

Speech Acts Uses in Persuasion and Deception in Marketing Discourse

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Abstract

The present study is an extract from an MA dissertation entitled "A Pragmatic Study of the Language of Deception in Marketing Discourse". Deception is one of the characteristics of human species. This is also true about language and language use in marketing discourse. The language of deception is an interesting subject in academics such as law, marketing and politics. There have been many researches on the marketing discourse especially on the persuasion part of the discourse. Also, there have been studies on the language of advertising and marketing. Nevertheless, a pragmatic study of the language of deception in marketing discourse is not widespread especially studying the promotional aspects of deception in the fields of social media such as posts of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube Videos.

The use of social media is increasing and this may result in an increase of deceptive language as well. Therefore, it is important to address this issue. One of the ways of dealing with it is concentrating on the communicative aspects of it. The speech act theory of Searle is used to analyse the corpus.

The research starts with providing literature of marketing, persuasion, deception and it continues on explaining how speech acts used in those contexts. The collected data analysed are authentic taken from Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. The findings show that marketers apply mostly assertive speech acts to persuade and also avoid commitment. Also the use of commissive speech acts are not promising or guaranteeing, however it sounds promising but they can be denied. The paper concludes that speech act studies can be used to address deception in marketing discourse.

Keywords: Speech Acts, Persuasion, Deception, Marketing

استعمالات الأفعال الكلامية في الإقناع والخداع في خطاب التسويق

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المستخلص

الدراسة الحالية مقتطف من رسالة الماجستير بعنوان "دراسة براغماتية للغة الخداع في الخطاب التسويقي" الخداع هو أحد خصائص الأنواع البشرية. وينطبق هذا أيضا على اللغة واستخدام اللغة في الخطاب التسويقي. لغة الخداع هي موضوع مثير الاهتمام في الدراسة الأكاديمية مثل: القانون والتسويق والسياسة. لقد تم إجراء العديد من الأبحاث حول الخطاب التسويقي، خصوصا جانب الإقناع من الخطاب. وتم إجراء العديد من الدراسات حول لغة الإعلان والتسويق. مع ذلك فإن دراسة براغماتية للغة الخداع في الخطاب التسويقي ليست واسعة الانتشار، وعلى وجه الخصوص دراسة الجانب الترويجي للخداع في مجال وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي مثل منشورات فيسبوك وتويتر ويوتيوب. يزيد استخدام وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في الترويج التسويقي وقد يؤدي ذلك إلى استخدام لغة خادعة أيضا. لذلك، من المهم معالجة هذه المشكلة. واحدة من طرق التعامل معها هي التركيز على الجانب التواصلي. يتم استخدام نظرية قانون خطاب سير للتحليل المجموع.

يبدأ البحث بتقديم أدبيات التسويق والإقناع والخداع ويستمر في شرح كيفية استخدام أفعال الكلام في تلك السياقات. جميع البيانات التي تم جمعها من الفيسبوك وتويتر ويوتيوب نسخة أصلية. تظهر النتائج أن الموسيقين يستخدمون في الغالب أفعال الكلام الحازمة للإقناع وتجنب الالتزام. أيضاً، استخدام قانون الكلام التعسفي ليس واعداً أو مضموناً، ومع ذلك، يبدو واعداً ولكن يمكن رفضه. تختتم الدراسة بأن دراسات حول أفعال الكلام يمكن استخدامها لمعالجة الخداع في خطاب التسويق.

الكلمات الدالة: أفعال الكلام ، الإقناع ، الخداع ، التسويق

1. Introduction

This paper focuses on the language of deception in marketing discourse with the pragmatic theory of speech acts by Searle [1]. Utterances can have more than one meaning, so this is used both to persuade and avoid responsibility, promising or granting indirectly. In the corpus, samples were chosen and explained and the rest were illustrated in graphs and tables. The theory of speech acts was applied to study persuasion by other researches in advertising and political speeches. However, this theory has not been applied in investigating of marketing of social media especially in addressing the misleading and deceptive aspects of it.

2. Marketing and Persuasion

Marketing can be defined as activities that marketers use to sell products or services to customers. Hibbard et al state that marketing is “the sum of activities involved in directing the flow of goods and services from producers to consumers”[2]. While it is known by the public as “presenting, advertising and selling company’s products or services” [3] in the best way possible. According to McCarthy marketing contains only four elements known as Marketing Mix or the 4Ps; product, price place and promotion, cited in [4,p.2]. Marketers want to persuade potential customers. To do this, the promotion is related to this process. Promotion is related to the communicative aspects of language [5, p.814]. Experts write that businesses let customers know about their product through; Sale representatives, Advertising, Sales promotion and Public relations [3]. For marketers to increase sales they need to persuade their targeted audience.

2.1 Persuasion in Marketing

According to Larson[6], persuasion is a process both complex and interactive. Messages are related to both receiver and sender through signs of vocal and non-verbal in which the persuader tries to convince his audience to change his behaviour, thoughts and attitude on a given subject in favour of the persuader. Furthermore, persuasion is not fixed; it keeps its forms changing and it needs to be implicit because not many people like to be persuaded against their own will [7, p.299].

In marketing, persuasion is essential for businesses to run. For instance, Armstrong[8, p.293] asserts that the main aim of advertising is to persuade its targeted audience to buy the promoted product. As Osman [9] argues that for persuasions to work, they need to be inexplicit. However, a recent study believes that persuasion can be gained both directly and indirectly [10, p. 35]. Linguistically, persuasion is not direct and there are no utterances such as “I hereby persuade you” [11, p. 12]. Therefore, one way of studying persuasion is done through the pragmatic theory of speech acts.

2.2 Speech Acts and Persuasion

Persuasion acts are defined as a stimulus that alters, shape or in forces a response. This response modifies the importance, attitudes and opinions of a given

topic of the act of persuasion. In another word, acts of persuasion is an effort that can be detected and production that can be detected by changes in audience's behaviour [12,p.48].

A recent research has concluded that "persuasion is an act by itself which can be gained through the use of other acts beside the verb to persuade. A perlocutionary effect is a persuasive act that results from any circumstance with the impact of persuasion"[10,p.35]. Furthermore, the gain of persuasive result comes from the application of other kinds of speech acts accompanied by rhetoric [13,p.18].

Perlocutionary is used to show the illocutionary acts in performative speech acts. Searle wrote that "perlocutionary acts have to do with those effects which our utterances have on hearers which go beyond the hearer's understanding of the utterance" [14,Intro,p.vii]. For instance, "acts of convincing, persuading, annoying, amusing, and frightening are all cases of perlocutionary acts" [14]. Also, utterances can have influence or effect on the "unintended overhearer" and persuade them to do something [15, p187]. Since persuasion is indirect, there is room to craft deceptive elements and convince people about a particular topic.

3. Deception

Deception is seen as making others believe something false is true. Experts believe that the core meaning of the word *deceive* is to cause another person to have false beliefs [16]. Also, they define deception as "a message knowingly transmitted by a sender to foster a false belief or conclusion by the receiver" [16,p205]. Similarly, McCleskey states that deception is not resulted by chance or the product of unexpected circumstances, it is a "deliberate enterprise" cited in [17,p.15]. In addition, deception happens whenever a speaker deviates the information which holds the messages to imply a particular meaning that deviates from the truth as they know it except mistakes and unintentional lies [16, p.205]. Deception often involves money and researches have been done on verbal and nonverbal aspects of it especially speeches that are associated with deception versus truth [18, p.1344]. Deception is deliberate acts containing crafted messages to lead others having wrong beliefs.

To illustrate, if somebody uses speech acts of assertive and knows it can be interpreted as a commissive ie. promising. He causes a wrong belief by the recipient of the message. It is deceptive if this interpretation favours the sender but hurts the receiver.

3.2 Marketing and Deception

Deception in marketing might be one of the obvious topics that are related to every individual, and one of the primary aspects of deceptive communication is involved in marketing. Deception in marketing happens whenever "...a producer or seller uses deceptive practices to gain an unfair advantage over competitors or consumers by influencing or manipulating consumer choice" [5,p.816]. According to Durmaz and Diyarbakırlıoğlu, marketing begins with the needs of consumers and production by producers [19, p.40]. However, Godin explains that marketing is not just about the needs of the consumers and facts, but it is about the buyers' wants and how to tell stories about your product and convince them. Moreover, he names one of his books as *All Marketers Are Liars* [20]. Gneezy, also, agrees with him and demonstrates that most people are not honest in economic contexts. He, for example, argues "business people, politicians, diplomats, lawyers, and students in the experimental laboratory who make use of private information" reject morality in favour of deception when it is in their interest [21, p. 384]. Moreover, Novella [22]

states that humans are not rational and they can be deceived. One way to study deceptive marketing is focusing on the communication.

4. Pragmatic study

To study deception in marketing, Serota [5] argues that we can comprehend how deception happens by concentrating on communication aspects of it. However, deception can occur anywhere in the four Ps or *Marketing Mix*; product, price, place and promotion. Furthermore, in terms of communication marketing deception is related to advertisement and promotion, persuading, informing, and reminding concerning customers. This research aims to analyse the language of deception in marketing discourse, therefore, it concentrates on the communicative aspects of marketing. In doing so, it is necessary to show the ways marketers introduce their messages to potential consumers in terms of promotion. Therefore, pragmatically the selected samples will be analysed to address deception in a marketing context. So indirect speech act theory of Searle [1] is chosen to analyse the corpus. The speech acts are assertives, directives, commissives, expressives and declaration.

4.1 Indirect Speech Act Types and Deception

In deception, indirect speech acts can be used as a tool both to persuade and deceive. Searle's [1] taxonomy of speech acts reveals that there are rooms for deception because speakers perform an indirect speech to achieve something without asking directly. For example, a marketer may claim that a promoted product contains "low cholesterol" that is understood as it has a low amount of fat [23, p.159]. In addition, Meibauer shows that Searle's theory of speech act is a reasonable step to study deception especially in terms of assertion [24, pp.64-67]. Again, Powers argue that deception occurs when one pretends to perform one speech act while he intends another one [25]. Therefore, Searle's speech act theory is a reasonable method of studying the language of deception.

4.2 Searle's Speech Act Classification

An interesting classification of speech acts is written by Searle [1]. This is known to be an important classification. For instance, Archer et al argue that the classification of speech acts is a need instead of drawing distinctions between them based on speech act verbs [26, pp. 38-39]. For such reasons, Searle classifies speech acts into general types based on what can be done with language. The types are based on "their fit to the world, psychological state, and above all the purpose of the illocution, illocutionary point" (ibid). Furthermore, This taxonomy is known to be the most effective and consistent and has been applied as the basis of investigations [27, p.292]. The classification consists of five categories:

- 1- Representatives (Assertive): they are indicated by speech acts in which they show the speaker's thought on the truthfulness of what they utter. They express "word-to-world fit" For instance, the purpose is to make the words fit the world [28, p. 131]. In the use of representatives, "existing states of affair" is made to fit the belief of the speaker [26, p.39]. Samples of representative speech acts are "suggesting, boasting, complaining, claiming, concluding, deducing" (ibid). Also, Al-Sulaimaan provides examples such as "putting forward a hypothesis, insist, swear, flatly state advice, etc." [27, p.292].
- 2- Commissives: by the use of such speech acts, the speaker commits to doing future acts. It illustrates 'world-to-word fit', the speaker is responsible to make the world fit the words. Speech acts of "promises, pledges and vows" are examples of Commissives [26, p.39].

- 3- Directives: by using these illocutionary points, the speaker wants the hearer to do something. Directives illustrate 'word-to-world fit'. Speech acts of "asking, ordering, commanding, requesting, begging, praying, entertaining, inviting, permitting, advising" are examples of Commissive [26].
- 4- Expressives: in such speech acts, a psychological state of the speaker is shown toward the listener. For example, the 'thanking' expresses the gratefulness of the speaker. Speech acts of "thanking, congratulating, apologizing, condoling, deploring, welcoming" are examples of Expressives [26,p.39].
- 5- Declaration: by using such speech acts, the world is changed by an utterance. These speech acts are institutionalized. Their successes depend on officiates of the speaker. For instance, a judge can declare a verdict or a priest can baptize children[26].

5. Methodology

The purpose of this paper is to study the speech acts in deception and persuasion in marketing discourse. The methodology used contains data collection, sampling, analysing and interpretation of the findings.

5.1 Data Collection

The collected corpus contains two main types. First, there are 25 of promotional posts of products of nutritional and supplements from Facebook and Twitter. It has taken into account the posts and its pictures where verimportant relevant written texts found. They are collected from authentic pages which are verified by Facebook or Twitter respectively. The pages either belong to particular brands or a company that sells products of other brands. All the collected data are from 2019 and 2020. Those pages have a range of between 160000-2000000 followers and likes.

The second type of the data comes from YouTube Videos. This is because they are spoken rather than written. 25 videos are downloaded from YouTube. Then transcribed by the researcher. These videos are promoting for nutritional supplements and vitamins that are related to health and fitness. These videos are posted from 2015-2020, except for two of them which are posted in 2009 and 2013. They are promotional products while some of them are advertisement of radio and TV that are uploaded on YouTube. Some of the videos are promotions by body builders, owners, customers, patients, manufactures and doctors. While a few of them contain only music and provide information about a brand or a website of a company that sells these products.

5.2 Ethical Consideration

It is important that the ethical aspects of research to be considered. Bellbelieves that ethics is a moral principle of the researcher that affects the people that the data are collected from [29]. Furthermore, according to Punch, cited in [30], researchers face ethical issues. Therefore, Olive acknowledges that the researcher is responsible for ethical aspects from the beginning to the end of the study, cited in[30].

This research deals with studying deception as a phenomenon, not targeting any products or brands. So, it will not be ethical to mention the names of the products, brands, websites, shops, retailers etc. Therefore, they will be replaced with [X] in order not to damage their reputation.

5.3 Data Analysis and Result Interpretation

First, a sample of the promotional advertisement will be analysed and interpreted, to show a clear picture of the analysis, and then the whole data analysis will be illustrated with graphs and tables that precede the interpretation of the results.

This text is a video transcription. It is a promotional advertisement for supplements and vitamins products. It aims to persuade potential customers to buy products of the brand. In the following paragraphs, it will be analysed based on the Searle's Speech Act taxonomy[1]:

Attention, please! Hear something, I bet you didn't know. Not all supplements are created equal. At [x], our omega-3 oil is sustainably sourced from the South Pacific Ocean. We found our turmeric in the southern provinces of India and our cod liver oil comes from the cold crisp seas of Greenland. We travel the entire globe to find the best ingredient for our supplements. We are [x].co.uk. Vitamins and supplements direct to your door.

The speech acts are employed by this ad is explained in this section to persuade the potential customers. It contains only two types of speech acts; Directive and Assertive. Their frequencies are two and five respectively. The first two utterances are directives in which, using these illocutionary points, the speaker wants the hearer to do something [26, p. 39]. In this case, it calls for the attention of the recipients *Attention please!* and then betting them to have an important thing to tell them. Using directives is one of the strategies to influence hears to act [10, p. 95]. It tries to persuade the audience to listen to the message because it bets them that they do not know as if it has something very important.

The other five utterances are assertives; they are indicated by speech acts in which they show the speaker's thought on the truthfulness of what they utter. They express "word-to-world fit" For instance, the purpose is to make the words fit the world [28, p. 13]. It asserts that *not all supplements are created equal*, this is a claim to convince the audience without mentioning the competitors. The intention or the force of this speech act is that this brand is better than the competitors. A possible perlocutionary effect would be that the audience takes it as this product created equal or this one as special. However, in the next utterance asserts that their *omega-3 oil is sustainably sourced from the South Pacific Ocean*.

Also, it continues on describing the ingredients through the use of assertive speech acts without using any commissive speech acts in which it can guarantee or promise something special related to its products directly. One of the possible perlocutionary acts is that the ad can persuade the potential customers to purchase products of this brand aiming to achieve desired results of its consumption because it describes the quality of its ingredients by four illocutionary acts. This leads to the interpretation that the brand is offering quality products. In case of the failure of gaining the desired result, the brand is not responsible because they have not promised anything special despite the quality of its ingredient. Table I shows the speech acts found in the ad.

Table I

Locutions	Speech Acts
Attention, please!	Directive
Hear something, I bet you didn't know!	Directive
Not all supplements are created equal.	Assertive
At [X], our omega-3 oil is sustainably sourced from the South Pacific Ocean.	Assertive
We found our turmeric in the southern provinces of India and our cod liver oil comes from the cold crisp seas of Greenland.	Assertive
We travel the entire globe to find the best ingredient for our supplements.	Assertive
We are [X].co.uk. Vitamins and supplements direct to your door.	Assertive

5.5 Findings and Discussion

An analysis of the texts is carried out in the collected data. In 25 transcribed videos, there are 293 speech acts which are analysed based on the Searle (1979) Speech Act Taxonomy. The results contain 75% Assertives, 15% Directives, 9% Commissives and 1% Expressives. However, no declaration speech act is found because it is used in only institutions for instance sellers do not have the right to order people to buy a particular product. thus, its use in the promotion and advertising is rear. Figure I and Table II shows the percentage of each speech acts.

Fig. I.

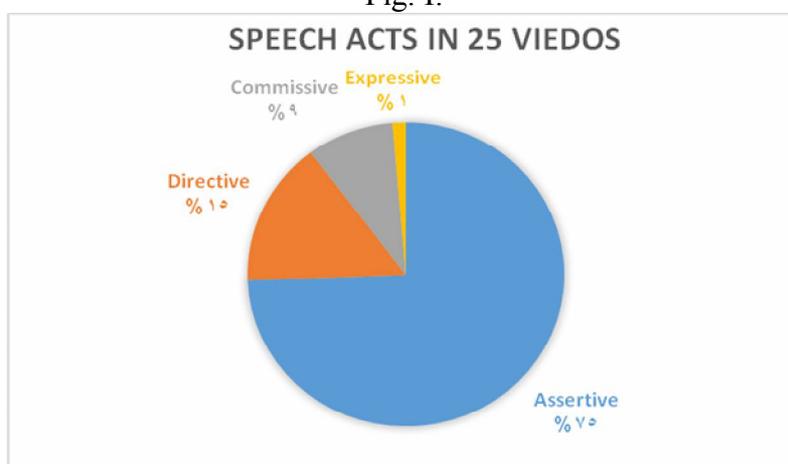


Table II Speech acts in 25 YouTube Videos

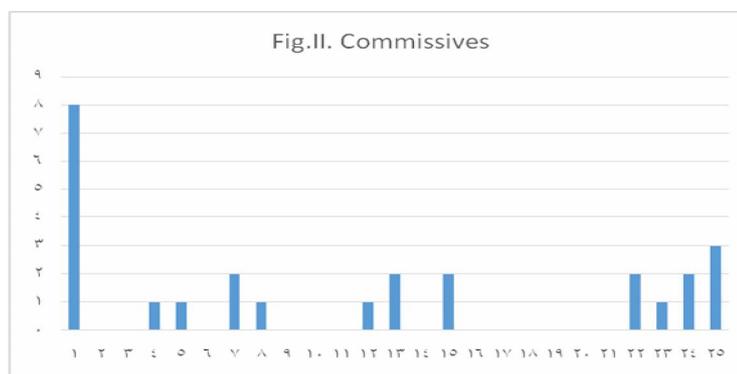
Speech Acts	Frequency	Percentages
Assertives	218	75%
Directives	45	15%
Commissives	26	9%
Expressives	4	1%
Total	293	100%

This illustrates that in YouTube advertising and promotion of products persuasion, the use of assertive speech acts is dominant. This explains that companies can easily get away from responsibility because they seldom promise anything concrete. The assertives appear to be promising while they are just stated opinions or description of the product with a vague language. These illocutionary points look convincing and can lead to persuasion by creating perlocutionary acts or effects as well as deception.

In addition, the commissive speech acts are even not very strong in promising. They do not promise or guarantee that the products work. Also, the promises are not related to the quality of the products as a whole but it concentrates on one or two aspects of it as shown in the examples 1-9 extracted from the corpus;

1. *We won't get it wrong.*(Video number 1)
2. *We won't compromise on taste.* (Video number 1)
3. *I simply won't recommend any product I haven't used or search myself and believed in and trust.* (Video number 1)
4. *Every cell in your body will enjoy a boost with [X].* (Video number 5)
5. *You'll love life again with [X].* (Video number 5)
6. *Soon you will be at the beach.* (Video number 7)
7. *You will surprise yourself with new energy.* (Video number 7)
8. *I'm going to show you how to use Whey protein powder.* (Video number 12)
9. *I will only give you the maximum best info, the maximum truth, the maximum product.* (Video number 15)

The majority of the 25 video promotions, 13, do not contain any commissive speech acts fig. II illustrates the frequency of commissive speech acts per each promotion.



Sample 1 which contains eight commissive speech acts, the video with most commissive speech acts, is a rather long video. It is 2:19 minutes. It contains 31 speech acts. Fig III shows the portion of each speech acts.

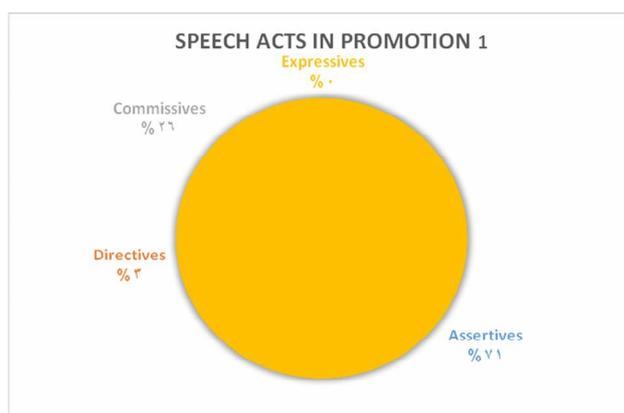


Fig .III. Speech Acts in Video number one

This indicates that still Assertive Speech act is dominant even though it happens that a particular promotional video contains a greater number of commissive speech acts than the rest of the samples.

Similarly, the Speech Act Analysis in posts of Facebook and Twitter display that the Assertives are most employed to persuade customers as Fig IV illustrates:

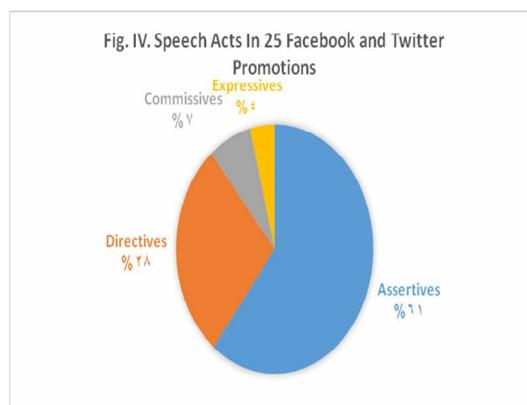
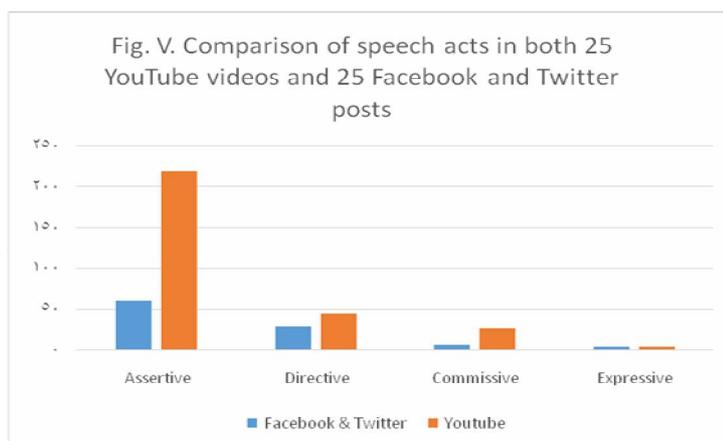


Table III Speech Acts in 25 posts of Facebook & Twitter and 25 YouTube Videos

Speech Acts	YouTube Videos		Facebook & Twitter Posts	
	Frequency	Percentages,	Frequency	Percentages,
Assertives	218	75%	60	61%
Directives	45	15%	28	28%
Commissives	26	9%	7	7%
Expressives	4	1%	4	4%
Total	293	100%	99	100%

Comparing both types of data, YouTube Videos contains more utterances. Therefore, it has more speech acts. This is because videos are mostly spoken rather than written texts. While in the post of Facebook and Twitter contain written text on the post or/and on the posted pictures. This limits what they can write. Therefore, the

number of speech acts found on Facebook and Twitter are approximately 2/3 is less than those of YouTube. Table III above, and fig V below shows the comparison between the two categories.



In both types of the data, assertives are prevailing speech acts in creating persuasion or desired perlocutionary effect. This explains that what the promotions and advertisement say can be denied or blame the audience of the misinterpretation of the messages. For example, in *We found our turmeric in the southern provinces of India and our cod liver oil comes from the cold crisp seas of Greenland* is a persuasive utterance explaining where the ingredients come from. Nevertheless, it does not necessarily make the product workable or make it superior to the competitors. This is deception by truthful but misleading utterance even if the proposition be taken as true.

Speech acts of directives take the second-ranking in both types of data. Directives are 28% on Facebook and twitter while in the YouTube videos they only hold 15%. This is because Twitter and Facebook posts have less space and time to provide much of assertives and write in many details. Thus, they need to direct the audience as soon as possible to buy, choose, try, recover, head to etc.

In terms of commissive speech acts, they come third. They are used to convince the potential customers. In both types of data, the percentages are close to each other. In YouTube Data 9% and Facebook and Twitter 7% of the found speech acts are commissives. A few of them creates scarcity by warning that the sale or the offer lasts for a limited time and this is a strong persuasion principle. However, the majority of these commissives regarding promises are misleading because they do not directly concentrate what the product can provide. They focus on for example the ingredients, taste etc. Furthermore, the addresser might observe on some of the conditions of promising but they craft promises that are still deceptive. For instance, in *we won't compromise on taste* is vague because how that can be met the conditions of speech acts of promising; essential 'the speaker of an assertion commits himself to the truth of the proposition of the expression' preparatory rules, 'the sender of the message must be able to provide enough proof or reason to back the truth of the proposition of the expression'. In such cases, the sender can blame the unsatisfied consumer that the taste is fine because what is a taste to the addresser might not be to the addressee.

Finally, expressive speech acts are used to create a rapport between the addresser and addressee as a persuasive strategy. It takes the bottom ranking of the speech acts in both types of data. In YouTube data, there is only 1% while on

Facebook and Twitter is 4%. They contain speech acts of greeting, congratulating and thanking.

6. Conclusion

Based on the data analysis and discussion of the results these conclusions are drawn:

- Speech acts of assertives are dominant in promotional of YouTube videos and post of posts of Facebook and Twitter.
- Assertive speech acts appear convincing that the promoted product is workable, but they do not promise or guarantee that.
- Commissive speech acts are not used to promise directly; they rather describe the quality of ingredients, tastes and other persuasive aspects of promoted products vaguely. Also they can be denied. Thus, such cases are deceptive.
- Indirect promises or guarantees of promoted products can be both persuasive and deceptive.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

There are no conflicts of interest

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