



Doublespeak In Beauty Product Discount Advertisements on Instagram and TikTok: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

This study addresses gaps in Doublespeak, the use of language that obscures meaning through ambiguity, euphemism, and hyperbole in Instagram and TikTok beauty product discount ads, where ambiguous promotional language is commercially influential and under-studied academically. This study aims to identify the linguistic forms of Doublespeak, analyze the discursive strategies used to frame discount claims, and uncover its ideological function in digital advertising discourse. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach in the framework of critical discourse analysis. The ad data, which netted as many as 70 discount ads for beauty products, were collected from the products' official accounts on Instagram and TikTok through documentation techniques. Furthermore, the data were encoded and analyzed in three dimensions, namely text, discursive practice, and social practice. The results showed that Doublespeak was realized through five overlapping categories, namely up-to claims, scarcity claims, urgency claims, vague superiority claims, and pseudo-scientific claims. Discursively, this strategy views discounts as rare opportunities limited by time and uncertain pricing information. Ideologically, Doublespeak serves to reproduce digital consumerism and normalize certain beauty standards. The novelty of this study lies in integrating the concept of Doublespeak with the practice of promoting discounts as a construction of economic discourse on social media. This research contributes to critical linguistics and consumer literacy of digital advertising language, as well as the need for closer scrutiny of discount claims and further research into how audiences actually interpret them.

Keywords: Doublespeak; Discount ads; Critical discourse analysis; Social media; Ideology

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's cosmetics industry is showing consistent growth. The national cosmetics market is projected to grow by an average of 5.35% per year in 2024-2028, with revenue increasing by 48% (Indonesia, 2024). Globally, the cosmetics industry is estimated to reach USD 677.2 billion by 2025, making the beauty sector one of the fastest-growing industries (Indonesia, 2025). The rapid growth of the cosmetics industry is supported by the high penetration of social media, especially Instagram and TikTok, as the main marketing channels. As of January 2025, Indonesia has 143 million active social media users, with 103 million Instagram users and 108 million TikTok users (Kristanti et al., 2025). The high use of these two platforms makes them strategic media as well as vulnerable to marketing communication practices that use Doublespeak to influence consumers.

One prominent phenomenon in digital advertising practices is the use of *Doublespeak*, a form of language that disguises or obscures meaning through ambiguity, euphemism, or hyperbole. According to Lutz (1998), *Doublespeak* is a form of communication that makes something negative sound positive, or something vague sound convincing. In beauty product advertising, this strategy is often used to increase the appeal of the product while manipulating consumers' perception of its value and effectiveness (Dirgantini, 2023). Expressions like "up to 70% off" or "instant results in 7 days" seem informative, but they can implicitly frame reality in a biased way. The language of advertising is not neutral, but is loaded with ideology, economic interests, and power relations. This perspective aligns with the Critical Discourse Analysis approach developed by (Fairclough, 2018), which emphasizes that language is a social practice that shapes reality and influences how people understand the world. In the context of digital promotion, the use of discount claims not only reflects marketing strategies but also reproduces consumption ideologies that encourage impulsive buying behaviors and fear of missing out.

Various studies show that language in beauty advertising can shape social reality and audience perception (Hidayat et al., 2020). In addition, advertising also functions in reproducing certain ideologies, such as ideal beauty standards and consumptive lifestyles (Kaur et al., 2013; Saeed & Khan, 2022). In the context of social media, this power is further reinforced by the platform's fast, visual, and algorithm-based characteristics. However, most previous research has still focused on persuasion strategies in general or the construction of beauty. In fact, discounts are a major marketing strategy that heavily influences purchasing decisions and often involves implicit language manipulation. Research on *Doublespeak* in social media advertising is also still limited and tends not to integrate linguistic analysis with ideological dimensions in depth (Dirgantini, 2023).

This research departs from the gap between literal truth and pragmatic meaning in discount claims. While most discount claims are not semantically wrong, they can still direct consumer interpretations in favor of advertisers. Phrases such as "up to", "limited stock," and "flash sale" appear simultaneously with technical ingredient terminology that is literally accurate about the best conditions. Pragmatically, this implies that the condition has a broader meaning than it actually does. The gap between the meanings explicitly stated in a claim and the inferences that consumers are encouraged to form is the main linguistic issue this study focuses on. This focus distinguishes this study from studies that only discuss advertising language as a form of persuasion or manipulation in general. From the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis, language is seen as a social practice that is closely related to power and ideology. Advertising not only represents reality, but also shapes and reproduces certain social structures (Rohmah, 2020).

Based on this background, this study aims to (1) identify the linguistic forms of *Doublespeak* in discount advertisements for beauty products on social media, (2) analyze discursive strategies in framing discount claims, and (3) uncover its ideological function in reproducing consumerism and beauty standards. This research is expected to contribute to the development of critical linguistic studies and improve consumer literacy of digital advertising languages. The objectives of the research are described in three research questions that are the basis of the analysis and direct the preparation of the Methods, Results, and Discussion sections in this article. RQ1: What linguistic forms are used as *Doublespeak* in beauty discount ads on Instagram and TikTok? RQ2: Through discursive strategies, do these forms of *doublespeak* frame discount claims in the production process and advertising discourse? RQ3: What ideological function does *Doublespeak* perform in reproducing digital consumerism in beauty advertising?

Literature Review

Doublespeak refers to the use of language that obscures meaning through strategies such as euphemisms, ambiguities, hyperbole, and incomplete claims. In the context of advertising, this form is often used to create a positive impression without conveying information transparently. Recent studies show that Doublespeak in social media advertising often appears in the form of Weasel Words, Unfinished Claims, and up-to-claims that are implicitly misleading (Dirgantini, 2023). Within the framework of critical linguistics, this practice is understood not only as a language phenomenon but also as a form of power-related meaning manipulation. Language is used to control the audience's interpretation and limit the understanding of reality.

According to Susanti (2021), advertising language is a form of suggestive communication designed to influence consumer attitudes and behaviors. Strategies such as hyperbole, word choices that provoke consumer emotions, and framing have proven effective in increasing product appeal. In addition, the linguistic structure in advertising also plays a role in building product image and identity. Other research shows that beauty ads systematically construct beauty concepts through certain linguistic features, such as evaluative adjectives and instant results claims (Ardyanti et al., 2025). Thus, the language of advertising not only conveys information but also shapes the social reality that consumers internalize.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an approach that views language as a social practice related to power and ideology. In the three-dimensional model, analysis is carried out at the level of text, discursive practice, and social practice. This approach allows research to reveal the relationship between language, power and ideology in a discourse. In the context of language used in advertising, AWK has been widely used to examine how language influences consumers and reproduces specific ideologies such as beauty standards and gender identity (Salsabila, 2024). In addition, according to Hidayat et al. (2020), AWK can also reveal how advertising discourse shapes social reality and influences consumption behavior.

Beauty advertising not only promotes products but also builds and reproduces certain ideologies, such as ideal beauty standards and consumptive lifestyles. Research results (Saeed & Khan, 2022) suggest that the language and visuals in advertising play a role in shaping perceptions of beauty that are often reductive. In addition, advertising also serves as a tool to control audience perception through certain representations that are considered normal or ideal (Kaur et al., 2013). In the Indonesian context, beauty advertising can also contain elements of identity commodification, such as religiosity and femininity (Ardiya, 2025).

Although there has been a lot of research examining advertising language and beauty ideology, studies that specifically link Doublespeak to the practice of discounts on social media remain limited. Most research focuses on aspects of persuasion or visual representation without examining in depth how the language of discount promotions leads to ideological interpretations of economic reality. This research fills this gap by integrating the concepts of Doublespeak and Critical Discourse Analysis in the context of beauty product discount ads on Instagram and TikTok. This research framework examines Doublespeak as a discourse that takes place at three levels, namely linguistic (micro), discursive (meso), and social (macro), which together shape and reproduce meaning in digital advertising discourse.

METHOD

Research Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The qualitative approach was chosen because this study aims to understand the meaning, strategy, and ideological function of language in the

context of digital advertising discourse, not to measure frequency statistically alone. A descriptive design is used to describe the phenomenon of Doublespeak systematically based on the collected data. This research does not propose a hypothesis, but is exploratory and interpretive in revealing the discourse patterns hidden behind the text of beauty promotion advertisements on social media.

Data Sources

The data in this study are in the form of verbal text advertising promotions for discounts on beauty products obtained from two social media platforms, namely Instagram and TikTok. The selection of these two platforms is based on the consideration that Instagram and TikTok are the platforms with the highest penetration rate of beauty ads in Indonesia and have the characteristics of a rich and diverse promotional language (Dirgantini, 2023). Advertising data in the form of Indonesian beauty products were taken from the official account platforms of each product. A total of 70 ads met the inclusion criteria. Data inclusion criteria include: (1) ads that explicitly contain discount claims in verbal text, (2) ads published by verified Indonesian beauty brand accounts, (3) ads in the Indonesian language or containing a mix of Indonesian and English, and (4) ads published within the study time frame. Exclusion criteria include user-generated content without an official brand affiliation, ads that do not explicitly contain price claims or discounts, and ads that use languages other than Indonesian and English.

The corpus in this study is advertisements for discount claims from March 1, 2025 to March 1, 2026. It consists of 17 local Indonesian cosmetic brands covering the skincare and makeup segments. Ad post formats include static images and short videos—posts using Indonesian verbal text or a mixture of Indonesian and English. The coding unit in this study is any discount claim that appears in the verbal text of the Advertisement, both in the caption and accompanying the image. An ad may contain more than one discount claim code.

Data collection techniques

Data collection was carried out through documentation techniques by systematically searching on the official Instagram and TikTok platforms of each beauty product using keywords related to beauty product promotions and discounts, such as "beauty sale," "skincare discount," "cosmetic promo," and their variations. Data is collected through screenshots of ad posts that meet the inclusion criteria. Each piece of data is documented with contextual information, including the account name, publication date, number of interactions (likes and comments), and content format (static photos, carousels, or videos). Documentation is carried out consistently by one researcher to maintain the consistency of the data selection process. The collected data is then stored in a structured database and coded before entering the analysis stage.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was carried out qualitatively using a three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis developed by Fairclough (2018), which includes the dimensions of text, discursive practices, and social practices. The five doublespeak categories used to analyze, up-to claims, scarcity claims, urgency claims, vague superiority claims and pseudo scientific claims, were adapted from (Lutz, 1998) doublespeak taxonomy by mapping the general categories into discount-specific advertising languages, ads that combine more than one doublespeak category are coded under all applicable categories, resulting in the total number of categories exceeding the number of ads (table 1). These three dimensions are analyzed sequentially and complement each other to produce a thorough understanding of beauty product discount

practices. The analysis procedure is carried out through four stages: (1) thorough data reading and transcription, (2) open coding based on the appropriate doublespeak category, (3) systematic analysis of each dimension, and (4) interpretation of findings in an ideological and social framework. In this study, the researcher functions as the main instrument in identifying, coding, interpreting, and analyzing the data. To improve the consistency of the analysis, the research was supported by coding manuals, observation sheets, advertising screenshot archives, and data extraction matrices used to document advertising characteristics, doublespeak forms, and interpretation results. All of these instruments were compiled before the analysis process and used consistently in the research.

In this study, the researcher acts as the main instrument in data collection, coding, interpretation, and analysis. To improve the consistency of the analysis, the research was supported by coding manuals, observation sheets, advertising screenshot archives, and data extraction matrices used to document ad characteristics, doublespeak categories, communication contexts, and interpretation results.

Given that the research data is in the form of publicly available digital advertising content, validation is not carried out through member checking. On the contrary, the credibility of the findings is strengthened through peer debriefing, expert checking, audit trail, and negative case analysis so that the interpretation process can be scientifically accounted for. All data is obtained from the cosmetic brand's official accounts on Instagram and TikTok without involving the user's personal information. Advertising screenshots are used only for research and educational purposes while still listing the source and maintaining the original context of the material in accordance with the principles of fair use for academic purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Results

This study analyzed 70 beauty product discount promotion advertising data collected from Instagram and TikTok between March 1, 2025 and March 1, 2026. All data were coded based on the doublespeak category defined at the methodological stage. The coding results show that doublespeak users are the dominant strategy in the promotional language of beauty product discounts on Instagram and TikTok. The findings lead to three main ideological functions, namely (1) building a perception of pseudo-economic value, (2) accommodating time to drive faster purchasing decisions, and (3) utilizing symbolic or scientific authority to legitimize product claims. Furthermore, this subsection discusses RQ1 and RQ2 by presenting representative examples grouped by category. A summary of the findings is presented in Table 2, while a discussion of RQ3 is presented in the Discussion section.

In Table 1, a single ad can be coded into more than one doublespeak category, so the total reported by the platform reflects the incidence of the encoded claim, not the number of different ads; therefore, the number exceeds the corpus data of 70 ads. The percentage across this section is reported as a proportion of the 70 ads in the corpus and rounded to two decimal places.

Table 1. Distribution of Doublespeak Types in Data (Multiple-Response Coding: One Advertisement may Contain More than One Category)

Claim Types	Posted on Instagram	Tiktok	Quantity
Up to Claim	16	32	48
Scarcity Claim	14	2	16
Urgency Claim	21	22	43
Vague Superiority Claim	16	20	36

Pseudo-Scientific Claim	4	27	31
TOTAL ADS	33	37	70

Up-to-Claims: Construct the Maximum Discount Value

The first, most dominant category in this corpus of research is the use of *up to claims*, which is a discount that displays the maximum number without clearly including discount information. Of the total 70 advertising data, as many as 48 ads (68.57%) used this strategy, making Doublespeak the most often encountered in the discourse of promoting beauty product discounts on social media. The dominance of this strategy shows that data obfuscation is a key technique in constructing advertising promotional language.

Linguistic Analysis (Text Dimension)

Lexically, phrases *up to* and their equivalent in Indonesian, "until", function as a scalar modifier, which means a scalar marker that sets the maximum limit without revealing the distribution of values below it. In pragmatic linguistics, this structure results in an implicature scalar, that is, the audience naturally understands that the price cut-off value mentioned applies generally or is representative of most products, when in reality the literal claim only guarantees a maximum point that may only apply to one specific item of goods (Dirgantini, 2023; Lutz, 1998).

In data, the evaluative adjectives "Exclusive" and "Favorite" are used to construct positive framing before a discount claim is submitted. "Exclusive" creates the impression of rarity and privilege of access; only certain people can get the discount. Meanwhile, the word 'Favorite' utilizes personalization to build affective familiarity with consumers. The combination of the two creates a discourse context that is intended before a numerical claim is submitted, so consumers tend to accept the number "50%" as an overarching representation of the value of the transaction.

The Ad data shows the MS Glow Beauty brand, which uses the maximum discount claim as a linguistic strategy. The use of the word *up to* states the maximum limit of discounts that consumers may get, but does not explain in detail which products get the discount or what percentage of the discount is. Semantically, a high percentage number presents the impression of strong attraction even though it actually causes ambiguity. Consumers could potentially interpret that a large discount applies to all or most products, even though it literally refers only to the highest possible discount.

In addition, this claim is displayed along with other promotions such as "Buy 4 Get 6"; the initial price is crossed out, and then the new lower price is displayed. This layered numerical information reinforces the impression of big profits and creates a perception of savings that is more significant than the information that is explicitly described. According to Cialdini et al. (2007), the use of the phrase "up to" in this ad highlights the potential for maximum savings while maintaining flexible meanings, so the promotional message remains attractive without providing completely transparent details to consumers.

Discursive Practice Analysis

In the practice dimension of discourse production, the use of *up to claims* allows advertisers to achieve strategic goals simultaneously. First, it conveys the promise of large-scale savings to attract consumer attention and interest. Second, it avoids specific claims that can be legally verified or tested for the truth of the product's claims. Third, it remains within the limits of applicable advertising regulations, because the claim does not contain technically incorrect information (Hastak & Mazis, 2011)

Ideological Interpretation

From the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis (AWK), up to claims function as an ideological mechanism to construct the perception of pseudo-economic value. The promotional language in this category does not reflect the real price, but rather builds an image of value that is greater than can be guaranteed. Thus, consumers are encouraged to feel economic benefits, and that is why it is important to buy based on information that is pragmatically misleading but literally not wrong (Lutz, 1998; Schmitt et al., 2022).

Ideologically, this strategy reproduces the ideology of consumerism that places spending as a rational economic action. Smart consumers are the ones who take advantage of big discounts. However, the reality behind such claims often suggests that the maximum discount only applies to products with low popularity or excess stock. Thus, numerical Doublespeak serves not only as a linguistic strategy but also as a means of reproducing consumption culture that blurs the power relations between producers and consumers (Dijk, 2001; Fairclough, 2018).

Scarcity Claims

The second category identified in the advertising data corpus is Scarcity Claims, which establish product limitations or scarcity as a mechanism to encourage consumers to buy goods directly. Of the 70 data points, 16 ads (22.86%) used this strategy. Although the frequency is lower than other claims, scarcity claims have a significant psychological impact because they directly cause fear of missing out (FOMO) in consumers. This is in line with the results of Roberts et al. (2019). FOMO can be used in advertising because it can cause anxiety in consumers, encouraging them to buy products without rational thinking immediately.

Linguistic Analysis (Text Dimension)

Grammatically, the data of Wardah's 7 cosmetic brands opens with a negative imperative sentence, "Do not run out!", which has an explicit directive structure. Imperatives function as speech acts that directly direct the behavior of the audience, but in the context of advertising, these claims work subtly; consumers do not feel external pressure, but rather seem to make decisions based on personal considerations. This, according to Fairclough (2018), is a form of manipulation of agency; consumers are positioned as active actors even though the structure of advertising language directs their actions.

The use of the term FOMO is an example of the appropriation of digital subculture discourse into the language of commercial advertising. "FOMO is too much to miss" adopts the informal register of social media to create an effect of proximity and cultural relevance. This strategy shows how brands leverage the linguistic understanding of the digital generation to generate credibility and emotional resonance (Roberts et al., 2019).

The Advertisement of Fanbo Cosmetics products represents a *scarcity claims* strategy through the use of the phrase "crazy flash sale" accompanied by specific time restrictions (12.00–13.00, 16.30–17.30, and 19.00–20.00), which means that the promotion only lasts for a short duration and is not available throughout the day. Linguistically, this construction reinforces the dimension of time-based *scarcity*, as narrow temporal intervals limit buying opportunities. This encourages consumers to make decisions immediately before the opportunity ends.

In addition to the claim of "get freebies (min. 50k)", it indicates a conditional form of scarcity. Rewards are not given to all buyers but only to consumers who meet a certain purchase amount threshold. The pragmatic use of such structures implies that additional advantages are limited and selective. Through this paraphrase, it can be understood that advertising messages not only convey promotional information but also convey time limitations, limited profit distribution, and limited access to bonuses.

Discursive Practice Analysis

In the dimension of ad production, scarcity claims are designed by utilizing the psychological knowledge of loss aversion, which is the human tendency to avoid losses rather than gain equal gains. By displaying an "out of stock" narrative, the ad creator shifts the frame from "do I need this product?" to "will I regret not buying it now?" Accordingly, this cognitive shift significantly shortens the consumer's evaluation time. This is in accordance with research findings (Karimkhan & Chapa, 2021). Scarcity claims are a marketing strategy that emphasizes time constraints so that consumers do not have the opportunity to think more critically. This strategy is related to FOMO because consumers can be encouraged to make implied purchases when they feel they are getting lucky by getting the item that is only available on a limited basis.

The message of scarcity, in the dimension of consumption, is processed affectively more than cognitively. The phrases "Do not run out!" and "Flash sale (12.00-20.00)" trigger an emotional response in the form of anxiety and urgency, which then drives an implied purchase decision. The intertextuality between scarcity claims and discount claims ("Disc up to 575") creates a double effect of layered persuasion; two motivations drive consumers at once: the desire to get the best price and the fear of missing out on opportunities.

Ideological Interpretation

From AWK's perspective, scarcity claims reproduce the logic of scarcity economics in a paradoxical digital ecosystem. E-commerce and social media platforms are essentially spaces of high accessibility and almost limitless distribution. However, promotional language artificially creates conditions of scarcity within a space that is actually abundant. This is a form of ideological construction that manipulates the perception of consumer economic reality.

The strategy of scarcity reproduces an ideology that frames time as a commodity and consumers as competitors, fighting for limited resources. Consumers who buy late and run out of products are positioned as losers in the consumer competition. This ideology systematically normalizes impulse buying behavior and disqualifies rational reflection as a "too slow" response in the digital market ecosystem (Roberts et al., 2019; Schmitt et al., 2022).

Urgency Claims

The third category is urgency claims. These claims frame the limited time of a promotion as a determining factor in the purchase decision. There were 43 data points (61.43%) of urgency claim type ads. This category is the second most common doublespeak strategy in the corpus. Urgency claims use the temporal framing mechanism, which is language and visual elements that construct time as a shrinking and irrecoverable resource.

Linguistic Analysis (Text Dimension)

The most obvious element is the placement of the countdown timer "07:25:39", which serves as a concrete and dynamic time marker. In the context of digital discourse, the countdown timer is not just information, but a temporal framing tool that changes the consumer's time experience, providing information to consumers in a clear, real, measurable way of visual time. This creates a much stronger urgency effect than sentences like "the deal ends soon" because it presents visual evidence of the deadline.

The data combines urgency claims with pseudo-scientific claims in one text. "+21% Instant Glowing", "+17.50% Reduce Pores" and "93% Agree on Makeup Perfecting". These figures function as pseudo-quantitative claims that present numerical data that appear scientific but are not accompanied by measurement methodologies, research

samples, or independent testing institutions. The combination of pseudo-scientific numbers with a countdown timer creates a double persuasion effect. This product is "scientifically proven", and the opportunity to get it at a discounted price is coming to an end.

The digitization of calendar dates (12.12), combined with "disc up to 20%", promises double savings, creating a festive shopping context that normalizes massive consumption as a natural social tradition. Then, in the caption that accompanies the ad, the imperative sentence "it is time to wholesale" encourages consumers to make a purchase immediately if they want to get a low price. Furthermore, the imperative sentence "hurry up, check" further encourages consumers to act quickly if they want to get a low price. The combination of these three elements creates the impression that promotions are only valid for a short period of time, so consumers are encouraged to immediately make product purchase transactions if they want to get discounted prices. The caption that accompanies the ad on Instagram.

Discursive Practice Analysis

In the production dimension, urgency claims are made in response to the brand's need to maximize limited promotional time. This strategy utilizes psychological insights into decision fatigue, i.e., consumers who are given time limits tend to make decisions based on emotional heuristics rather than rational considerations. By presenting time as a determining factor, brands effectively eliminate the space to carefully consider consumers before purchasing a product (Karimkhan & Chapa, 2021). Urgency claims often appear alongside scarcity claims and up to claims in a single ad text, forming what is referred to as a multi-layered persuasion strategy. This combination shows that digital promotion discourse does not use only one mechanism, but operates through a linguistic ecosystem that reinforces each other. Each element adds a different layer of pressure. Time (urgency), availability (scarcity), and economy (up to claim): together, they create a strong incentive for consumers to buy the product.

Ideological Interpretation

Ideologically, urgency claims are a manifestation of the commodification of time in digital capitalism. Time is constructed not as it should be but as a limited and competitive economic resource. Consumers who do not act according to the predetermined time limit will lose the "opportunity" to get products at low prices (Tiemessen & Schrafenberger, 2023). This condition is called a deceptive countdown timer, a form of time limitation claim that makes it appear as if the promo has ended, but in reality the discount is still available. The practice is ethically problematic, as it can create false urgency, pressure consumers to buy products without thinking, and create the impression that limited product availability differs from the actual condition.

The use of countdown timers in a digital context creates the illusion of similarity of experiences. Every consumer sees the same clock ticking, but the reality is that the time limit of a promotion is often extended or repeated in the next cycle. Thus, the urgency that is made linguistically and visually does not always reflect the urgency of the original, making a form of temporal Doublespeak that moves in the grey area between information and manipulation.

Vague Superiority Claims:

The fourth category is vague superiority claims, which are superiority claims that cannot be objectively verified because they are conveyed through ambiguous, evaluative language or lack a clear comparative reference. As many as 36 ads (51.43%) used this strategy. Vague superiority claims work through lexical ambiguity, which is the choice of words that sound informative but cannot be semantically tested.

Linguistic Analysis (Text Dimension)

The Advertisement for lipstick products, using the phrase "Lip Shake & Glaze," shows a strategy of vague superiority claims through the choice of lexically ambiguous language. The claims of "glossy finish but durable" and "unique formulation" give the impression of product excellence, but are not accompanied by clear data, so that the meaning becomes relative and can give rise to many interpretations. In addition, the use of technical terms such as "Long Lasting Gloss Film Technology" gives a scientific impression but is not explained in detail, so it functions as persuasive pseudo-scientific language without concrete evidence. Words like "glossy" and "transferproof" are also forms of lexical ambiguity because they do not have a definite standard and can be interpreted differently by each consumer. Thus, these 5 data points build a superior image of the product through positive language but are not supported by accurate data, so claims of excellence cannot be verified.

The Advertisement is a skincare product from the Skintific brand, using a vague superiority-claim strategy on TikTok social media. The lexical ambiguity seen in the phrases "disguise black spots" and "brighten the skin" is a positive claim commonly used in beauty discourse. However, these claims are not accompanied by valid measuring tools, such as the level of effectiveness, duration of use, and certain skin conditions, so that their meaning becomes relative and can be interpreted differently by consumers. In addition, the use of terms such as "Symwhite 377", "Niacinamide" and "Tranexamix Acid" gives a scientific nuance. However, the mechanism of action is not explained in detail in the context of the product, thus serving as pseudo-scientific language that strengthens the power of persuasion. Additional claims such as "for all skin types" are also included as generalizations that are difficult to verify universally. Thus, this Advertisement utilizes a combination of evaluative lexicons and technical terms to provide a superior product image, even though the information provided remains vague and cannot be validated. This is in line with the concept of vague claims in advertising put forward by Tiemessen & Schrafenberger (2023), which states that advertisers often use non-specific language to make claims sound convincing without providing empirical evidence.

Discursive Practice Analysis

In the production dimension, vague superiority claims are produced as a strategy to build brand equity without having to prove the product's excellence empirically. Advertising law in Indonesia, on consumer protection, prohibits advertising that is clearly misleading. However, ambiguous claims, such as "bestsellers" with no clear periods and methodologies, are in grey areas that are difficult to process legally. Vagueness is a law-conscious discourse strategy. In the consumption dimension, consumers process vague superiority claims through default interpretation. When there is no clear information to evaluate critical safety claims, consumers tend to fill the meaning gap with assumptions favorable to the claim. According to McQuarrie & Phillips (2005), ambiguity provides space for consumers to construct meanings that suit their expectations and desires, which ultimately also benefits brand persuasion.

Ideological Interpretation

From AWK's point of view, vague superiority claims construct two main ideologies. First, the ideology of beauty standards that places "looking beautiful" as a universal aspiration of women that can be achieved through the consumption of products. Second, the ideology of consumptive nationalism positions the purchase of local products as a form of social responsibility and national identity. These two ideologies work together to give rise to layered aesthetic and emotional buyer motivation, as well as a sense of nationalism (Ardiya, 2025; Kaur et al., 2013; Saeed & Khan, 2022).

Critically, this strategy shows how "symbolic legitimacy" is created not through facts, but through the resonance of cultural values. Brands do not need to prove their products are the best empirically; they associate them with socially respected values. Pride, beauty, and loyalty of the nation are used to build a perception of superiority in the minds of consumers. According to Dijk (2001) and Fairclough (2018), this is a form of linguistic hegemony that moves beyond the critical consciousness of most consumers.

Pseudo-Scientific Claims: Pseudo-Scientific Legitimacy

The fifth category of claims based on Lutz's theory is pseudo-scientific claims, which use scientific terminology without accompanying empirical research methodologies validated by independent institutions. Of the 70 data points, 31 advertising data points (44.29%) used this strategy. Pseudo-scientific claims are constructed through scientific lexicalization, which are claims that borrow vocabulary from scientific discourse to give a scientific impression without any real substance (Fowler, 2023; Eriksson & Eriksson, 2021).

Linguistic Analysis (Text Dimension)

The Scarlett 7X ceramide Moisturizer ad in the data of 16 Instagram ads uses a pseudo-scientific claim strategy through the use of scientific terminology and quantification symbols that give the impression of objectivity and credibility. Screenshots of advertisements such as "7X Ceramide", "Triple Action barrier Repair", "Hecapeptide-8" and "4D Hyaluronic Acid" linguistically adopt a scientific lexicon commonly encountered in dermatology discourse. However, in the context of advertising, the terms are not accompanied by verifiable empirical explanations, so they serve more as theoretical tools than substantial scientific information.

Semantically, the use of technical terms and numbers such as "7X" and "4D" creates the illusion of precision and measurable effectiveness. This structure creates the impression that the product has gone through a complex scientific formulation, even though the operational meaning of the term is not clearly explained to the consumer. Thus, the language used is suggestive; that is, it implies scientific validation without providing evidence that can be accounted for. This strategy is in line with the character of pseudo-scientific advertising, where science is used to increase consumer confidence in the product.

Then, the claim written on the 16th data ad, "strong skin barrier with triple action barrier repair," combines technical terms with evaluative phrases. Pragmatically, this structure implies that the product can improve skin problems without being scientifically proven, even though there is no clinical data in the advertising text. The use of the term "repair" also presupposes that the product can improve skin conditions effectively. According to Munichor & Levontin (2024), overall, pseudo-scientific claims can be understood as indirectly presenting scientific data by using lexical choices, numerical symbols, and technical claim structures to increase the credibility of the product. Pseudo-scientific claims serve as a mechanism to build trust through implications, not through evidence.

Discursive Practice Analysis

In pseudo-scientific claims, a series of advertising words are produced through a process called scientification of advertising, which is the transformation of commercial discourse into discourse that uses the style, terminology, and authority of scientific discourse. This strategy is even more relevant in the post-truth digital era, where consumers are increasingly aware of the importance of evidence-based claims, but do not always have the capacity to evaluate the quality of products as claimed (Fowler, 2023; Eriksson & Eriksson, 2021).

For consumers, the use of scientific word choices is considered to provide a sense of product safety and effectiveness. Research results (Fowler, 2023; Ringrow, 2016) show that, among consumers, technical terms that are not fully understood are often considered more convincing because consumers assume that the complexity of the terminology indicates the scientific accuracy of the product formulation. The effect is even stronger in the context of visual platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, where messages are delivered in short durations and leave little room for critical thinking.

Ideological Interpretation

Basically, the ideology that the pseudo-scientific claim wants to convey is that beauty is related to scientific problems that require high-tech-based solutions. A glowing face will be achieved through the right chemicals. This ideology breaks the assumption that a healthy face is obtained with nutritious food, a good lifestyle, and stress management. Thus, pseudo-scientific claims not only sell products but also create a belief system in beauty products.

Summary of Data Analysis Findings

Based on the analysis of five doublespeak categories in 70 data points on beauty product discount ads on Instagram and TikTok, a comprehensive picture of the linguistic, discursive, and ideological patterns that shape digital promotion discourse is obtained. A single ad loads more than one doublespeak category at the same time, so the total frequency exceeds the overall amount of data. The following table summarises the distribution and main functions of each category:

Table 2. Summary of Data Analysis Findings

Categories Doublespeak	Amount of data	%	Main linguistic functions	Main ideological functions
Up to Claims	48	68,6%	Scalar modifier, numerical ambiguity	Perception of pseudo-economic value
Scarcity Claims	16	22,9%	Directive imperative, vernacular FOMO	Reproduction of artificial scarcity logic
Urgency Claims	43	61,4%	Temporal framing, visual countdown	Commodification of time, impulse buying
Vague Superiority Claims	36	51,4	Evaluative adjectives, social proof pseudonyms	Symbolic legitimacy, consumerist nationalism
Pseudo-Scientific Claims	31	44,3%	Scientific lexicalization, unfinished claim	Commodification of science, medicalization of beauty

The findings suggest that Doublespeak in beauty product discount advertising operates as an integrated discourse system, rather than as a single, stand-alone strategy. Each category has its own distinctive linguistic mechanisms. However, they all serve the same ideological function: reproducing digital consumerism by manipulating perceptions of value, time, availability, excellence, and scientific authority. These findings are in line with Fairclough (2018), who states that language in social practice is never neutral, but is always charged with interests and operates within a wider network of power relations.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that Doublespeak functions as a systematic linguistic strategy in beauty product discount advertisements on Instagram and TikTok. Rather than appearing as isolated persuasive expressions, Doublespeak operates through interconnected linguistic forms that shape how consumers interpret discount value,

product superiority, urgency, and scientific credibility. The identification of five categories—up-to claims, scarcity claims, urgency claims, vague superiority claims, and pseudo-scientific claims—extends previous discussions of Doublespeak by showing how this phenomenon operates within contemporary digital advertising environments. While earlier studies have examined Doublespeak mainly as a general form of misleading or ambiguous communication (Lutz, 1998), the present study demonstrates that digital beauty advertising adapts Doublespeak into platform-specific promotional practices where short texts, visual emphasis, numerical claims, and algorithm-driven exposure work together to influence interpretation.

The dominance of up-to claims in this study (48 occurrences or 68.6% of advertisements) indicates that numerical ambiguity represents one of the strongest mechanisms in beauty discount discourse. Phrases such as “up to 70% off” create an impression of substantial economic benefit while avoiding explicit information regarding which products receive the maximum discount or how the discount distribution is structured. This finding supports previous research showing that advertisers frequently use technically accurate but pragmatically misleading claims to create favorable consumer interpretations (Hastak & Mazis, 2011). Similar to Dirgantini’s (2023) findings on Shiseido advertisements, the present study confirms that ambiguous numerical expressions allow advertisers to maximize persuasive effects while maintaining semantic flexibility. However, this research extends previous findings by demonstrating that discount-based Doublespeak does not only construct product attractiveness but also creates a broader ideology of economic rationality, where purchasing discounted products is represented as a smart and beneficial consumer decision.

From the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis, the prevalence of up-to claims illustrates how language participates in constructing economic reality. Fairclough (2018) argues that discourse is not merely a reflection of social practices but actively contributes to their reproduction. In this context, discount language transforms consumption into a rationalized activity by presenting purchasing behavior as an act of financial intelligence. Consumers are positioned as economically capable individuals who recognize opportunities and maximize savings. Nevertheless, the discourse conceals the uncertainty behind the claim because the maximum discount value may apply only to selected products. Therefore, Doublespeak operates by maintaining a tension between literal truth and pragmatic implication: the statement may not be factually false, but it encourages interpretations beyond what the advertisement explicitly guarantees.

The findings regarding scarcity and urgency claims further demonstrate how digital advertising constructs psychological pressure through linguistic choices. Scarcity claims appeared in 22.9% of advertisements, while urgency claims appeared in 61.4% of advertisements, indicating that temporal limitation was a major strategy in beauty product promotion. Expressions such as “limited stock,” “flash sale,” “don’t miss it,” and countdown timers transform time into a commercial resource that consumers must manage immediately. These findings are consistent with previous studies on Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), which show that perceived scarcity and limited opportunities can encourage consumers to make faster purchasing decisions (Roberts et al., 2019; Karimkhan & Chapa, 2021).

However, this study contributes a critical perspective by showing that urgency discourse is not only a marketing technique but also an ideological construction of time. Through advertising language, time is represented as continuously decreasing and opportunities are framed as temporary privileges. This supports Tiemessen and Schrafenberger’s (2023) argument that limited-time discount strategies can create artificial urgency that influences consumer experiences. Within digital advertising

ecosystems, where products are theoretically available continuously, the construction of scarcity represents a discursive practice that creates competition among consumers. Those who purchase immediately are positioned as successful consumers, while those who delay are implicitly represented as losing opportunities.

The analysis of vague superiority claims and pseudo-scientific claims reveals another important dimension of Doublespeak: the construction of symbolic legitimacy. The findings show that beauty advertisements frequently use evaluative expressions such as “premium,” “best seller,” “unique formulation,” and technical terms related to ingredients and dermatological concepts. These expressions provide an impression of authority even when they are not supported by measurable evidence. This finding confirms previous studies demonstrating that beauty advertising relies heavily on linguistic and symbolic strategies to construct idealized beauty standards (Kaur et al., 2013; Saeed & Khan, 2022). Furthermore, the findings support research on the scientification of cosmetic advertising, which shows that scientific terminology is often incorporated into commercial discourse to increase consumer trust (Kenalemang-Palm & Eriksson, 2021).

Nevertheless, the present study extends this perspective by connecting scientific language with the broader concept of Doublespeak. Scientific terminology in these advertisements does not necessarily provide consumers with scientific knowledge; instead, it functions rhetorically by transferring the authority associated with science into commercial contexts. Terms such as “7X ceramide,” “4D hyaluronic acid,” or “clinical-based formula” create an impression of precision and effectiveness, even when advertisements do not explain the scientific basis, testing procedures, or measurement standards behind these claims. As a result, scientific discourse becomes commodified and transformed into a persuasive resource.

The integrated findings indicate that Doublespeak in beauty discount advertisements functions as a multi-layered discourse system rather than a single linguistic strategy. Advertisements frequently combine multiple forms of Doublespeak, such as combining large discount numbers with countdown timers, scarcity messages, and scientific terminology. This combination creates a powerful persuasive environment where economic value, limited opportunity, product superiority, and scientific credibility reinforce one another. Such findings extend Fairclough’s (2018) concept of discourse as social practice by showing how digital advertising language operates as a mechanism for reproducing consumer culture.

Importantly, this study does not claim that consumers are always deceived by such advertisements. Instead, the findings demonstrate the potential interpretive effects embedded within advertising texts. Since this research analyzes discourse rather than audience behavior, it identifies how advertisements are structured to encourage particular meanings but does not measure whether consumers actually accept or act upon those meanings. Future research involving consumer interviews, experiments, or digital ethnography would be valuable to examine how audiences interpret and respond to Doublespeak strategies in real purchasing situations. This study contributes to critical advertising studies by demonstrating that discount language in digital beauty advertising is not merely promotional communication but a form of ideological discourse. Through ambiguous claims, emotional triggers, and symbolic authority, Doublespeak transforms ordinary commercial messages into narratives about value, urgency, beauty, and consumer identity. Understanding these mechanisms is therefore important for strengthening digital consumer literacy and encouraging more transparent communication practices in online marketplaces.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Doublespeak represents a central linguistic mechanism in beauty product discount advertisements on Instagram and TikTok. Through the analysis of 70 advertisements, five major forms of Doublespeak were identified: up-to claims, scarcity claims, urgency claims, vague superiority claims, and pseudo-scientific claims. These strategies operate through different linguistic mechanisms but share similar ideological functions, including constructing pseudo-economic value, creating artificial urgency, strengthening perceptions of product superiority, and borrowing authority from scientific discourse. The findings demonstrate that discount advertising language is not simply designed to provide information about products but also functions as a discourse practice that shapes how consumers understand value, opportunity, and beauty. In this sense, Doublespeak represents a form of persuasive communication that operates between factual accuracy and interpretive manipulation, where claims may remain literally acceptable while encouraging meanings that exceed the available evidence.

The study contributes to Critical Discourse Analysis by extending the application of Doublespeak from general persuasive communication into the specific context of digital beauty advertising. The integration of Lutz's concept of Doublespeak with Fairclough's three-dimensional model reveals how linguistic choices at the textual level connect with advertising production practices and broader consumer ideologies. The findings highlight the importance of critical digital literacy because consumers increasingly encounter promotional discourse designed through ambiguity, emotional appeal, and symbolic authority. However, the study is limited to Indonesian beauty advertisements on Instagram and TikTok within a specific period and focuses on advertising texts rather than consumer interpretation or purchasing behavior. Therefore, future research should investigate audience responses, compare Doublespeak practices across industries and cultures, and explore how advertising regulations address promotional claims that are technically accurate but pragmatically misleading.

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DECLARATION OF USING AI TOOLS

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used during the preparation of this manuscript to assist with language editing, translation support, and improving the clarity and organization of academic writing. All analyses, interpretations, arguments, and conclusions were developed and verified by the author. The author takes full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and ethical integrity of the final manuscript.

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