



DISCOURSE ANALYSIS ON VAGUE LANGUAGE USED IN ADVERTISEMENT VIDEOS BY TIKTOK INFLUENCERS

Coreen Joy L. Revamonte

College of Teacher Education, Arts, and Sciences

Saint Columban College, Philippines

coreenjoyrevamonte@gmail.com

Muhadir H. Balimbingan

College of Teacher Education, Arts, and Sciences

Saint Columban College, Philippines

tmuhadz@gmail.com

Isabella Angel C. Irong

College of Teacher Education, Arts, and Sciences

Saint Columban College, Philippines

angelisabella0516@gmail.com

Eubien Jane V. Suco

College of Teacher Education, Arts, and Sciences

Saint Columban College, Philippines

eubiensuco20@gmail.com

Aris Pet Angeli A. Suarez

College of Teacher Education, Arts, and Sciences

Saint Columban College, Philippines

arispet28@gmail.com

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v5i1.1260>

APA Citation: Suarez, A. P. A., Revamonte, C. J. L., Balimbingan, M. H., Irong, I. A. C., & Suco, E. J. . V. (2023). DISCOURSE ANALYSIS ON VAGUE LANGUAGE USED IN ADVERTISEMENT VIDEOS BY TIKTOK INFLUENCERS. *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies*, 5(2), 118–135. <https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v5i2.1260>

Received:

28/04/2023

Accepted:

10/06/2023

Keywords:

TikTok video advertisements, vague language, hedges, vague words, vague implication, pragmatics .

Abstract

The study aimed to examine how vague language (VL) is employed by social media influencers in their TikTok video advertisements. This study used discourse analysis, specifically pragmatic analysis, which focuses on the meaning of a language within its social context. The corpora consisted of 25 transcribed texts from video advertisements of the five Filipino social media influencers. Results revealed that the selected influencers use VL in their TikTok video advertisements. Results further revealed that three strategies in the use of VL were identified: hedges, vague words and vague implication. Hedges include adapters, rounders, plausibility shields, and attribution shields. Influencers commonly use these strategies to create a more modest and credible image for the product or service they advertise and to avoid making explicit claims that could be challenged or refuted. Finally, it was found that the use of these strategies has contributed to the effectiveness of advertisements as evidenced in the engagement rate. Based on the results, the researchers recommend that social media advertisers should ensure that VL is used ethically and responsibly to avoid deception or misinformation and that there be further research on the use of VL in advertising across different social media platforms and languages.

1. INTRODUCTION

Advertising is the utilization of strategies and techniques to make consumers aware of certain goods, services, or ideas with the intention of influencing their views and buying intentions (Jovanović, Vlastelica, & Kostić, 2016). In advertising, there are certain strategies employed in order to successfully persuade consumers and influence their buying behavior. A common strategy is by using covert communication in which advertisers convey their intention without revealing too much information. This is often done by deliberately using vague language. Vague language refers to the use of linguistic features, notably lexis, to modify and make the meaning imprecise and unclear. Vagueness is commonly used in advertising because of its advantageous features which include enhancing the flexibility of communication, enhancing its persuasiveness, and guaranteeing information authenticity. On the other hand, vague language in advertising has the tendency to make consumers subject to false understanding and potentially mislead them into purchasing a product or availing of a service (Alfin, 2019).

Vague language has been used in various contexts such as in courts, in speeches, news reports, and even advertising. Although vague language is not “good” nor is it “bad”, dependence and continuous of vague language has the tendency to create false hope and mislead people especially consumers of products and services. Now, producers and manufacturers are taking the benefits of the internet to market because it easily reaches a large number of potential buyers. Internet advertising has become one of the preferred ways of advertising with the advancement of media. The problem is when some online advertisements including those on social media are discovered to be illegal, misleading, and deceptive as they contain dubious or untested claims (Ismail, Daud, Jalil, Azmi, & Safuan, 2018).

Previous studies on vague language mostly examined the use of vague language in the academic, political, and advertising context. In the advertising context, it mainly focused on print and television advertisements thus the study on the application of vague language in

commercial advertisements on various social media platforms is relatively sparse (Alfin, 2019). Hence, this study will be undertaken to examine the use of vague language in the advertisement videos on a specific social media platform called TikTok. Primarily an entertainment platform, TikTok is now one of the go-to platforms for promoting products or services (Yang, Zhang, & Zhang, 2021). In 2021, TikTok officially added TikTok Shopping which is an in-app shopping feature that allows online merchants to create an online mini-storefront where they can directly display their products and allows TikTok users to buy products directly from the application (Adegbuyi, 2022).

This study aimed to examine how vague language is employed by some known social media influencers in their advertisement videos on TikTok. This study was conducted from A.Y. 2022-2023.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. Based on the corpora, what are the vague language used in the different advertisements?
2. What strategies in the use of vague language do social media influencers use to contribute to the effectiveness of advertisements?
3. How do these strategies in the use of vague language contribute to the effectiveness of advertisements?

2. Literature Review

This section briefly discusses pragmatics and the theories of Conversational Implicatures of Grice (1975) and the Cooperative Principle of Grice (1975) which the study is anchored from. It also focuses on the types of vague language: (1) hedges; (2) vague words and; (3) vague implication. Hedges include: (1) adapters; (2) rounders; (3) plausibility shields and; (4) attribution shields.

2.1 Pragmatics

The way to identify and understand vague language is through analyzing its pragmatics. The study of pragmatics focuses on the meaning of utterances in relation to their context. It investigates the relationship of form and function (Woodrow, 2018). Language can be used naturally, that is, meaning what you say. However, it can also be used in a way such that its literal utterance differs in meaning. Woodrow (2018) gives one influential perspective in pragmatics which is Austin's (1962) Speech Act Theory in which a pragmatic analysis investigates how action can be achieved with words. According to Austin (1962), speech acts can be direct ("clean the house") or indirect ("it's been a while since the vacuum was used"). In a discourse, pragmatics focuses on the implications of a language which is what the speaker implies and what the listener infers.

2.2 Theoretical basis

Grice (1975) proposes the theory of conversational implicatures which states that in a conversation between or among people, speakers tend to have implied meanings behind their

literal speech. What speakers usually say is one thing while its implication is either different or it can be interpreted in other ways. The concept of “implicature” was developed to make a clear distinction between the actual utterance and the intended message of the utterance (Khalil, 2017). Moreover, he also proposes the cooperative principle which is essentially the theory that to have a better communication, a speaker must adhere to certain rules which he calls maxims. To further illustrate the cooperative principle, Grice (1975) puts forward four categories of maxims:

Maxim of quality. Try to make one’s contribution to be true. Do not say what one believes to be false and do not say that for which one lacks adequate evidence.

Maxim of quantity. Make one’s contribution as informative as is required for the current purpose of the exchange and do not make one’s contribution more informative than is required.

Maxim of relevance. Make one’s contribution relevant.

Maxim of manner. Avoid obscurity and be brief and orderly.

The cooperative principle describes what actually happens in a conversation; when people speak, they generally have something like the cooperative principle and its maxims in their minds. They try to say things which are true, relevant, as well as informative enough, and in a clear manner. Listeners will also try to interpret what is said to them in this way (Zebua, Rukmini, & Saleh, 2017).

2.3 Types of Vague Language

According to Channell (1994, as cited in Sabet & Zhang, 2015), vague language can be classified into three types: 1) Hedges are words or phrases that are used to make things ‘fuzzier or less fuzzy’. These are evasive statements that help in softening and lessening straightforward utterances; 2) Vague words are words whose meaning is imprecise, uncertain, or indefinite and trigger follow-up questions from readers or listeners. The reason being the words could have varying meanings to various readers or listeners and; 3) Vague implication is information that delivers a precise impression. This is commonly misunderstood by readers and listeners because information has a hard time catering to the understanding of the collective (Khalil, 2017).

2.3.1 Hedges

Hedges were first introduced by Lakoff (1972) but later on developed by Prince, Frader, and Bosk (1982, as cited in Gribanova & Gaidukova, 2019). According to Prince, Frader, and Bosk (1982), hedges consist of two categories: approximators and shields.

A.) Approximators

The first category of hedges is approximators which are utterances that avoid absolute answers by using words and phrases that are close to the actual information but not enough to be a sure impression. These words or phrases affect the value of an utterance’s truth by making

the original meaning loose. They are used to make vague references to amounts, dates, and times as well as factual information like quantities and dates (Prince, Frader, & Bosk, 1982, as cited in Gribanova & Gaidukova, 2019). Under approximators are adapters and rounders:

Adapters. Adapters are words or phrases that speakers might use in an attempt to clarify unclear meanings and try to bring their words closer to reality. The expressions in this category makes the proposition or statement closer to certainty but the speaker doesn't feel absolute enough. It modifies the language which is close to the truth value of the proposition. It comprises words like *somewhat, kind of, sort of, some, a little bit, really, almost, quite, entirely, little, some, to some extent, more or less, preferably, nearly*, etc. On the other hand, rounders are words or phrases that sets a range of numbers and figures in order to support a listener's further understanding (Vlasyan, 2020).

Rounders. Rounders are words or phrases that make precise, accurate numbers and figures to be fuzzy. Instead of providing the hearer with clear and definite information, rounders enable the listeners to assume a variety of information instead. These terms and expressions include *about, around, roughly, nearly, approximately, something, around, essentially, between...and..., over, up to, or else, or up...to..., one of the..., around, more than, minimum, maximum, no more than, less than...,* etc. (Vlasyan et al., 2020).

B.) Shields

The second category of hedges is shields which are words or phrases that does not affect the content of the utterance. They don't function for the proposition rather the degree of a speaker's commitment to the truth value of the proposition they wish to convey and reflect the extent of their involvement. Shields don't change the meaning of a language but helps the speaker disclaim responsibility for their utterance (Gribanova & Gaidukova, 2019). Shields are further classified into two categories: plausibility shields and attribution shields.

Plausibility shields. Plausibility shields are the hedges which speakers use to express their thoughts or opinions in a soft, humbling, or doubting manner as a façade of the information they provided that is not absolute or accurate. They are readily accomplished with modal verbs that soften the tone and hesitation words that portray a guarded and cautious attitude. Such shields include *I think, probably, I take it, as far as I can tell, I have to believe right now, I don't see that, as far as I'm concerned, seem, wonder, I am (was) wondering, I suppose, I assume, I'm afraid, I believe, hard to say, would, could, might, may, would like*, etc. (Moheddin & Sherwani, 2019).

Attribution shields. Attribution shields are words or phrases that indicate the uncertainty of the accuracy of information provided. Thus, there is a demand for clarification or questioning, they assign the responsibility to a different person or speaker in order to save face and disclaim responsibility. Basically, attribution shields are mitigating devices that allow speakers to protect one's self from any harm to their name. They are mostly manifested in third person viewpoint and convey the ideas of others. Attribution shields frequently cite the original source of the information. Such shields include *according to, it is said that, it seems to, ...says that..., as is well known, according to, presumably, at least, to somebody's*

knowledge, someone says that..., the possibility would be..., the probability is..., generally estimated etc. (Moheddin & Sherwani, 2019).

2.3.2 Vague words

Vague words are words or phrases whose meanings are imprecise, uncertain, or indefinite. Vague words lack the ability to relate to precise information and their primary characteristic is the ambiguities of the words itself. Vague words are used in situations wherein a word can suffice as a representation of the information as a whole. This is because the mention of detailed information is inflexible and time-consuming. Vagueness can be applied to nouns or entities. Instead of the exact or the actual word or phrase, speakers use a vague word as a representation or reference for that exact word. Examples are and things, something, such, anything, thing, what is name, stuff, like, whatever, sort of, everything, or any word in the language that evokes interest and prompts inquiries for further details of the information (Gribanova & Gaidukova, 2019).

2.3.3 Vague implication

The third type of vague language is vague implication which, by implication, refers to statements that contain precise wording yet are frequently misinterpreted. In this type of vagueness, a precise number or a plural number name has a vague meaning, or a round number is used loosely without firm accuracy. Examples include plural by numbers (10 to 20 or 75 to 80), exaggerations (thousands of, hundreds of, millions of, a gazillion), and quantifiers (some, a lot, a few, many). Thus, the vague implication is not unclear due to a lack of information or a lack of clarity but because the context leaves room for misinterpretation, elicits questions for clarification, or even confusion over what the implicature really means (Gribanova & Gaidukova, 2019). For example, “American aircraft struck five targets within five hours Sunday, including armed vehicles and a mortar position, U.S. Central Command said,” (From a news article on the Iraqi security crisis, as cited in Khalil, 2017). The phrases five targets and five hours Sunday still elicits questions to clarify the information. It’s because this information may be interpreted differently to different readers or listeners depending on their background and their current knowledge of the subject and thus, these phrases become vague.

3. Methodology

The research methodology of the study is presented in this section. It includes discussion on the research design, research environment, corpus of the study, data gathering procedure, and data analysis.

3.1 Research design

This study used Discourse Analysis which is one of the contemporary approaches to qualitative research that emphasizes human language as a socially contextual performance (Wertz et al., 2011). It is an umbrella term for describing approaches that examine discourses relating to specific social contexts. Conducting discourse analysis means examining how language functions and how meaning is created in different social interactions. It focuses on the social aspects of communication and the ways people use language to achieve specific effects.

Specifically, this study employed Pragmatic Analysis which focuses on the meaning of a language within its social context. It is used in order to understand the implied communicative function of a language, in this case, the implied meaning of a social media influencer's advertisement message (Woodrow, 2018).

3.2 Research environment

The research environment of the study was the virtual world of social media influencers. This study focused on a social media platform called TikTok which began as an entertainment application. Currently, it caters online sellers who wish to promote or sell products and services to their large following.

3.3 Corpus of the study

The corpus of the study consisted of (25) transcribed texts from video advertisements of the five social media influencers who were selected for the study. Five (5) video advertisements were collected from each influencer. These influencers are active in promoting products and/or services on TikTok and have at least 100 thousand followers. Filipino is the chosen nationality of the social media influencers.

The videos were selected based on the engagement standard set by Adobe Express. According to the article titled, "10 tested tips for boosting your TikTok engagement" (2022), an engagement rate is a percentage that shows how successful a content is. According to Adobe Express (2022), a successful TikTok video must have a good engagement rate that falls anywhere between 4% to 18%.

3.4 Data gathering procedure

The social media influencers in this study were selected based on their popularity and the number of their followers, i.e. at least 100 thousand followers. Filipino was the chosen nationality of the social media influencers. They were also selected based on a good engagement rate, i.e. at least 4%. Since this study focused on vague language used in advertisements, only advertisement videos, either in English or Filipino, were collected which suggested that all the personal videos were excluded. Only videos within a year of posting were extracted from March 2022 to February 2023. Social media influencers typically promote within a length of 15 seconds to three (3) minutes in order to keep their videos short and interesting. The same video length was applied as basis for the selection of videos. Five (5) videos were collected from each of the five (5) influencers. Thus, in total, the specialized corpus in the current study included (25) advertisement videos.

3.5 Data analysis

In order to analyze the data, the researchers employed the Pragmatic Analysis of Ramanadhan, Revette, Lee, and Aveling (2021). The researchers undertook the following steps: 1) familiarization; 2) identifying a coding framework; and 3) charting. During the analysis, the researchers revisited the research questions set for this study.

The first research question was concerned with the vague languages uttered by the TikTok influencers. The theory of Conversational Implicatures of Grice (1975) were employed in order to identify the the actual utterance and the intended message of the TikTok influencers. The researchers familiarized themselves with the data by watching the videos and converted the audio files into written text. When transcription was done, the researchers made an inventory of the vague languages.

The second research question tackled the strategies used by TikTok influencers in advertising products. The strategies analyzed here were categories of vague languages of Channell (1994). The researchers then referred to the inventory of vague languages and grouped similar vague languages using a coding framework based on Channell’s (1994) categories. These categories were assigned to words, phrases, or sentences. The coding scheme was applied to the entire data set. Each strategy was then explained with its corresponding examples.

The third research question was concerned about how these strategies contribute to the effectiveness of the advertisements. The researchers used engagement rate as a basis for an effective video content. The formula for engagement rate is the number of engagements divided by the number of views multiplied by 100. The engagements of TikTok videos include the likes, comments, and shares. Then, the researchers analyzed the strategies of vague language and inferred how these strategies benefited the TikTok influencers in creating effective messages in their video advertisements. Finally, the researchers created a descriptive summary of the results.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, significant results and findings of the study are presented. A thorough discussion of the data gathered from the corpora and the interpretation of the results are also presented.

4.1 Vague Language Used in Different Video Advertisements

Vague language refers to words or phrases that are imprecise, ambiguous, or lacking in detail (Alkhatnai, 2017). In the context of advertising, social media influencers may use vague language to create an emotional appeal or to spark curiosity about the product or service being advertised. However, this use of vague language can also be seen as manipulative or misleading. One of the aims of this study is to examine the use of vague language on TikTok video advertisements of social media influencers.

Table 1 :Vague Language Used in Different Video Advertisements

Vague language	Statement
a bit	<i>“This is a bit price-y, mga 400 plus ata.”</i> [This is a bit expensive, about 400 plus I think.] Influencer E
a lot	<i>“I’ve tried quite a lot of MagSafe power banks in the market already.”</i> Influencer D
affordable	<i>“Ito ang isa sa pinaka affordable na nahanap kong vitamin C at effective siya.”</i> [This is one of the most affordable vitamin C I’ve found and it is effective.] Influencer A

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based on my experience	“Based on my experience, ‘yun talaga ‘yung nag work sa akin ha.” [Based on my experience, this is really what worked for me.] Influencer A
benefits	“...itong coffee na ‘to, napakaraming benefits...” [this coffee has so many benefits...] Influencer C
feedback	“...itong coffee na ‘to napakaraming benefits sa mga naririnig ko at nakikita ko sa feedback nila.” [...this coffee has so many benefits coming from the feedback that I hear and see.] Influencer C
for me	“...for me, this is the best.” Influencer C “...for me after 3 months of using this Oppo Reno 8, it does deliver premium experience in most areas...” Influencer D
isa sa pinaka	“Ito ang isa sa pinaka affordable na nahanap kong vitamin C at effective siya.” [This is one of the most affordable vitamin C I’ve found and it is effective.] Influencer A
maganda	“Siyempre kailangan na may puhunan ka rin na maganda.” [Of course, you also need a good investment capital.] Influencer B
marami	“...recommended siya ng maraming doctor.” [...it’s recommended by many doctors.] Influencer C
mga	“Kapag gamit mo ‘to mga ilang weeks or months, makikita mo talaga ‘yung resulta.” [If you use this for about how many weeks or months, you can really see the results.] Influencer C
most areas	“...it does deliver premium experience in most areas...” Influencer D
one of the	“This is one of the best sunscreens that I’ve tried.” Influencer E
parang	“Parang twice a month ko lang ginagamitan ‘yung mukha ko ng ganito.” [I sort of use this on my face only twice a month.] Influencer A
personal opinion	“So, personal opinion ko lang naman ‘yun, nasa sa inyo pa din.” [So, it’s just my personal opinion, it’s still up to you.] Influencer B
quality	“You won’t believe it’s so affordable for its quality, yay!” Influencer E
reviews	“Sobrang dami kong nakikitang magagandang reviews nito.” [I see so many good reviews of this.] Influencer A
under 250 pesos	“...under 250 pesos lang.” [...under 250 pesos only.] Influencer A
400 plus	“This is a bit price-y, mga 400 plus ata.” [This is a bit expensive, about 400 plus I think.] Influencer E

Note. This is only a rough translation.

Table 1 shows the different vague language used by the five social media influencers in their TikTok video advertisements. This study provides evidence that social media influencers often use vague language in their video advertisements on TikTok. These findings

are consistent with previous studies that have examined the use of vague language in advertising, suggesting that this is a widespread practice across various forms of advertising: online, print, radio, and television. One study that corroborates these findings is the study of Wenzhong and Jingyi (2013). They conducted a pragmatic analysis of vague language in printed media advertisements. It was found that vague language in commercial advertising plays both positive and negative roles. Its positive functions include improving the flexibility of communication, enhancing the persuasiveness of communication, and ensuring the accuracy of information whereas its negative functions cover misleading readers and making them subject to false understanding. Another study by Yang (2019) analyzed hedges in English television advertising on the basis of Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975). It was found that since hedges have rich special functions, therefore, advertisers widely employ them on television advertisements as an effective strategy to achieve attraction.

4.2 Strategies in the Use of Vague Language in Video Advertisements

The concept of linguistic vagueness of Channel (1994) was the basis for identifying the strategies in the use of vague language by social media influencers in their TikTok video advertisements. According to Channel (1994), these strategies are a crucial component of an English native speaker's communication skill. She further elaborates that speakers intentionally employ vague language as a way to maintain social relationships and prevent misunderstandings or potential conflicts. It is more than merely a means of transmitting information, but it also plays an essential role in building and sustaining relationships within society. Speakers may employ vague language in order to be courteous, demonstrate deference, indicate hesitation or doubt, or prevent offending anybody.

Based on the researchers' analysis, three strategies in the use of vague language in video advertisements were identified: hedges, vague words, and vague implication. Under hedges were adapters, rounders, plausibility shields, and attribution shields. With the use of these hedges, vague words, and implication, the social media influencers have violated the four maxims: maxim of quality, maxim of quantity, maxim of relevance, and maxim of manner. According to Rohmanti and Pradika (2018), hedges usually flout the maxim of quality, maxim of quantity, maxim of relevance, and maxim of manner. This is called "hedging maxim" which is commonly employed when the speaker wants to avoid making a bold statement that he or she is unsure of. In the study of Vidakovic and Trninic-Janjic (2017), they state that lexemes whose meaning are indefinite (vague words) and vague numerical expressions (vague implication) particularly flout the maxim of quantity and maxim of manner to create implications that influence how consumers interpret advertising messages and, ultimately, their purchasing decisions.

Adapters. According to Alfin (2019), adapters are words or phrases that advertisers use to acknowledge exceptions, limitations, or potential shortcomings of the product or service being advertised. Adapters can be used to address potential objections that consumers may have and to present the product or service as more credible and trustworthy.

Data show that Influencer A and Influencer E use adapters in their TikTok video advertisements.

"*Parang* twice a month ko lang ginagamitan 'yung mukha ko ng ganito."
(Influencer A)

In the video advertisement for pimple patch, Influencer A claims that the product is effective. However, the utterance is vague because of the use of an adapter *parang*. In order to tone down her claim, she uses the adapter *parang* since she herself may be unsure as to the actual number of months that the product should be used before it can make the acne disappear.

“This is *a bit* price-y, mga 400 plus ata.” (Influencer E)

In the video advertisement for makeup, Influencer E recommends a specific face powder. Since the product is expensive she uses the adapter *a bit* to tone down the word “price-y” (an informal term for expensive).

Rounders. In the context of advertising, Gribanova and Gaidukova (2019) defined the term rounder as a type of hedge that allows advertisers to make claims about their product or service without making a definite or explicit statement. This is done by rounding off information about numbers and figures they are unsure about. They explain that rounders are often used to create a sense of positivity or encouragement, while avoiding the risk of making false or exaggerated claims.

Data show Influencer A, Influencer C, and Influencer E use rounders in their TikTok video advertisements.

“Ito ang *isa sa pinaka* affordable na nahanap kong vitamin C at effective siya.” (Influencer A)

“Kapag gamit mo ‘to *mga* ilang weeks or months, makikita mo talaga ‘yung resulta.” (Influencer C)

“This is *one of the* best sunscreens that I’ve tried.” (Influencer E)

In Influencer A’s video advertisement for a vitamin C, the utterances are vague because of the use of the rounders *isa sa pinaka*. When advertising a product, advertisers make sure that the product they advertise stands out among the rest. The phrase *isa sa pinaka* implies that, although the product is affordable, but there are also other products in the market that are affordable as well. In Influencer C’s video advertisement for a collagen, she adds *mga* and says “*mga* ilang weeks or months” as her way of avoiding making a specific commitment as to the exact number of weeks or months that the effect of using the product will finally be seen. Just like Influencer A’s use of the rounder *isa sa pinaka*, Influencer E also employs *one of the* for her video advertisement for a sunscreen. Influencer E claims that her product is “best” however her use of *one of the* implies that this is not the only sunscreen that produces the best result.

Plausibility shields. Plausibility shields refer to the use of language by individuals or groups to make claims that are difficult to verify or disprove, thus protecting them from being held accountable for false or misleading information (Gribanova & Gaidukova, 2019). In the context of social media influencers, plausibility shields can be used to reduce speaker’s commitment, making it difficult for consumers to evaluate the claims made in advertisements.

Data show Influencer A, Influencer B, and Influencer C, and Influencer D use plausibility shields in their TikTok video advertisements.

“Based on my experience, ‘yun talaga ‘yung nag work sa akin ha.”

(Influencer A)

“So, *personal opinion* ko lang naman ‘yun, nasa sa inyo pa din.”

(Influencer B)

“...for me, this is the best.” (Influencer C)

“...for me after 3 months of using this Oppo Reno 8, it does deliver premium experience in most areas...” (Influencer D)

In the video advertisement for a bath soap, Influencer A uses *based on my experience*. While Influencer C and Influencer D use *for me* in their video advertisements for a collagen drink and a mobile phone, respectively. These phrases make the utterance vague because, in effect, they only take into account their own pleasant experience with the products and do not take responsibility for what may have been experienced by others. By saying that their claim is true only as far as they are concerned is their way of shielding themselves from being held accountable for their claim about the products. Influencer B uses *personal opinion* in their video advertisement for crypto trading. Since opinions are personal beliefs that a person feels strongly about and are technically neither right nor wrong, Influencer B’s use of this phrase protects himself against liabilities and helps him avoid direct responsibility for his claims.

Attribution shields. According to Gribanova and Gaidukova (2019), attribution shields are linguistic devices used by advertisers to deflect responsibility for claims made in advertisements by attributing them to other sources, such as scientific studies or customer testimonials. They argue that attribution shields can be used to enhance the credibility of advertising claims, while also protecting advertisers from legal or ethical challenges.

Data show that Influencer A and Influencer C use attribution shields in their TikTok video advertisements.

“Sobrang dami kong nakikitang magagandang *reviews* nito.” (Influencer A)

“...itong coffee na ‘to napakaraming benefits sa mga naririnig ko at nakikita ko sa *feedback* nila.” (Influencer C)

The statements above are from the video advertisement of Influencer A for a body wash and from the video advertisement of Influencer B for a coffee. The use of words such as *reviews* and *feedback* make their utterances vague. Because instead of explicitly saying direct claims about the products, they use such attribution shields to transfer the responsibility for the information to a third entity. By doing so, both these influencers deflect responsibility to others and avoid being held accountable for their claim.

Vague words. According to Khalil (2017), vague words are words or phrases that serves as a representation of the information as a whole. It lacks specificity or detail, and are often used in advertising to create a positive impression of a product without making specific claims that could be challenged or refuted. They argue that vague words can be effective in promoting products, but they can also be used to manipulate consumers by creating a false impression of a product’s qualities.

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Data show that all five influencers use vague words in their TikTok video advertisements.

“Ito ang isa sa pinaka *affordable* na nahanap kong vitamin C at effective siya.”

(Influencer A)

“Siyempre kailangan na may puhunan ka rin na *maganda*.” (Influencer B)

“...itong coffee na ‘to, napakaraming *benefits*...” (Influencer C)

“...it does deliver premium experience in *most areas*...” (Influencer D)

“You won't believe it's so affordable for its *quality*, yay!” (Influencer E)

Influencer A uses the vague word *affordable* in her video advertisement for a vitamin C. The word *affordable* is vague because it is not quantified. It is subjective and lack a clear and objective definition thus it could mean differently to different people depending on their needs, preferences, priorities, and socioeconomic status. In Influencer B’s video advertisement for a business, instead of stating the exact figures for the needed capital he uses the word *maganda* which is unclear. And although Influencer C keeps on saying that the coffee has many *benefits*, but she never mentions what these specific *benefits* are and in which area of the body these benefits actually manifests. Influencer D uses the phrase *most areas* but does not specify the exact proportion or percentage nor the specific areas of the phone whether it be storage, camera quality, or others. Influencer E uses the word *quality* but does not specify what aspect of the product she is referring to. All of these influencers use these vague words as a representation of the things they fail to specify or they are unwilling to specify.

Vague implication. In advertising, vague implication can be defined as the use of language that suggests a precise claim or attribute without directly stating it, thereby allowing for a wide range of interpretations by the audience (Khalil, 2017). The purpose of vague implication is to create a precise impression in the minds of the audience without making a specific claim that could be refuted or proven false.

Data show Influencer A, Influencer C, and Influencer D, and Influencer E use vague implication in their TikTok video advertisements.

“...*under 250 pesos* lang.” (Influencer A)

“...recommended siya ng *maraming* doctor.” (Influencer C)

“I’ve tried quite *a lot* of MagSafe power banks in the market already.”

(Influencer D)

“This is a bit price-y, mga *400 plus* ata.” (Influencer E)

Influencer A and Influencer E use the vague implication *under 250 pesos* and *400 plus* to refer to the prices of the advertised products. These utterances could have been clearer if the exact prices are given. The price range of *90 to 120* could mean that the price of the product could be anything from 90 to 120 (eg. 91, 102, 113 and so on). The same is true for *under 250 pesos* and *400 plus*. *Under 250 pesos* could mean 100 pesos, 199 pesos,

210 pesos and so on. *400 plus* could mean 410 pesos, 450 pesos, 499 pesos and so on. Influencer C and Influencer D use vague implication *maraming* and *a lot* to refer to the number of doctors and power banks, respectively. These are general words that imply large number or quantities but are unspecified making the utterances vague.

The above findings suggest that the use of vague language on TikTok video advertisements by social media influencers is a common practice. The use of vague language is not limited to one type but includes a variety of strategies, such as vague words, vague implication, and hedges that include adapters, rounders, plausibility shields, and attribution shields. These strategies are used to create a more modest and believable image for the product or service being advertised and to avoid making definitive claims that could be challenged or refuted. One study by Vidaković and Trninić-Janjić (2017) investigated the use of vague language as a form of covert communication in the printed and online advertisements in English and Serbian. The analysis of the corpus has shown the following: vague language comes in a form of implicit comparison where the element that should serve as a basis for comparison is omitted; vague numerical expressions which lead the recipients of a message to either overestimate or underestimate a certain quantity or value; and lexemes which create an impression that the real action and change are taking place or whose meaning is indeterminate.

4.3 Effectiveness of the Strategies in the Use of Vague Language

Data gathered from the corpora reveal that the five social media influencers use strategies in the use of vague language in their TikTok video advertisements. These strategies include hedges, vague words and vague implications. Under hedges were adapters, rounders, plausibility shields, and attribution shields.

The strategies in the use of vague language have contributed to the effectiveness of the video advertisements as evidenced in the engagement rate of these video advertisements. Table 2 shows the engagement rate of each of the TikTok video advertisement used in the study. As shown, each of the video advertisement has an engagement rate of not less than 4% which is considered to be a good engagement rate.

Table 2 :TikTok Influencers' Engagement Rate

Influencer A	Engagement Rate
Video 1	8.10%
Video 2	10.7%
Video 3	4.7%
Video 4	5.1%
Video 5	7.6%
Influencer B	
Video 1	13.2%
Video 2	9.3%
Video 3	12.7%
Video 4	6.1%
Video 5	6.4%

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Influencer C	
Video 1	4.20%
Video 2	4.62%
Video 3	4.42%
Video 4	4.35%
Video 5	4.98%

Influencer D	
Video 1	6.71%
Video 2	6.67%
Video 3	8.84%
Video 4	4.83%
Video 5	5.35%

Influencer E	
Video 1	9.16%
Video 2	9.71%
Video 3	5.92%
Video 4	4.89%
Video 5	4.45%

The results indicate that the use of these strategies has contributed to the effectiveness of the video advertisements because the latter passed the engagement standard set by Adobe Express for TikTok. The use of these strategies enabled the influencers to communicate to their audience better. Moreover, it allowed the influencers to successfully convey information and persuade consumers without having to be direct and specific. In this way, they were able to evade responsibility for the information. The use of these strategies also helped them moderate the atmosphere or tone of communication thus allowing them to convey information in a flexible way. There are previous studies that support the findings of the present investigation. For instance, Vidaković and Trninić-Janjić (2017) explored the use of vague language in advertising and found that it was associated with higher consumer interest and recall. In addition, it was found that vague language helped advertisers to communicate messages in a flexible and persuasive manner while avoiding legal implications. In the study of Wenzhong and Jingyi (2013), they examined the functions of vague language in commercial advertising, which is a communicative factor in the effectiveness of advertisements. The study revealed both benefits and drawbacks of using vague language in commercial advertising. Its beneficial effects include strengthening persuasiveness, flexibility in communication, and accuracy of information, whereas its negative ones include misleading readers and subjecting them to incorrect understanding.

The above findings can be related to Grice's (1975) Conversational Implicatures and his Cooperative Principle. According to the Grice cooperative principle, communication should be based on cooperation between speakers and listeners which make their interaction meaningful and relevant. That principle emphasizes the importance of speakers being able to be truthful, informative, relevant, and clear in their messages. In line with this, the use of vague language strategies by social media influencers on TikTok video advertisements can be seen

as a violation of the Cooperative Principle as they use hedges, vague words, and vague implication to communicate information in an indirect and unclear manner.

On the other hand, the use of vague language strategies by social media influencers appears to be a reliance on the Conversational Implicatures. This theory shows how speakers use indirect language to express the meaning, while listeners infer it from context and background knowledge. The social media influencers in the study use vague language strategies to create a more modest and credible image for the products or services they advertise, and to avoid making explicit claims that could be challenged or refuted. This approach allows them to convey meaning beyond the literal meaning of their words and rely on the audience's inference to understand their intended meaning.

The results of this study have important implications for social media influencers and online advertisers. The use of vague language and the accompanying strategies can be a powerful tool for communication and persuasion, enabling people to communicate their ideas in a flexible and persuasive manner while avoiding unfavorable feedback. However, consumers should be critical of the information provided to them and aware of the potential use of vague language in advertising.

This study has also implications for the teaching of linguistics. It emphasizes the value of how language is used in different contexts, such as social media and advertising. The study also emphasizes the importance of critical thinking and context-specific language analysis, which can help individuals become more informed and discerning consumers.

Another important implication of the study is that it contributes to our understanding of how language is used in digital communication, particularly in the context of social media advertising. The findings of this study can lead to a deeper understanding of the relationship between language use and digital communication.

5. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that social media influencers on TikTok video advertisements commonly use vague language. to create a more modest and credible image for the products or services they advertise. This is achieved through the use of vague words, vague implications, and hedges, which include adapters, rounders, plausibility shields, and attribution shields. These strategies in the use of vague language enable the influencers to communicate with their audience more effectively, convey information, and persuade consumers without being too direct or explicit. Additionally, the use of vague language allows the influencers to evade responsibility for the information, moderate the tone of communication, and convey information in a flexible way. The engagement rate of the video advertisements shows that these strategies contribute to their overall effectiveness.

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