

Analyzing Dove Advertisement Using Van Dijk's Model: A Discourse Analysis Study

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the hidden ideologies and power structures within a Dove advertisement using Teun A. van Dijk's discourse analysis model, as introduced in the Discourse Analysis course. The research explores how linguistic and visual elements collaborate to construct social meanings related to beauty, gender, and consumer culture. It aims to reveal how everyday media, particularly advertising, subtly shapes public perception and reinforces cultural norms. The analysis uses Van Dijk's framework: microstructure, mesostructure, and macrostructure. At the microstructure level, the ad employs specific lexical items such as "*nourish*," "*natural*," and "*new*," which suggest care, purity, and innovation. These word choices portray the product as gentle, essential, and beneficial for self-care. At the mesostructure level, the advertisement features a smiling woman with flawless skin, wrapped in a white towel, visuals that support the text and convey conventional ideals of feminine beauty. At the macrostructure level, the message reflects broader cultural narratives, implying that a woman's identity and social value are closely tied to her physical appearance and the products she uses. The findings indicate that the advertisement is not merely promoting a skincare item, but also reproducing gender-based ideologies and consumerist messages. Through subtle associations, it influences how audiences perceive beauty and femininity. This research emphasizes the importance of critical media literacy in language education, encouraging students to question how language and imagery influence thought, belief, and behavior in everyday life.

Key words: discourse analysis, Van Dijk, Dove advertisement, ideology, media literacy

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary society, advertisements function as potent cultural artifacts that both mirror and mold public perceptions, particularly those concerning beauty ideals and gender roles. As individuals navigate a media-rich environment, commercial messages exert influence over self-image and social expectations. Dove, a renowned personal care brand, actively promotes a vision of "authentic beauty," yet even campaigns under this banner often draw upon entrenched conventions and subtle ideological cues to boost product appeal. This paper employs Teun A. van Dijk's triadic discourse analysis model to dissect a Dove Argan Oil body wash advertisement, revealing the interplay of structural organization, linguistic choices, and overarching themes that construct specific narratives about femininity and consumption.

Discourse analysis, according to van Dijk, unfolds on three interconnected strata: superstructure (the ad's schematic arrangement), microstructure (lexical, syntactic, and rhetorical selections), and macrostructure (the implicit ideological message). By scrutinizing each layer, researchers can unpack how discursive elements converge to reinforce power dynamics and social norms. The present study poses three central inquiries: (1) In what way is the advertisement's framework orchestrated to guide audience interpretation? (2) Which verbal and visual strategies are deployed to solidify Dove's brand story? (3) What ideologies are inscribed within the advertisement's discourse? Answering these questions illuminates the often-unseen mechanisms by which commercial media perpetuate conventional gendered and consumerist paradigms.

Over the decades, discourse analysis has emerged as an indispensable lens for understanding how language and imagery circulate power. Van Dijk's critical discourse perspective emphasizes the social reproduction of dominance through text and talk, highlighting how seemingly neutral messages carry ideological weight (van Dijk, 2001). In parallel, visual grammar frameworks (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) and multimodal analyses (Machin & Mayr, 2012) underscore the necessity of integrating textual and pictorial examination to capture the full semantic load of media artifacts.

Research demonstrates that beauty advertising routinely perpetuates narrow ideals of femininity, employing a combination of empowering rhetoric and traditional

gender tropes (Gill, 2008). Such studies reveal a pattern: ads promise autonomy and self-actualization but anchor these aspirations in consumer behavior, subtly endorsing the notion that personal value is market-dependent. This paradox of empowerment calls for methodological tools capable of dissecting both form and content, precisely what Van Dijk's three-tiered model offers.

METHODS

This investigation adopts a qualitative approach, applying Van Dijk's discourse analysis to a single Dove body wash advertisement spotlighting Argan Oil. Visual and textual components were collected from Dove's official digital materials. Analytical units comprised: headlines, slogans, product descriptions, typographic features, color schemes, and the model's pose and expression.

Analysis proceeded in a staged fashion:

1. Superstructure: Charting the ad's macro-organization (headline → image → call-to-action).
2. Microstructure: Identifying salient lexical items, syntactic forms, and rhetorical devices alongside visual cues such as font choice and color tonality.
3. Macrostructure: Synthesizing findings to extract the advertisement's latent message and ideological underpinnings.

Each stage involved systematic coding and cross-referencing with existing scholarship on gender representation and consumer discourse. The interpretative

narrative was informed by critical media studies to ensure a nuanced understanding of ideological effects.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Superstructure: Narrative Flow and Persuasive Design

Van Dijk characterizes superstructure as the overarching blueprint of discourse. In this ad, the sequence aligns with the AIDA model—Attention, Interest, Desire, Action:

- Attention (Headline): "Nourish your skin with natural nutrients."
- Interest (Visual): Depiction of a radiant, contented woman cradling the product.
- Desire (Supporting Text): Emphasis on the novelty and purity of Argan Oil infusion.
- Action (Call-to-Action): "Try the new Dove body wash today."

This linear arrangement orchestrates emotional and cognitive engagement, steering viewers from awareness to purchase intent without extraneous information. By structuring the message in discrete, recognizable segments, the ad maintains clarity and reinforces a persuasive argument: visible evidence of beauty results in product credibility and consumer motivation.

Microstructure: Language, Typography, and Visual Rhetoric

Microstructure examines the fine-grained linguistic and visual features that shape local meaning.

- Lexical Fields: Adjectives such as "nourish," "natural," and "new" evoke connotations of health, authenticity, and innovation. Verbs in the imperative form ("Try") directly engage the receiver.
- Syntactic Simplicity: Clauses are concise and directive, enhancing memorability. The imperative sentence structure projects urgency and creates a sense of personal invitation.
- Typographic Choices: A minimalist sans-serif font communicates modernity and transparency. Hierarchical font sizing delineates priority, guiding the reader from the headline to body text to the call-to-action.
- Chromatic Schema: Warm earth tones cream, gold, and ivory complement the Argan Oil theme and subconsciously align with notions of nature and purity. The

model's skin tone is similarly accentuated, reinforcing the product's transformative promise.

- Visual Composition: Centering the model against a neutral backdrop spotlights her luminosity. Her relaxed posture and direct gaze create rapport, positioning Dove as both approachable and authoritative.

These micro-level techniques coalesce to forge a cohesive brand aesthetic: one that equates product use with self-care and aspirational living.

Macrostructure: Ideological Messaging and Social Implications

The macrostructure captures the overarching narrative and ideological thrust.

- Femininity and Value: The advertisement implicitly ties feminine worth to dermatological perfection. By positioning clear, glowing skin as the pathway to confidence, the ad aligns self-esteem with the consumption of beauty goods.
- Consumer Subjectivity: Dove constructs the consumer as an active agent whose identity is enhanced through product choice. Yet, this autonomy is circumscribed by the brand's parameters of "acceptable" beauty.
- Exclusion and Normativity: Representation is largely homogeneous young, slender, and fair-skinned thereby marginalizing alternate embodiments of beauty. Despite Dove's broader inclusivity claims, this specific campaign reverts to normative standards.
- Naturalness Discourse: The invocation of "natural nutrients" fosters a myth of organic legitimacy masking the commodified nature of the body wash. The naturalness rhetoric aligns consumer desires for authenticity with corporate branding strategies.

Collectively, these elements reinforce a consumer culture wherein identity and self-worth are continually negotiated through market transactions.

Educational Implications for Critical Media Literacy

This study highlights the pedagogical necessity of dissecting commercial texts. Incorporating Van Dijk's framework into media literacy curricula can sharpen students' abilities to:

1. Detect persuasive architectures in advertisements.
2. Unpack semantic and visual strategies that signal ideological stances.
3. Critique the sociocultural effects of normative representations.

Structured classroom activities ranging from guided analyses to creative counter-advertisements foster critical engagement and empower learners to resist manipulative messaging.

Proposed Classroom Model

A stepwise instructional design could include:

1. Identification: Students pinpoint key structural and stylistic features in sample ads.
2. Analysis: Small groups apply superstructure, microstructure, and macrostructure coding to dissect meaning.
3. Reflection: Learners discuss personal reactions and societal implications.
4. Creation: Participants produce alternative campaigns emphasizing inclusivity and authenticity.
5. Presentation: Peers provide feedback, reinforcing metacognitive awareness of discourse effects.

This scaffolded approach aligns with critical pedagogy principles and supports national education standards on digital literacy.

CONCLUSION

Employing Van Dijk's tri-layered discourse model uncovers the layered strategies that Dove's Argan Oil body wash advertisement uses to craft compelling narratives about beauty and identity. The superstructure establishes a persuasive sequence, the microstructure deploys linguistic and visual devices for emotional

resonance, and the macrostructure embeds ideological messages that align self-worth with consumption.

Despite Dove's overarching commitment to representing "real beauty," the ad under review reveals a reversion to conventional aesthetic tropes. This finding underscores the complex dynamics at play when ethical branding intersects with market imperatives.

To cultivate discerning media consumers, educational systems must integrate critical discourse analysis into their curricula, equipping students to reveal and challenge the subtle mechanisms through which advertisements shape social reality. Future research might extend this analysis across multiple product lines or media platforms to map the evolution of beauty discourses in commercial culture.

BIOGRAPHY

Ambar Ratry Kartika Nendry started learning English in 2020 at Kampung Inggris, Pare, and completed the English Master program at Webster Course for six months. In 2021–2023, the author founded and taught at her own English course. She has also taught at several Islamic boarding schools, including Pondok Ahbabul Mujtaba Malang (2023), owned by Habib Sholeh Alaydrus, and Pondok Al Bahjah Blitar (2024), led by

Buya Yahya. Currently, she is a student in the RPL program at Kadiri Islamic University and a tutor at Webster Course since December 2024.

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