese (58) and English (57) lower than that in Russian (64). In authority appeal and value appeal, the number of lexical means in each language is relatively small.

In terms of syntactical means, there is no obvious difference across Chinese, English and Russian languages, and the overall trend is that they mainly enhance emotional appeal (10/11/8 cases), while very few syntactical means of persuasion are used in authority appeal.

Tactics and means of persuasion in digital educational advertising

Tactics	Means		Languages		
			Chinese	English	Russian
Emotional appeal	Verbal	Lexical	73	68	47
		Syntactical	10	11	8
	Nonverbal		28	26	23
Rational appeal	Verbal	Lexical	58	57	64
		Syntactical	6	5	7
	Nonverbal		18	22	25
Authority appeal	Verbal	Lexical	10	6	11
		Syntactical	2	2	3
	Nonverbal		4	3	5
Value appeal	Verbal	Lexical	16	14	18
		Syntactical	4	3	4
	Nonverbal		5	5	7

As far as nonverbal means are concerned, their number in emotional appeal is the largest in Chinese (28), followed by rational appeal (18), which is similar in English (26 and 22 respectively), while in Russian the situation is opposite, as the number of nonverbal means in rational appeal (25) is slightly higher than that of emotional appeal (23). It can also be seen that in each language the number of nonverbal means is consistent with the number of verbal means of persuasion, that is, the tactics with more verbal markers (emotional and rational appeal) also use more nonverbal means, and vice versa (authority and value appeal). This illustrates close cooperation between verbal and nonverbal means of persuasion in advertising.

The following are instances of analyses. Here is an example of emotional appeal in Chinese-language educational advertising: 暑假培训, 限时火热招生中, 名额有限. 'Summer training, limited time hot enrollment, seats are limited'. Positioned below the text is an image of children learning with a teacher. Verbal means in this ad are mainly aimed at triggering feelings and emotions. The marker 火热招生 'hot enrollment' brings positive emotions to consumers, while the markers 限时 'limited time' and 名额有限 'seats are limited' create an anxious mood. These two emotions are opposite, persuading the customers through added contrast. In terms of nonverbal means, the bold font highlights the focus of attention, and in the image, the children in the front are sitting while the last child is standing, which echoes the idea that 名额有限 'seats are limited' and further urges the children's parents to take action.

This advertisement exemplifies rational appeal: 人民币一块钱在今天还能买点什么?三个鸡蛋, 或者, 也可以到老罗英语培训听8次课. 'What can one yuan of RMB buy today? Three eggs, or, you can go to Laoluo English Training to take 8 classes'. Accompanying the text is an image of three eggs. This ad appeals to consumers' rational thinking by describing price. The verbal markers 一块钱 'one yuan' and 8次课 '8 classes' are direct descriptions of price, and the bold font of these two verbal markers is a nonverbal means emphasizing key information. As for syntactical means, the question is used to compare 三个鸡蛋 'three eggs' and 8次课 '8 classes', helping consumers make the obvious choice.

Next, let's consider a case of authority appeal: 千图培训, 名师家教24小时在线. 'Qiantu Training, famous tutors are online 24 hours a day'. The image that corresponds to the text depicts a student learning with a teacher. In this advertisement, the verbal marker 名师家教 'famous tutors' reflects the authority of teaching staff. The information conveyed nonverbally resides within the image of the student's victory gesture and the teacher's affirmation gesture, which shows teacher-student interaction in a professional context.

Now we look at value appeal: 同舟共赴好未来. 'Together, let's sail towards a bright future'. Complementing the verbal message is an image portraying students in boats on the water heading toward the sun. The lexical means 好未来 'a bright future' appeals to future and dreams, which are the common pursuit of all people. This example can be also classified as pun. 好未来 'a bright future' is not only a value pursuit, but also the name of the educational institution. The implication is that if you study at this institution, you can get a bright future. As for nonverbal means, the picture reproduces the text content: the scene of chasing the sun shows students' efforts, and the sun signifies a bright future.

Let's examine emotional appeal in an English-language advertisement. *Discover the joy of innovative learning! A curriculum that encourages them to create.* Next to the verbal message lies an image depicting three children jumping with their hands raised. The verbal marker *joy* describes a positive learning

atmosphere. The verb *discover* gives an encouragement, or calls to action, allowing everyone to enjoy innovative learning, which gives the overall message the character of an imperative sentence. In terms of nonverbal means, the colorful capitalized letters highlight the text, and the children's jumping and smiling match the verbal marker *joy*, thus appealing to consumers' positive emotions.

This advertisement showcases rational appeal: *With online learning, learners can access content **anywhere and anytime**. E-learning **saves time & money***. The image that corresponds to the text depicts a girl seated at a table with a tablet in front of her. The verbal marker *anywhere* reflects the convenience of learning location, the verbal marker *anytime* shows the convenience of learning time, and *saves time & money* describes the advantages of economizing. All of these are benefits of online courses appealing to consumers' rational thinking. Concerning nonverbal means of expression, the tablet illustrates the features of online learning, while the girl's posture demonstrates comfort, which matches the verbal markers *anywhere* and *anytime*.

An example of authority appeal is as follows: *Learn English quickly! With ExtraEnglishClass.com. **Qualified instructors**. Flexible times and locations. Online available*. The nonverbal message is the image of a woman writing on the wall. This ad appeals to authority through the verbal marker *qualified instructors*. As for syntactical means, parallelism is used. The structure of *qualified instructors* is consistent with the next sentence, and each item is presented in a similar format thus enhancing readability and clarity. Regarding nonverbal means, the writing woman embodies a qualified specialist, which corresponds to the verbal message.

This advertisement illustrates value appeal: *Choosing the right school is same like giving **the best future** to your child*. Adjacent to the text is an illustration of a pair of hands supporting a child moving forward. This ad talks about *the best future* for children, appealing to the values of future and dreams. Meanwhile, by comparing *choosing the right school for children* to *giving the best future to children*, the importance of making the right choice is visualized. In terms of nonverbal means, the uniqueness of font highlights the text content, and a pair of hands supporting the child suggests that parents help their children move towards the best future.

Here is a case of emotional appeal in Russian-language educational advertising: *–50 %. VIP-группа (3–5 человек) по цене обычной (6–8 человек). **Последние места в группах!*** '–50 %. VIP-group (3–5 people) at a regular price (6–8 people). Last places in groups!' The nonverbal aspect of this ad is the image of a woman who screams "wow". In terms of lexical means, a tense atmosphere is created by using the verbal marker *последние места* 'last places', thus provoking consumers' anxiety. In contrast, positive emotions are shown through nonverbal means. The woman's facial expression reveals surprise, excitement and thrill about the advertisement content, thus driving consumers' positive emotions.

This is an example of rational appeal: *Онлайн обучение из **любой точки мира**. Любую программу в нашей школе можно проходить в онлайн форма-*

те. Это так же **эффективно**, как и занятие в учебном центре. 'Online learning from anywhere in the world. Any program at our school can be completed in an online format. This is as effective as taking a class at a training center'. The accompanying image is of a female student happily engaged with her mobile phone. Verbal markers *любая точка мира* 'anywhere in the world' and *любая программа* 'any program' are used to emphasize the flexibility and boundlessness of online learning, highlight the characteristics of being independent from geographical restrictions as well as the freedom of course selection. Meanwhile, *эффективно* 'effectively' also presents the advantage of online learning. The image of the girl using her mobile phone complements verbal means, further reflecting the convenience of online course.

Let's take a look at an advertisement that demonstrates authority appeal: **Оксфордская коммуникативная методика. Международные стандарты. Сертифицированные преподаватели. 100 % результат.** 'Oxford communicative method. International standards. Certified teachers. 100 % result'. The background of the text is a British-style picture. The verbal markers *Оксфордский* 'Oxford's', *международный* 'international' and *сертифицированный* 'certified' are all associated with professional sphere and are used to enhance the authority of advertised educational institution and services. Meanwhile, parallelism as a syntactical means is used to emphasize the advantages of teaching methods, standards and teaching staff, which creates rhythm and increases the overall expressiveness of the ad. The British-style background picture as a nonverbal means echoes the verbal markers *Оксфордский* 'Oxford's' and *международный* 'international' in the text.

Finally, let's explore an example of value appeal: **Открой для себя мир возможностей!** 'Open a world of possibilities for yourself!' Beside the text is a photo of a student and a globe image with the Statue of Liberty and Big Ben. Verbal markers *открой* 'open' and *мир* 'world' guide students to establish a value orientation of exploration and success. In addition, these two words are colour-marked, which is also the application of nonverbal means. As for syntactical means, this is an imperative sentence starting with the verb *открой* 'open', which carries a strong sense of request and expectation, calling students to discover the world of possibilities for themselves. As for pictorial means, the Statue of Liberty, Big Ben and the American Flag match the verbal message, further highlighting the value of professional success.

This study aimed at exploring the relationship between tactics and means of implementing persuasive strategy in digital advertising that promotes educational institutions and services as well as comparing the use of these tactics and means in Chinese, English and Russian languages. The results show that each of the four major persuasive tactics in educational advertising (emotional appeal, rational appeal, authority appeal and value appeal) relies on both specific linguistic means (mainly lexical means, supplemented by syntactical means) and nonverbal means.

This reflects the current trend towards the diversification of persuasive tactics in digital advertising, and shows that verbal and nonverbal means always echo each other and work together to improve the overall persuasive effect.

In general, in Chinese, English and Russian languages, emotional appeal and rational appeal tactics are dominant, while authority appeal and value appeal are used relatively infrequently. This proves the fact that emotional appeal and rational appeal are the main persuasive tactics, but due to the particularity of educational advertising, authority appeal and value appeal still play important roles. The only significant difference across languages is that in Chinese and English, the number of means of emotional appeal is higher than the number of means of rational appeal, while in the Russian language the situation is reversed. This may show that compared with Chinese- and English-language speakers, Russian-language speakers pay more attention to the product itself when facing the choice of educational institutions and their services.

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