



Glorification of masculinity in the advertisements of *Kool* shaving cream or foam

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ABSTRACT

The present study is an investigation of the advertisements of *Kool* shaving foam/cream to find out the masculine biases and discourses by analyzing the speeches, linguistic and literary devices, character portrayal and physical setting of the advertisements. Three advertisements of *Kool* shaving cream, which are retrieved from the YouTube, are taken as samples in this research. Qualitative approach has been adopted to interpret the data. For the findings, analysis and discussion critical discourse analysis (CDA) based on Fairclough's three-dimension approach is applied. The analysis reveals that while circulating and advertising of *Kool* shaving foam/cream the advertisers have concurrently disseminated patriarchal ideologies and masculine discourses that have long been being lived out in our society as discursive practices. It is also found that at the end of each sample advertisement it is the veneration of masculinity, not the circulation of the product, which is significantly highlighted. The research carries significance for the academia of media studies, gender studies and other related fields.

INTRODUCTION

Modern life is notoriously affected by advertisements. Advertisements have close proximity with our life in respect of representing the socio-cultural values, beliefs and discourses though the representation is not always solid and neutral. Being one of the dominant platforms of carrying discourses to the masses it pervades our daily life with strong hold and affects our beliefs and psychological orientation expansively. It is a strong podium for focusing and spreading any ideology, may the discursive process be done deliberately or inadvertently. Sometimes, it bears distortions or exaggerations; at times, it fuels the fire of socio-cultural disputes like discursive demonstration of the power of masculinity.

The present era has essentially become product-dominated where the necessity of advertisement is immensely felt. Advertisement is now a very common part of our daily life for its use as the carrier of messages. Consumers get necessary

information about products and other issues of a company with the help of advertisement and positive image of the product is created (Sharma, 2017). Brierley (2005) maintains that advertisements play significant roles to create consumers' and retailers' motivation and encouragement for the products. Customers' attitude to the products is influenced by advertisement (Chand & Chaudhary, 2012). Kilbourne compares advertisement with water by saying that as fish cannot survive without water, we cannot live without advertisement (1999). Kilbourne's statement signifies the strong clasp of advertisement with our daily life. According to Sinclair, the function of advertising includes creating the opinions about the product and shaping culture through values and attitudes (1987). Similarly, Abdelaal & Sase opine that the contents of an advertisement are inseparable from culture (2014). Supporting them, Chand & Chaudhary argue, 'Advertising works not only on a psychological level but also on a cultural one (2012)'. Hence, advertisement has become a

pervasive platform for the seller's communication with the buyers with a view to promoting the products. It is very useful for making sound rapport with the consumers.

The function of advertising is not only convincing the customer for purchasing the goods, but also 'symbolically defining cultural standards of behavior and relations (Lopukhova, 2015)'. Advertisement is not free from spreading discursive agenda that will be discussed in the coming sections. It is a strong platform for presenting and consolidating gender stereotypes. Using gender roles and masculine discourses for promoting products is now very common to the advertisers. Various experts in the related fields argue that advertisements have the consequences that possess 'significant re-enforcement' of gender stereotypes (Eisend, 2010). Schroeder & Zwick (2004) opine that advertising promotes gender stereotypes that are still in existence in many countries where the campaigns of advertising are responsible for introducing identity based on gender and stereotypical masculine and feminine values. Hence, Gentry & Harrison argue that discursive constructions behind gender identities must be scrutinized through critical eyes (Gentry & Harrison, 2010). Pollay (1986) opines that advertisement is not free from sponsoring gender stereotypes which are false, humiliating and off-putting (cited in Vela, Romero & Giner, 2006). Therefore, as a powerful text of communicating discursive messages, the function of advertisement is never value-free; rather, it is value-laden impacting gender ideology massively.

The ideation of 'gender' is socially constructed. Likewise, the concept of 'masculinity' is watery and unstable as this is also a social construct and it manifests differently in various cultures and societies with its pervasive and discursive presence. Connell (2005) opines that masculinity can be understood as contrast to femininity. According to Itulua-Abumere (2013), there are some particular behavioral and linguistic traits specified for males in specific socio-cultural contexts which are called masculine traits. Masculine attributes may differ from culture to culture and society to society. But, their basic point of distinction is almost same. Usually, male attributes in traditional concept are related to

dominance, stoicism and rationality in contrast to the female attributes like being submissive, passive and irrational (Bozkurta, Tartanoglu & Dawesc, 2015). Masculinity signifies freedom, bodily vigor, fierceness, competitive mentality, impartiality, shrewdness, readiness for fighting and lack of emotion (ibid). Kaufman (1987) opines that masculinity signifies opposing submissiveness, cowardice and hopelessness.

The socialization process makes the society believe that boys are expected to be 'real man' and ready to take risk and show bravery (Bozkurta, Tartanoglu & Dawesc, 2015). Soulliere (2006) argues that violence and aggressiveness are not the only masculine features; rather, men's response 'tends to be primarily physical' and they are ready use physical aggressiveness for personal gains. Winning and achievement form one of the basic identities of a man (ibid). The significance of masculinity goes with the process of 'how to become a master of women', and showing violence is an issue that is taken for granted (Khan, & Khandaker, 2017). Men are supposed to save women in need (ibid). On the contrary, women are expected to be submissive and subjugated by men (Horowitz & Kaufman, 1987). Discourse is, as Sipra (2013) observes, 'the speech patterns and usage of language, dialects, and acceptable statements, within a community' and it is so powerful that it can influence in producing and reproducing 'unequal power relations between different ethnicities, social classes, genders, ages, and professional groups'. Through discourse we can understand the very nature of an object and differentiate it from other substances (Shaikh *et al*, 2015). Mithun (2015) states that, the identification of discourse goes beyond the boundary of an independent sentence. Gee (1999) states that discourse makes rapport between texts and specific social practices. Norman Fairclough is of the opinion that while selecting discourses there are some essential 'assumptions' which are never neutral, rather they are value-laden, and they possess inherent motivation based on ideology which may cause discrimination among social groups (Amoussou & Allagbe 2018). Tahmasbi & Kalkhajeh observe that advertisement is a powerful discourse which 'may employ social power abuse, dominance, and inequality, and eventually change and maintain social practices

(2013)'. The significance of gender as a discourse is immense and needs detailed explanations. As the concept of gender is socially constructed, gender is a very powerful and dominant social discourse. The relationship they maintain is interdisciplinary (Kendall & Tannen, 2015)

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is notably different from discourse analysis (DA). Actually, CDA is one step ahead which resorts to more critical stance. It is an inter-disciplinary approach put forward by Theo van Leeuwen, Gunther Kress, Teun van Dijk, and Norman Fairclough (Kendall & Tannen, 2015) and many scholars from various disciplines (Bloor & Bloor 2007). A text is encrypted with ideological mechanism and power relation which CDA attempts to unveil and establishes the channel in between microlevel, the text and mesolevel, discursive practice (Rahimi & Sharififar, 2015; Wodak, 1992). Van Dijk opines that a CDA analyst keeps objective stance from his analysis and his aim is to 'expose the social and political inequality in order to change it with social justice and equality in economics as well as politics for different sections of the society (Van Dijk, 1993)'. Critical Discourse Analysis builds an affinity between language and power through focusing on various disorientations in society, place of discourse and relation of power (Van Dijk, 2001). Wodak (2001) argues that CDA's spheres include the relationships of social domination, control and bias that may be solid or translucent visible through language. CDA possesses some linguistic techniques that unearth language's relationship with power, politics, society and identity (Corson, 1995). Rogers (2004) says that Critical Discourse Analysis deals with not only describing and interpreting discourse in context; it also interprets the reasons and ways of the operation of discourse. CDA, as Van Dijk observes, explores critically the social endorsement of power, control and discrimination and the required resistance (2003). Fairclough (1992) offers a very comprehensive definition of CDA:

'By critical discourse analysis I mean analysis which aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such

practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power, and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony.'

Van Dijk (1995) shares that while working in CDA some criteria should be kept in mind: a) CDA is problem-oriented which deals with studying racism, sexism, colonialism and other discriminations in the society; b) CDA is a critical approach of studying text and talk; c) the focal point of CDA is dismantling the interaction between discourse and society; d) CDA also operates with contexts like picture, film, music, sound and gestures; e) CDA focuses on the underlying ideologies and relations of class, gender, ethnicity, race, language, religion, age and sexual orientation.

According to Fairclough (1993), there are three aspects of every discursive phenomenon: as a spoken or written language text (image, speech, writing or combination of these), as an example of discursive practice (production, consumption and distribution of the text) and as a piece of social practice. In relation to these aspects of discourse, Fairclough (1993) suggests three stages of Critical Discourse Analysis: description, interpretation and explanation, each having connection with others i.e. textual, interpretational and social levels of CDA. In the first stage (Description), personal experience and knowledge of the speaker or the writer is described. Here, the text is the object. This is the linguistic description (vocabulary, grammar and text structure) at the structural level of the text. In the second stage 'discourse is not only regarded as text but also a discursive practice in this stage, which means apart from analyzing linguistic features and text structure, attention should be drawn to other factors such as speech act and intertextuality (Handayani, Heriyanto & Soemantri, 2018)'. In the third stage, social practice (Explanation), the relationship between discourse and socio-cultural reality is analyzed. Fairclough opines that, 'Explanation is concerned with the relationship between interaction and social context with the social determination of the process of production and interpretation, and their social effects (1992)'. The analysis in this stage is

done ‘in reference to the historical, social, and cultural Contexts’ and ‘factors like ideology or power are taken into account so as to fully explain the interaction between social-cultural context and then production and consumption of texts (Handayani, Heriyanto & Soemantri, 2018)’.

Significance of the study

The advertisements of *Kool* Shaving Cream/Foam are very popular and well circulated among the consumers especially the young groups. So, when these types of advertisements contain or carry discriminatory discourses like discursive gender/power relation, the young generations get wrong messages about gender ideology. The present study will unearth the inherent gender power and discourses in the examined advertisements that will make the consumers, especially the young groups, as well as other conscious groups, aware about the hidden mechanism of the advertisements.

This paper offers a discussion from a critical standpoint on the advertisements of *Kool* shaving foam/cream based on the language and contents used there and the socio-cultural ideologies of masculinity reflected through them. The product is owned by the Square company. It is a renowned group of industries in Bangladesh. This study shows how the advertisements, taken here as the samples, represent the glorification of masculinity through colonizing the minds of the consumers with a view to popularizing their products to the masses. To do so, a critical discourse analysis (CDA) which follows Fairclough’s three-dimensional approach was maintained.

Objectives of the study

The present study aims to show whether masculine biases are found in the advertisements of *Kool* Shaving Cream/Foam.

METHODOLOGY

Since the method of research is purely analytical, qualitative technique has been adopted to interpret the data. Three distinct video clips (see Reference) of the advertisements of *Kool* Shaving Cream/Foam were taken as samples in this study.

The videos are retrieved from the *YouTube*. The interpretation and analysis was done by employing the three-dimensional framework put forward by Norman Fairclough.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Dimension-1: Textual analysis

A text does consist of not only linguistic units; it may also be multi-modal like visual, audio, gestural, spatial etc. (movies, advertisements, books, emails, messages, songs etc). Text analysis consists of analyzing lexical choices, cohesion, coherence as well as stylistic features like narrative viewpoint, structure of stanzas, juxtaposition that ‘focuses on the particular theme and broader socio-political perspective of the speaker (Sipra, 2013)’.

In the first sample advertisement (Figure 1), the initial part occurs at a hair salon where the barber shaves the beard of a smart young man. The second part consists of another young man who attempts to win the heart of a girl by force and finally restrained by the first young man. The third part is about the *Kool* shaving foam, where a background voice is used. The second sample advertisement starts with a wrestler (model Nobel) who is defeated in the match. But, he is determined to fight another match in spite of his wife’s and the coach’s warning. At last, he wins. Before starting the winning-match he uses *Kool* shaving cream. The 3rd sample advertisement begins with cricketer Mashrafe showing how struggle he has faced all through his career. He suggests his team-mates (Miraz as the representative) to use *Kool* shaving foam as a part of ensuring success in cricket.



Figure 1: Sample advertisement-1



Figure 2: Sample advertisement-2



Figure 3: Sample advertisement-3

Table 1: Textual analysis of sample advertisements

Textual information	Sample Advertisement-1	Sample Advertisement-2	Sample Advertisement-3
Length	40 seconds	50 seconds	36 seconds
Camera style	Speedy moves, more close-up shots	Speedy moves, more distant shots	Slow move and more distant shots
Video contents	Other objects along with people	Other objects along with people	People are focused, no background objects
Use of light & color	Dominance of dim light on the background; brightness at the last portion	Planned mixing of dimness and brightness	Brighter and dominance of whiteness
Slogan	'For The Real Man'	'SPIRIT WITHIN'	'For The Real Man'
Target audience	Average male group	Average male group	Average male group
Repetition	- repetition of 'jor' (enforce) and 'real'	Repeated use of the word 'challenge'	Repeated use of the word 'struggle'
Contrast	- 'jor' (enforce) vs. "smooth" - Clean shaved boy vs. the unshaved one	Confident wrestler vs. mentally weak coach and lady	_____
Symbol & motif	White color, knife	White color	White color
Imperatives	'Tumi ekkhon jaba mane ekkhon jaba' (Come with me right now) - 'Apni jan' (You go)	"Stand up"	- 'Khudro jontrona agei biday koro' (Vanish minor hassles first) - 'Tule nao Kool and face the world...'
Foreshadowing	The background song 'Jor kore mon pawa jay ki?' (Who can win heart by force?)	_____	_____
Significant phrases/dictions	Jor (enforce), smooth, ultra gliding, real man	Stronger, faster, challenge, fight, spirit, man, lorte hobe arekbar (need to fight again)	Purusher struggle (Man's struggle), boro safollo (greater success), face the world, real man
Use of informal language	Ei! (hello!), shunba (will listen), ekkhon jaba (Come with me right now)	_____	_____
Adjective	Real, smooth	Stronger, faster, best (newspaper image)	Real
Simile/ metaphor	_____	_____	Face the world like a real man
Background voice	Male (including the singer)	Male	Male

In the table 1 a brief presentation of textual information of the sample videos is given. The slogans of the advertisements help maintain proximity with the consumer (male) of the product since the target audience is the male group. Use of light and color is significant. In each advertisement we see the use of brighter light with extra whiteness when *Kool* shaving foam/cream appears, to connect a corresponding relationship with the brightness of the face after shaving with *Kool*. It becomes relevant when we see the use of the word ‘smooth’ by the background voice. White color works here as a motif, being used recurrently. Use of informal language by one of the speakers in the first advertisement helps the advertiser create intimacy with the consumer. Background voice of the advertisements, including the music of the first advertisement is given by a

male. There is repetition of the words ‘enforce’, ‘real’, ‘struggle’ and ‘challenge’. These words are repeated to glorify the masculine vigor in the advertisement. Both of the issues establish connection between the product and the gender of the consumer that will be further discussed in the third dimension of CDA in this paper.

Dimension-2: Interpretation (Discursive Practice)

In this dimension how the advertiser uses various strategies in the advertisement to convince the consumer is examined. In the Table 2 a brief presentation of the strategies used by the advertisers in the sample videos is given.

Table 2: Interpretation from sample advertisement

Strategy	Example		
	Sample Advertisement-1	Sample Advertisement-2	Sample Advertisement-3
Celebrity endorsement	_____	Uses famous model and actor Nobel	Uses the cricketers Mashrafe and Miraz
Code-switching/ Code-mixing	-‘No <i>jor jobordosti</i> ’ -‘Real man kokhono jor khatay na’	‘Lorte hobe arekbar’ ‘I have to fight’	‘ <i>Purusher struggle hobe boro boro</i> ’
Emotive words/ phrases	-Ultra gliding -smooth	Spirit within	- <i>Khudro jontrona</i> -Real man
Invoking inadequacy	Rejecting normal foams by the barber	_____	‘Shaving-এ irritation <i>aar rash sristikari...</i> ’
Comparing	Normal shaving foam vs. <i>Kool</i> shaving foam.	_____	‘ <i>Sadharon foam chere tule nao Kool.</i> ’

In the first advertisement and the second advertisement three prominent celebrities Nobel, Mashrafe and Miraz are the central figures. It means that the advertisers have used the celebrities for their approval of the product *Kool* shaving cream/foam to the common people/consumers. This is an effective emotional strategy to reach the mind of the consumer because if a celebrity, for example cricketer Mashrafe, certifies a product, it gets instant place in the mind of the common people. Use of code-switching/mixing creates the advertiser’s intimacy with the consumer because code-switching/mixing is a frequently occurred phenomenon in our daily speaking. As through code-switching/mixing the speaker maintains

informal linguistic approach to the listener, the advertiser reaches and convinces the consumer with less difficult efforts.

The advertisers have resorted to a technique of comparison where they show that only *Kool* shaving foam is effective by showing all other shaving foams ineffectual. In the first advertisement, the barber attempts to use normal shaving foam, but instantly realizing his mistake he takes *Kool* shaving foam. In the third advertisement, the background speaker says: ‘Shaving-এ irritation *aar rash sristykari sadharon foam chere tule nao Kool*’. Through comparison the advertiser points at the inadequacy of all other

shaving foam and tries to persuade the audience to use *Kool* which is focused as 'smooth' and the best.

Dimension-3: Social analysis

Advertisement carries within it strong ideology which is one of the basement points of the society (Hussain *et al* 2020). Advertisement possesses immense scope for being a driving force of changing the society (Feramayasari & Wiedarti (2020). This part will focus on how the advertisers, purposely or inadvertently, have glorified masculinity in the name of popularizing their product *Kool* shaving foam/cream.

The slogan of the first advertisement and the third advertisement is '*Kool* Shaving Foam for the Real Man'. The concept of 'real man' is stereotypical. The "real man" is the ultimate winner and the central figure. The advertiser has focused the first young man in the first advertisement as the 'real man'. Actually, this is the man who wins the heart of the girl, the girl who was about to be fallen to prey by the second young man. The second man tries to win her by force and later restrained by the 'real man'. The second young man shows aggressiveness and applies force to win the heart of the girl by saying: '*Tumi ekkhon jaba mane ekkhon jaba*' (Come with me right now). He resorts to dominance and violence to succeed in the endeavor which is a major masculine tenet in our society. The boy is presented as tough using physical strength to win over his female counterpart. The girl expresses her defenselessness and powerlessness. In this way, a relationship of binary opposition, strength vs. vulnerability, is carefully established to show the demarcation between the power of man and the weakness of woman. Even the smart young man who rescues the scared girl uses the male mechanism of order and dominance when he says to her: '*Apni jaan*' (you go) and thus he becomes the 'master of woman'.

The background song in the first advertisement '*jor kore mon paowa jay ki?*' (Who can win heart by force?) provides positive message and states that no one can win someone's heart by force. It works as a foreshadowing as just after the moment we can see the triangle episode consisting of the

girl. The young man who tries to win the girl ultimately fails and the first young man coming from the barber shop restrains the second man by using charismatic touch and words: '*Vai, jor kore ki prem hoy?*' (Brother, can you get her consent by force?). It works magically to the girl and consequently, a soft sensation works inside her. Here, the rescuer young man is presented as possessing charismatic power of resolution and the girl is shown again as relying on the male counterpart. Therefore, the advertisement attempts to demonstrate that man is the ultimate source of reliance and solution and woman is always vulnerable to collapse.

The same binary opposition prevails in the second advertisement where the husband (model and actor Nobel) is presented as possessing Herculean qualities like taking challenge, being confident and having valor whereas, the wife is focused as having no confidence and zeal of gallantry. The man is defeated in wrestling but he wants to 'fight again' because he loves 'challenge'. But the wife tries to restrain him by saying: '*Tumi ki pagol hoye geso? Jano er porinam?*' (Have you gone mad? Don't you know its consequence?). It signifies that woman has no spirit of confidence, competitiveness and taking challenge. Love for competitiveness and challenge is a masculine quality which the society expects. This is clearly mirrored through the portrayal of binary opposition of the husband and the wife. The headline of the newspaper, read by the husband, written as 'I'm the best' consisting of the image of the winner wrestler is used as a symbol of strong masculine discourse. In the newspaper the image of the wrestler showing muscle signifies the glorified manifestation of masculine appearance and physical strength. The husband's utterance 'I've to fight because I'm a man' is very significant to study our socio-cultural beliefs about masculine trait- a man must keep on fighting until the desired success comes.

Masculine discourses are also used in the third advertisement. The central figure of the advertisement Mashrafi through a secondary voice states: '*Purusher struggle hobe boro boro*' (Man's struggle will be for greater causes). It clearly shows our society's outlook on man's ability and mythic power. Our society has bestowed almost

mythic capability to the man to such a extent that a man has no time for dealing with *Khudro jontrona* (minor hassles), rather his whole life will be spent for constant fighting and solving greater problems to 'face the world like a real man'. In the second advertisement wrestling is used as a symbol of masculinity. Wrestling symbolizes man's readiness for taking risk and showing bravery. The wife is shown as the only active spectator who reacts painfully while seeing her husband's falling down. Her scared and sorrowful reaction indicates woman's incapability for enduring toughness and facing danger.

CONCLUSION

Advertisement is a powerful tool for the people of the world of marketing (Rizvi, Khan, & Farooq, 2020). As a genre advertisement is one of the powerful platforms of carrying discourses to the mass people. The advertisements of *Kool* shaving foam/cream bear masculine discourses that are clearly based on gender bias. In the third dimension of Critical Discourse Analysis the manifestation of gender bias is studied with available examples in those advertisements. In the first two dimensions of Critical Discourse Analysis this paper has also gone through analyzing discourses on the basis of the mechanical and textual realities of the advertisements, though within a limited space. The analysis shows that the advertisers in the process of circulating and popularizing their product, *Kool* shaving foam/cream, have maintained a binary presentation of man and woman through speech, linguistic and literary devices and character portrayal.

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