

# Intertextual Techniques in Advertisements

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## ABSTRACT

Intertextuality is a network of textual relation. It is an important quality for successful advertisements. Advertisers often stir readers' prior knowledge by source texts to interpret advertisements. Quotation, parody and allusion are commonly-used techniques to set up an intertextual relation between advertisements or target texts and source texts. Most source texts of these three techniques come from proverbs, sayings, historical events, literary works, famous figures, and names of books, films or songs, etc. The popularity of these proverbs, sayings, historical events, literary works, etc. may produce a sense of intimacy to readers, and attract readers' attention to advertisements easily.

**Keywords:** intertextuality, advertisements, quotation, parody, allusion

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose with which any individual advertisement is designed is, of course, to sell products (Pateman, 1989). Once an advertisement is identified, such conative components as "we recommend that" and "buy our product" are understood by people easily. In order to get people to identify the product, to remember its brand, and to persuade them that it is worth buying, advertisers usually employ different strategies in the advertising campaign to promote the product sale. The application of intertextuality in advertising language is an effective technique that most advertisers prefer.

Intertextuality is a kind of relationship by which texts are interwoven with each other, that is, every text is an absorption and transformation of other texts. By intertextuality, texts are connected and repeated. The intertextual relationship in advertising can arouse people's attention, memory, interest and desire, and then stimulate their purchasing action, as it is natural for people to accept things they are familiar with. Many linguists and scholars show a great interest in intertextuality in advertising and have also done research on the forms and functions of intertextuality in advertising language (e.g. Xin, 2000; Cook, 2001; Chen, 2006; Han, 2005, etc.). Based on the previous studies, the present paper attempts to explain how intertextuality between texts is realized in advertisements.

This research is a qualitative study. The samples used for data analysis are mainly printed advertisements. They are collected from different channels, such as newspapers, magazines, books, TV and internet. The selection involves two principal standards in order to make the study convincing. One is the typicality of the advertisements. They are influential ones and are abundant in intertextuality. They can easily arouse people's awareness of intertextuality. The other is the success and popularity of the advertisements. They have strong attention value and memory value, and are widely accepted.

## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF INTERTEXTUALITY

Intertextuality derives etymologically from the Latin word “intertexto”, which means to intermingle while weaving. It is used to describe the range of ways in which texts make reference to other texts.

### The Origin of Intertextuality

The theory of intertextuality came into being in the thought of structuralism and post-structuralism. The advocates of this theory pointed out since language is the basis of existence, the world appears as endless texts. Everything in the world is textualized. All the contexts are intertexts including political, economical, social, psychological, historical and even theological contexts. It challenges and subverts the traditional views about authority and originality. Intertextuality can be said to have its origin in the twentieth-century linguistics, particularly in the seminal work of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1915). The influence of Saussure’s sign system on intertextuality can be seen from two points. One is that the linguistic signs are non-referential, e.g. a sign is not a word’s reference to some object in the world but the combination of a signifier (sound image) and a signified (concept). The other is that they are referential, e.g. the sentence “The tree is green” involves the selection of the word “tree” out of related sounds—“see” or “bee”, and related words—“bush” or “trunk” (Saussure, 1915).

The dialogism of M. M. Bakhtin, a Russian linguistic and literary theorist, is thought of as another origin of the theory of intertextuality. He pointed out that all discourses are dialogic and that dialogue is one of the fundamental structuring principles of all discourses, written and spoken alike (1984). Bakhtin (1984) believed that the words we select in any specific situation have a characteristic of “otherness” about them. They belong to specific speech genres, and they bear the traces of previous utterances. The dialogic quality of word and utterance must be the central focus of the study of language. Bakhtin’s understanding about words and language presents to us a world which is literally dialogic. Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism also led to intertextuality.

Generally, it is thought that the study of intertext starts in the literary field. A literary work is built from systems, codes and traditions established by previous literary works. The systems, codes and traditions of other art forms and of culture in general are also crucial to the meaning of literary works. However, now the study of intertext is not restricted to discussion in literary arts, just as He Ziran (2003, p. 1) pointed out:

Text, whether they are literary or nonliterary, are viewed by modern theorists as lacking in any kind of independent meaning. They are what theorists now call intertextual. The act of reading, theorists claim, plunges us into a network of textual relations. To interpret a text, to discover its meaning, or meanings, is to trace those relations. Reading thus becomes a process of moving between texts. Meaning becomes something which exist in a text and all the other text to which it refers and relates, moving out from the independent text into the network of textual relations. The text becomes the intertext.

### Classification of Intertextuality

Different theorists approach, discuss and develop intertextuality from different perspectives and classify it into different categories. The following are some of the representative classifications.

#### *Macro-intertextuality and Micro- intertextuality*

Culler (1981) talked about two types of relations: macro-intertextuality and micro- intertextuality. In a broad sense, the whole world is considered as a text. The relationship between a text and its signifying

practice is reciprocally referential. In a narrow sense, intertextuality refers to the relationship between a given text and other texts existing in a given text.

#### *Strong Intertextuality and Weak Intertextuality*

As far as the French theorist Laurent Jenny (1982) was concerned, intertextuality falls into strong intertextuality and weak intertextuality. The former refers to the obvious shown reference relation between a given text and other texts such as quotations, plagiarism and piercing, while the latter indicates that a given text implies something that induces semantic associations of other texts, such as similar opinions, topic ideas, genres, etc.

#### *Manifest Intertextuality and Constitutive Intertextuality*

Fairclough (1992: 85) differentiated these types of relation. "In manifest intertextuality, other texts are explicitly presented in the text under analysis; they are 'manifestly' marked or cued by features on the surface of the text, such as quotation marks" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 104). "The constitutive intertextuality refers to the complex relation of genres or discourse types' convention. It is the configuration of discourse conventions when the text is produced." (Fairclough, 1992, p. 105).

#### *Specific Intertextuality and Generic Intertextuality*

Xin (2000, p. 6) categorized intertextuality into these two types. He used the former to refer to a given text which contains others' discourses with concrete sources identified. Such intertextuality entails strong intertextuality, manifest intertextuality and the intertextual relation triggered by quotation from others' discourse; the latter refers to the integration of different styles, registers or genres (Xin, 2000, p. 14).

Although the scholars do not interpret intertextuality completely in the same way, still they share some common points. It seems that the above strong, manifest or specific intertextuality refers to the obvious shown, surface or concrete intertextual relation, while weak, constitutive or generic intertextuality means semantic associations of ideas, genres or registers, etc.

Actually it is hard to get a unanimous idea about intertextuality. However, this paper will discuss intertextuality in advertising in the narrow sense, or micro-intertextuality and focus on the intertextual relation "with concrete sources identified" (Xin, 2000) or the obvious shown, surface intertextual relation, such as quotation, allusion and parody.

## **INTERTEXTUALITY AND ADVERTISING**

Intertextuality is pervasive, and even the so-called "original" literary works are based on the intertextual relationships with other works. According to Allen (2000), intertextuality is not restricted to discussion in literary arts. It is found in discussions of cinema, painting, music, architecture, photography and in virtually all cultural and artistic productions. Readers can make meanings through the relations between two texts; meanings cannot be made within any single text. Intertextuality is a "precondition for the intelligibility of texts" (Hatim, 1997, p. 219) and is essentially a mechanism through which a text refers backward (or forward) to previous (or future) texts. Intertextuality exists in every text, including advertising texts, and it can explain the relation between different texts and an advertisement text itself, and help to interpret the meaning of an advertisement, in that the original text being referred to could establish a message which the second text can use and elaborate on. Therefore, the second text doesn't have to work so hard.

## Intertextual Nature of Advertising

Advertisements are usually interaction between products and readers. As we know, the purpose of an advertisement is to persuade the audience into buying the product by means of reforming those unconcerned people, thus advertisements must have selling power which can arouse people's interest in or desire for the products. To achieve this, advertisements should have attention value that impresses people and make them memorize the product. Advertisers often use intertextuality, which encourages readers to ponder and make association with their previous knowledge and arouse their feeling of familiarity facilitating memorization.

Scholars have noticed the intertextual relation in advertisements. They (e.g. Cook, 1992; Vestergaard & Schroder, 1985; Tanaka, 1994, etc.) suggested that advertising language should construct its own meaning by interacting other types of discourse. Cook (1992) focused on shared knowledge between advertisers and readers, and he pointed out that by shared knowledge, readers can grasp the covert meaning of advertisements. Tanaka (1994) illustrated how communication forms between advertisers and readers, nature of the communication and aspects of communication in advertising language. In exploring how readers are able to decode advertisers' intentions, she adopted Relevance Theory as theoretical framework to discuss intertextual relation of advertising, such as ostensive-inferential communication, relevance and cognition and covert communication in advertising.

### ***Basic Notions of Intertextuality in Advertising***

#### Source Text

Source text is the text from which messages or ideas are derived. Source texts in advertisements refer to signs and expressions an advertising campaign invokes including both texts and images, which can be further classified into i) texts, ii) paintings, architecture, music, iii) events, figures, iv) social values and norms widely accepted, etc. (Han, 2005).

Source texts play an important role in advertisement understanding. Without appropriate source texts, advertisements may not be easily interpreted as expected. Source texts are always needed to grab the meanings of advertisements.

Information of most advertisements is conveyed to readers mainly through texts and images. Compared with texts, images are likely to arouse readers' attention more quickly and impress them more easily. However, images usually have much broader and vaguer meanings than texts. So in this paper, the author uses texts as source texts.

#### Intertextual Marks

Words, idioms, other kind of expressions or images existed for linking source texts are intertextual marks. Han Jinlong (2005) firstly adopted the term intertextual marks. He pointed out that intertextual marks have the function of helping readers know where the source is. For example, quotation marks are always used to tell the primary source directly. Texts containing direct or clear intertextual marks are called explicit intertexts while texts without intertextual marks are often referred to implicit intertexts, e.g. advertising discourse falls into implicit intertextuality.

This paper focuses on explicit intertextuality.

## INTERTEXTUAL TECHNIQUES IN ADVERTISEMENTS

Advertisers often make creative use of source texts so as to produce noticeable and memorable effects. Quotation, parody and allusion are the ways they commonly adopt to create intertextual relation between advertisements or target texts and source texts.. This section will discuss these three explicit forms of intertextuality in advertisements.

### Quotation

Quotation is the language phenomenon that spoken or written words are a passage, a book or other forms of texts, which are usually known and without any change (Xiong, 2007). The advantage of quotation relies on its popularity and public acceptance. Quotation is a very effective way to realize intertextuality in advertising and help achieve the advertising goal in a concise and appealing way. Proverbs, historical events, literary works, films or songs are the sources to be quoted.

Example 1: Love me tender, love me true. (for Cosmetics Ludanlan)

This advertisement comes from a famous classic love song with the name "Love Me Tender". The quotation of this song can touch readers greatly and readers may make a quick response to the advertisement, as there is a link between the words, the intended meaning of the advertisement and readers.

Example 2: A friend in need is a friend indeed. (for Quick Heartache Reliever)

This is an advertisement for a medicine, *Quick Heartache Reliever*. The advertiser quotes the proverb "A friend in need is a friend indeed". By adopting this proverb, the advertisement emphasizes the quality and efficiency of the medicine and also conveys the meaning that this medicine will come to your rescue the moment you are in danger. It is your trustworthy friend. The quotation brings readers kindness and credibility and shortens the distance between the product and its readers.

Example 3: Listen to the Quiet

If you are tired of the traffic or your neighbor's chatter, try something different...the sound of silence in this cozy 2 bedroom, 2 bath cottage set back from the street. (for Real Estate from *Big Book of Real Estate Ads: 1001 Ads That Sell*)

The head of the advertisement is a quotation of the name of a popular book, *Listen to the Quiet*, written by Alda Ellis and published by Harvest House Publishers in 2005. By quoting the name of this book which is the intertextual mark, the advertiser sets up an intertextual link between source text (the name of the book), target text (head of the advertisement). Thus, the advertisement attracts buyers' attention and get more potential buyers.

Example 4: The Pen is mightier than the sword and some pens are mightier than others. (for Parker Pen)

The first sentence is cited from the famous proverb "The pen is mightier than the sword". The proverb originally means that writing can be more powerful than violent action. However, it is quoted here not to appraise the writers but to evoke people's awareness of the writing instrument, Parker Pen. The second sentence imitates the form of the original one and implies Parker Pen is superior to its counterparts.

Example 5: Jurassic Park

Do you have the courage to explore the hidden valley or enter the silent glen on this time-forgotten wooded site that might have been home to marauding dinosaurs? While only 60 minutes from the city. (for Real Estate from *Big Book of Real Estate Ads: 1001 Ads That Sell* )

“Jurassic Park”, the head of the advertisement, is cited from the name of the film *Jurassic Park*, directed by the famous American director Steven Spielberg. *Jurassic Park* is a popular film and it is a story of regenerated dinosaurs. People, old or young, all love this film. By citing the name of this familiar film, an intertextual relation is established and a sense of familiar feeling is produced.

Intertextual technique can also be applied through many other forms, for example, quotation of famous speeches, literary works, historical events, idioms, popular slogans, etc. Popularity of all these may put appealing power and influence on advertisements.

## Parody

Parody, as a prestigious rhetorical device, can be defined as recognizable copying of the manner of other’s words. It is the exaggerated imitation or mimicking of another’s voice for humorous or comical effect (Xin Bin, 2000). Parody is a process of generating new expressions by changing or borrowing some parts of the original sources, such as adding or taking out some words, or combining two or several of them together. It is one of the most commonly used techniques in advertisements writing.

Example 6: Making An Ice Idea Better. ( for Rongsheng Refrigerator )

This advertisement is derived from the proverb, “Make a nice idea better”. Here the author skillfully divides the word “nice” into two parts. As a result, “a nice idea” changes into “an ice idea” in order to highlight “ice”. The possible customers can be easily impressed by the advertisement. Normally, the original version of proverb is kept in the mind of audiences. People can associate the new version with the original one. Moreover, the positive meaning of the original proverb results in the favorable association of advertising.

Example 7: Home Sweet Honda. (for Honda Car)

This example is designed to promote Honda cars by imitating a film’s name Home Sweet Home. Honda replaces Home to bring forth the associative meaning that Honda cars can make the consumers feel warm and comfortable like at home when they purchase them. The intertextual link is created by the source text, the name of film Home Sweet Home.

Example 8: Do your teeth a flavor

.... No matter what the flavor, when your kids brush with Crest, they’re doing their teeth a favor. (for Crest Toothpaste)

The head of the advertisement imitates the English phrase “do somebody a favor”, which is often used in people’s daily life. The parody means that using Crest makes your teeth clean and gives your teeth a flavor, which can do your teeth a favor. If you want to do your teeth a favor, just use Crest that can do your teeth a flavor. The association between the toothpaste and “do somebody a favor” possibly accelerates the popularity of Crest toothpaste successfully.

Example 9: Just Reduced it!

Owner’s found another home, needs to sell quickly, charming colonial with white-pillared porch, 3 bedrooms, 2 baths, bricks veranda, totally upgraded kitchen and bath. (for Real Estate from 2000 Winning Ads for Real Estate)

The head is an imitation of the famous slogan of Nike, “Just do it”. Nike is well-known that its slogan is also popular. Thus, “Just do it” is familiar to the public. The advertiser changes “Just do it” into “Just reduced it” by replacing “do” with “reduced” to show the low price of the housing. It gives readers a sense of intimacy and attracts readers’ attention easily. The source text is the basis of intertextuality.

Example 10: There is a way, there is Toyota (for Toyota Corporation)

This example is duplicated by imitating the famous proverb “there is a will, there is a way”. The proverb connects the product and readers, with which the advertisement surely impresses people. Possibly, this advertisement implies two meanings. The literal meaning symbolizes the popularity of Toyota cars and encourages more and more people to purchase Toyota cars. The other meaning implies a positive attitude that there is always a hope when driving Toyota. Consequently, people who know this famous proverb will have favorable response to Toyota’s advertisement.

Example 11: Not all cars are created equal. (for Mitsubishi Motors)

This advertisement is to promote Japanese Mitsubishi to develop American market. The advertiser chooses intertextual technique, as the advertisement is a reversed version of the famous sentence in the American Declaration of Independence “All men are created equal”. This sentence has been quoted in numerous situations and speeches in hundreds of years. It has deeply implanted the idea of “equal” in everyone’s mind in America. Thus, it arouses the American people a kind of familiar and warm feeling. By the reversion, however, the advertisement shifts the focal point to “not” and “not equal”. It tries to convey that Mitsubishi Motor outperforms other cars. The superior performance and other advantages cannot be equal with others.

Example 12: A Mars a day keeps you work, rest and play. (for Mars Chocolate)

The structure of this advertisement is very similar to that of “An apple a day keeps the doctor away”. While the words “work” and “play” may also stir the association of another familiar proverb “All work no play makes Jack a dull boy”. Thus, this parody with two intertextual marks may convey vividly to the readers the message that eating a Mars a day will make you clever and healthy.

## Allusion

Allusion is a brief reference, explicit or indirect, to a person, place or event, or to another literary work or passage (Yang Xiaojie, 2010). The writer uses allusion to explain, illustrate or reinforce his point, he just picks the key words or phrases without indicating their sources. It is left to the reader or hearer to make the connection. Like quotation and parody, allusion gives readers the pleasure that comes from seeing similarities or hearing echoes of ideas. Employed in advertisements, allusion also functions as intertextual links between advertisements and source texts. Most source texts of allusion come from literary works, the Bible, historical events, famous figures, fairy tales, mythologies and so on.

Example 13: Kangaroo Island—you can escape from the rush of life and become a modern day of Crusoe. (for Kangaroo Island)

“Crusoe” is the intertextual link which influences the interpretation of this advertisement. Crusoe is the character of Daniel Defoe’s book *Robinson Crusoe*. Crusoe was left alone on an isolated island and he managed to survive on the island for thirty years. The use of Crusoe here helps readers think of living on an island with a beautiful scene: on Kangaroo Island, like Crusoe, you can escape from the madding crowd and trifles of modern life, enjoy the wonderful beauty of the nature and have a free life.



Example 14: Charles Dickens would feel right at home in this proper English manner house in prestigious Southaven. Of course he would be amazed at the dazing array of modern amenities this 3 bedrooms and 2 bath residence has to offer. (for Real Estate from *Big Book of Real Estate Ads: 1001 Ads That Sell*)

Charles Dickens is one of the most popular English novelist of the Victorian era. By allusion of figure, the advertisement is to show Charles Dickens would feel right at home in this proper English manner house. Surely ordinary people would be satisfied with this house, too. The adoption of “Charles Dickens” creates the most attractive selling point for house buyers.

Example 15: Today there are three new Nike lasts. With each, we widened the heel base, trimmed the Achilles area and put what amounts to slight curve in the heel area. (for Nike Shoes)

“Achilles” is a character in Greek mythology, the greatest warrior at Troy and the slayer of Hector. When Achilles was still a baby, he was predicted that he would die in war. His mother wanted to save him, so she dipped him in the water of Styx for the water could protect the human body from the fire and sword. But as the heels by which she held him was dry, they became the fatal weakness in the whole body of Achilles and at last he died from this mortal spots. “Achilles’ heel” comes to mean “a weak spot”.

In this advertisement, “Achilles area” is used to refer to the heel area which is the imperfect and unsatisfactory point. However, this weak area has been improved with new kinds of Nike lasts. The association between “Achilles area” and “the weak area” greatly caters to readers, and the technique of using allusion results in a humorous and impressive effect.

Example 16: Bomb Shelter no More. (for Real Estate from *Big Book of Real Estate Ads: 1001 Ads That Sell*)

This advertisement is an allusion of historical event. The housing site in the advertisement was a bombing place in the cold war era in London. It was used as a bunker in the early 1950s. Here the advertiser recalls this event in order to make a contrast between the old bomb shelter and the present real estate. This allusion sets up an intertextual link between the historical event and the real estate, or the past and the present.

## CONCLUSION

In order to skillfully present the features of products, advertisers often create an intertextual relationship between advertisements or target texts and source texts by using some devices or techniques, such as quotation, parody and allusion. The paper discusses these three intertextual techniques and finds that intertextuality is achieved by the quotation, imitation or adoption of sources texts, e.g. literary works, proverbs, sayings, historical events, famous figures, mythologies, names of books, films or songs, etc. All these intertextual marks are obvious and concrete, which are easy to figure out, especially when they are closely related to readers’ prior knowledge or life experience. They are effective methods to build an intertextual link in advertisements. Moreover, the application of the three techniques can result in vividness, humor and uniqueness and thus, advertisements attract readers’ attention easily.

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