

THE PRAGMATICS OF MANIPULATIVE INFLUENCE IN CHINESE ADVERTISING DISCOURSE

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Summary

This article examines the pragmatic devices of manipulative influence in Chinese advertising discourse based on authentic advertising slogans and promotional texts. Advertising is considered as a form of persuasive communication in which linguistic choices are strategically employed to shape consumer perception and stimulate purchasing behavior. Particular attention is paid to the interaction between rhetorical devices, pragmatic strategies, and culturally conditioned implicit meanings. The study identifies the most recurrent manipulative devices in Chinese advertising, including techniques aimed at creating a sense of necessity and urgency, parallel constructions, repetition, quotation, exaggeration, inversion, evaluative vocabulary, superlative adjectives, and implicit meaning. The findings demonstrate that the construction of urgency and necessity is the most frequently used strategy, reflecting the competitive nature of China's rapidly developing digital advertising environment. The analysis shows that rhetorical devices such as parallelism and repetition enhance memorability and rhythmic organization, while quotation and implicit meaning establish cultural resonance through references to classical poetry, idioms, and shared values. Exaggeration and evaluative lexis intensify the perceived value of products, whereas inversion foregrounds key information and increases expressive impact. Overall, the study confirms that manipulative influence in Chinese advertising is achieved not through isolated linguistic means but through their systematic interaction within a culturally specific pragmatic framework. The results contribute to a deeper understanding of advertising discourse from a pragmatic perspective and may be relevant for further research in media linguistics, pragmatics, and intercultural communication.

Key words: Chinese language, advertising discourse, means of manipulation, pragmatic strategies, rhetorical devices, persuasive communication.

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1. Introduction

In contemporary society, advertising is ubiquitous and continuously present in consumers' everyday lives, functioning not merely as a channel of information transmission but as a powerful instrument of persuasive and manipulative influence. Through carefully constructed

linguistic strategies, advertising discourse shapes consumer attitudes, desires, and patterns of behavior, often operating beyond the level of explicit rational argumentation. Within this context, Chinese advertising discourse attracts particular scholarly attention due to its distinct cultural and linguistic characteristics. As noted by Koshovyi M. V., Chinese advertising is marked by an appeal to collective values, social approval, the use of traditional symbolism, and the aesthetics of harmony, all of which enhance the persuasive and manipulative potential of advertising messages (Koshovyi, 2023). Scholars Gao Yuan (高渊) and Wu Ruoyu (吴若愚) further emphasize that advertisers seek to influence consumers' purchasing decisions by deliberately modifying linguistic forms in advertising utterances, thereby increasing their attractiveness and improving the effectiveness of product-related information delivery (Gao, Wu, 2024).

In recent years, advertising in China has demonstrated a pronounced tendency toward increased effectiveness alongside an active transition into the digital environment. As noted by Jiang Zhibin (姜智彬), the overall effectiveness of advertising activities in China has undergone several stages of development, progressing from relatively low to high efficiency (Jiang, 2025). The researcher further emphasizes that internet-based media exhibit significantly higher performance compared to traditional advertising channels, indicating the growing importance of online advertising in China's contemporary information landscape. This digital shift has intensified competition for audience attention and has stimulated the widespread use of sophisticated linguistic and pragmatic strategies aimed at influencing consumer behavior.

Chinese advertising discourse is therefore of particular interest due to the interaction between rapid digitalization and the specific linguistic and cultural characteristics of the Chinese communicative tradition. The pragmatic effectiveness of Chinese advertisements is largely grounded in indirectness, implicit meaning, culturally shared knowledge, and strategic appeals to collective values such as harmony, family, success, and social belonging. According to the observation of Demchuk K. Yu., the manipulative potential of advertising text is largely realized through the selection of linguistic means (Demchuk, 2016). Nevertheless, rather than relying on overt persuasion, Chinese advertising frequently employs subtle manipulative strategies that guide the recipient's interpretation and decision-making processes in an unobtrusive manner.

Despite the growing body of research on advertising discourse, the pragmatic mechanisms of manipulative influence in Chinese advertising remain insufficiently systematized. Previous studies tend to address either general issues of linguistic manipulation or descriptive features of Chinese advertising language, while the complex interaction of pragmatic devices – such as the creation of urgency and necessity, repetition, parallelism, quotation, exaggeration, inversion, evaluative lexis, and implicit meaning – has not yet received comprehensive and integrated analysis.

The relevance of the present study is thus determined by the need to examine Chinese advertising discourse as a pragmatic phenomenon in which linguistic form is subordinated to communicative intention and perlocutionary effect, particularly within the rapidly expanding digital advertising environment. The aim of this article is to identify and analyze the pragmatic devices and strategies of manipulative influence employed in Chinese advertising discourse, as well as to determine their role in shaping consumer perception and behavior.

2. Literature Review

The review of existing scholarship indicates that although the phenomenon of linguistic manipulation has been examined by scholars such as Biriukova V.O., Drobna M.S., Hubicheva Ye.V., Hrebenkova M. S., Troian M. Yu., and Khyzhniak M. O., and the

specific features of Chinese advertising have been addressed by Gao Yuan (高渊), Wu Ruoyu (吴若愚), Wan Kaiyan (万凯艳), Fang Meichen (方美晨), Liu Dan (刘丹), Feng Juanjuan (冯娟娟) among others, the complex interaction of various linguistic devices of manipulation within Chinese-language advertising discourse remains insufficiently explored. In particular, previous studies tend to focus on individual aspects of manipulation or descriptive characteristics of advertising language, while an integrated pragmatic analysis of manipulative strategies in Chinese advertising has yet to be fully developed.

3. Presentation of the Main Research Material and Obtained Results

Analyzing the linguistic material, we identified recurrent instances of manipulative devices in Chinese advertising, including both pragmatic and (to a lesser extent) formal linguistic means. In advertising discourse, rhetoric functions as a set of specialized linguistic devices that optimize textual structure and enhance communicative effectiveness. As noted by Wan Kaiyan (万凯艳), the appropriate use of rhetorical devices enables a more precise and vivid presentation of product characteristics, effectively attracts consumers' attention, and evokes an emotional response (Wan, 2025). According to Horodetska I. V., the most widespread manipulative means in advertising include syntactic simplicity, specialized and expressive vocabulary, as well as stylistic devices such as repetition, metaphor, and comparison, the use of which contributes to the formation of a positive product image and ensures an effective impact on consumer consciousness (Horodetska, 2013). In Chinese advertising, these rhetorical and pragmatic strategies comprise the use of superlative adjectives, parallel constructions, quotation, exaggeration, repetition, inversion, evaluative vocabulary, techniques aimed at creating a sense of necessity and urgency, as well as implicit meaning. The following section examines these devices in greater detail.

One of the most frequent manipulative strategies is the **creation of a sense of necessity and urgency**, which accounts for 20.3% of the collected examples. This technique is designed to prompt consumers to take immediate action by emphasizing the importance, relevance, or economic advantage of purchasing a particular product or service. In Chinese advertising discourse, this effect is achieved through the use of lexemes denoting urgency (e.g. 去抢购 “rush to buy”), explicit temporal limitations (如: 即日起至... “from today until...”), references to exceptional benefits (如: 5折起 “50% off and up”), or direct formulations of necessity (如: 必备 “a must-have”). The following examples illustrate this strategy:

- Product advertising: 过节必备、双旦指南 (“A must-have for the holidays: a guide for the two festivals”). In this example, the expression 必备 (“a must-have”) emphasizes that the product is indispensable during the holiday period.

- Product advertising: 节日爆品5折起 (“Holiday bestsellers starting from 50% off”). Here, 爆品 (“best-selling hit”) highlights the popularity and perceived necessity of the product, while 5折起 (“starting from 50% off”) stimulates rapid purchasing by foregrounding financial benefit.

- Product advertising: 每满300减40。去抢购! (“Spend 300 yuan and save 40. Rush to buy!”). The imperative 去抢购 (“rush to buy”) creates a strong sense of urgency and fear of missing out, while 每满300减40 (“save 40 for every 300 spent”) underscores economic advantage, motivating immediate action.

- Payment system advertising: 即日起至2025年3月31号 银联手机Pay乘地铁 立享5折 (“From now until March 31, 2025, pay with UnionPay Mobile Pay on the metro and instantly enjoy 50% off”). In this example, the temporal restriction establishes urgency, whereas 立享 (“instantly enjoy”) accentuates the immediacy of the benefit.

Holiday advertising: 大牌钜惠最后1天 (“Massive discounts on major brands – last day”). This slogan exemplifies the classic “last chance” strategy, which generates a sense of urgent necessity.

– Holiday promotion: 红包翻翻乐 最高可翻666元 (“Flip the red envelope and win up to 666 yuan”). The phrase 最高可翻666元 (“win up to 666 yuan”) appeals to the desire for maximum gain, while 翻翻乐 (“flip and play”) functions as an interactive call to action, increasing user engagement.

Parallelism is another device that is widely employed in advertising discourse. It accounts for 17.% of the total number of collected examples. Parallelism is a rhetorical technique that enhances the dynamism of an utterance. In Chinese advertising, it is frequently used to organize three or more words or phrases with similar structure and semantic content. This strategy facilitates the perception of advertising slogans, enables a concise and accurate transmission of the message, and increases the expressiveness of the text. The following examples illustrate this device:

– Website advertising: 58 是开始, 58 是家, 58 是惊喜, 58 是幸福 (“58 is a beginning, 58 is home, 58 is surprise, 58 is happiness.”) This example consists of four short parallel clauses. Each clause gradually unfolds the meaning of the message by highlighting different advantages of the website. The rhythmic and harmonious structure creates a sense of order and appeals to audiences who value family life and emotional stability.

– Watch advertising: 精准是它的灵魂, 耐用是它的品质, 尊贵是它的象征 (“Precision is its soul, durability is its quality, and prestige is its symbol.”) In this slogan, parallelism emphasizes the product’s key attributes (precision, durability, and prestige) thereby drawing attention to its high quality and unique value.

Parallelism is characterized by balanced and symmetrical structures, a harmonious and aesthetically pleasing rhythm, semantically interconnected components, grammatical alignment, and tonal contrast. When used appropriately in advertising discourse, this device can significantly enhance persuasive effectiveness. Consider the following examples:

– Peanut oil advertising: 正宗花生油, 地道花生香 (“Authentic peanut oil, genuine peanut aroma.”) This slogan consists of two short clauses with identical structure. The rhythmic parallelism makes the slogan easy to remember and reinforces product authenticity.

– Library advertising: 学海凭鱼跃, 书林任鸟翔 (“In the sea of knowledge, fish leap freely; in the forest of books, birds soar at will.”) The two parallel segments – “the sea of knowledge” and “the forest of books” – are structurally and tonally balanced, creating a vivid and memorable metaphor.

– Pharmacy advertising: 但愿世间人无病, 何愁架上药生尘 (“If only there were no illness in the world, why would medicines gather dust on the shelves?”) Here, the two parts of the sentence form a contrast between the wish for a world without disease and its implied consequence, expressed through the metaphor of unused medicine, thereby enhancing the emotional and rhetorical impact of the slogan.

Another relatively widespread device in advertising discourse is repetition, which accounts for 14% of the total number of analyzed examples. One of the most common forms is anaphoric (or chain) repetition, a technique that involves repeating a word or phrase at the end of one sentence and at the beginning of the subsequent one. In advertising slogans, chain repetition highlights a core characteristic of the product and enhances the memorability of the message. The following examples illustrate this device:

– Home appliance advertising: 好空调, 格力造, 造精品, 格力心 (“Good air conditioners are made by Gree; Gree is committed to producing premium-quality products.”). In this

example, the word 格力 (Gree) is repeated, linking the end of one clause with the beginning of the next. This repetition emphasizes the brand's focus on quality and manufacturing expertise.

– Electrical appliance advertising: 骆驼进万家, 万家欢乐多 (“Camel enters ten thousand households; ten thousand households enjoy happiness.”) Here, the phrase 万家 (“ten thousand households”) appears at the end of the first clause and is repeated at the beginning of the second, thereby conveying the product's wide popularity and social acceptance. In this repetitive technique commonly found in advertising slogans, the final word of the first sentence often becomes the initial word of the next one, ensuring textual cohesion and a smooth rhythmic flow.

A separate subgroup is formed by reverse repetition, a rhetorical device based on the repetition of words or structures in both direct and reverse order, creating a closed linguistic loop. This device is realized through the use of identical or similar linguistic elements at the beginning and the end of an utterance, which lends the text rhythm, fluency, and a sense of completeness. As a result, advertising messages become more melodic, easier to remember, and capable of forming positive associations with the product. In Chinese, this technique is particularly popular due to the flexibility of syntactic structures and the polysemy of Chinese characters. The following examples demonstrate this pattern:

– Household appliance advertising: 吸尘器, 静静地吸, 吸得静静 (“A vacuum cleaner that vacuums quietly, and vacuums so that it remains quiet.”) In this slogan, the repetition of the verb 吸 (“to vacuum”) and the adverb 静静 (“quietly”) creates a distinct rhythmic structure and reinforces the key product feature – low noise.

– Pharmaceutical advertising: 痛则不通, 通则不痛, 请用追风透骨丸 (“Where there is pain, there is blockage; where there is no blockage, there is no pain. Use Zhweifeng Tougu pills.”) In this example, repetition combined with structural inversion produces logical completeness and a form of medical persuasiveness, enhancing the credibility of the advertised remedy.

A distinct group within Chinese advertising discourse is formed by quotations. An analysis of the collected linguistic material reveals that the use of quotation accounts for 13.8% of the total number of examples. Quotation represents a highly sophisticated rhetorical device in advertising, as it integrates idiomatic expressions, colloquial phrases, or poetic lines, drawing on the implicit aesthetic appeal of classical poetry and set expressions to evoke associations with cultural heritage and shared collective memory. The following examples illustrate this device:

– Residential complex advertising: 山外青山楼外楼 (“Beyond the mountains, more green hills; beyond the buildings, more buildings.”) This slogan draws on a line from the well-known poem 《题临安邸》. The quotation effectively conveys the scenic attractiveness of the residential area and creates an image of a desirable and aesthetically pleasing living environment.

– Wine advertising: 何以解忧, 唯有杜康 (“What can dispel sorrow? Only Dukang.”) This quotation from the poetry of Cao Cao is seamlessly integrated with the advertised product – Dukang wine (杜康酒). It emphasizes the wine's symbolic ability to “soothe the soul,” rendering the slogan both poetic and memorable.

– Refrigerator advertising: 众里寻他千百度, 想要几度就几度 (“I searched for it among thousands; whatever temperature you want, that is the temperature you get.”) In this example, a famous line from the poetry of Xin Qiji is skillfully quoted, while the added continuation provides practical information about precise temperature control, thus aligning poetic imagery with consumer needs.

– Automobile advertising: 车到山前必有路，有路必有丰田车 (“Where there is a road, there is a way; and where there is a way, there is a Toyota.”) This slogan draws on the Chinese proverb 车到山前必有路，船到桥头自然直 (“When a car reaches the mountain, a road will appear; when a boat reaches the bridge, it will straighten itself”), which conveys the idea that solutions will inevitably be found. By adapting this proverb, the advertisement highlights the intrinsic connection between automobiles and roads while simultaneously emphasizing the brand’s confidence in its product and its ability to accompany consumers wherever they choose to go.

Another identified device is exaggeration, which accounts for 10.5% of the total number of analyzed examples. In Chinese advertising, exaggeration is employed to intensify the characteristics of people, objects, or phenomena through imagination and emotional amplification. When used in a balanced manner, exaggeration can elicit trust and an emotional response from the audience, thereby enhancing advertising effectiveness. The following examples illustrate this device:

– Alcohol advertising: 凡有人之处必有华人，凡有华人之处必有泸州老窖。泸州老窖，中华荣耀。 (“Where there are people, there are Chinese; where there are Chinese, there is Luzhou Laojiao. Luzhou Laojiao, the pride of China.”) In this example, exaggeration emphasizes the brand’s significance by associating it with national pride. Although the claim is factually overstated, it creates positive associations and enhances the prestige of the product.

– Alcohol advertising: 常饮银杏酒，活到九十九 (“Drink ginkgo wine regularly and live to ninety-nine.”) Here, the product’s influence on longevity is clearly exaggerated, appealing to consumers’ aspirations for health and long life.

– Jewelry advertising: 钻石恒久远，一颗永流传 (“A diamond is forever; it is passed down through generations.”) Although a diamond cannot be literally eternal, exaggeration serves to highlight the perceived durability and high quality of the product.

The analyzed material also contains instances of inversion, which likewise account for 10.3% of the total examples. In Chinese advertising discourse, inversion is used to alter the standard word order in order to foreground a key element of the utterance. By deliberately violating the conventional sentence structure and placing the most salient component at the beginning, this technique immediately attracts the recipient’s attention, renders the slogan more dynamic and rhythmic, and produces a striking stylistic effect. In advertising discourse, inversion helps emphasize the product’s primary advantage, intensifies emotional and associative impact, and facilitates memorability. The following examples demonstrate this strategy:

– Air conditioner advertising: 好空调，格力造 (“Good air conditioners are made by Gree.”) In this slogan, the phrase 好空调 (“good air conditioners”) is placed at the beginning to foreground product quality before introducing the manufacturer.

– Food delivery service advertising: 叫外卖，上饿了么 (“If you want food delivery, open Ele.me.”) The natural word order would be “Open Ele.me to order food delivery.” By foregrounding the purpose of the action, ordering food delivery, the slogan first addresses the consumer’s immediate need and only then offers the solution, thereby enhancing pragmatic effectiveness.

– Noodle advertising: 好面，汤决定 (“Good noodles are determined by the broth.”) This is a classic example of inversion. The expected structure would be “The broth determines good noodles.” By foregrounding “good noodles,” the slogan captures attention before revealing the decisive factor – the broth.

The analyzed material also reveals instances of evaluative vocabulary, which constitute 7.2% of the collected advertising slogans. In Chinese advertising, evaluative lexis is used to

express subjective judgments about a product, highlight its advantages, and construct a desirable image in the consumer's mind. This device enables advertisers to shape positive attitudes toward a product or brand through adjectives, adverbs, and other evaluative markers. Consider the following examples:

– Soy sauce advertising: 90%的复购率、数万条五星好评 – 李锦记酱油用实力定义畅销! (“A 90% repurchase rate and tens of thousands of five-star reviews – Lee Kum Kee soy sauce defines best-selling quality through strength.”) In this example, 好评 (“positive reviews”) and 畅销 (“best-selling”) function as explicit evaluative markers.

– Service advertising: 服务周到、效率超高、清冽推荐 (“Attentive service, extremely high efficiency, highly recommended.”) This slogan employs evaluative vocabulary such as 周到 (“attentive”), 超高 (“extremely high”), and 强烈推荐 (“strongly recommended”).

Although numerically less frequent, the use of superlative adjectives, accounting for 6.9% of the analyzed material, exerts a noticeable pragmatic impact. Superlative forms such as 最佳 (“the best”) and 最贴心 (“the most considerate”) reinforce a positive impression of the product, construct an image of unquestionable superiority over competitors, and foster consumers' feelings of confidence and trust.

Finally, it should be noted that implicit meaning in Chinese advertising functions as an indirect means of conveying information and generating emotional influence on the audience. Its essence lies in the presence of hidden or ambiguous meanings that are not immediately explicit but are inferred through context, imagery, metaphors, euphemisms, or cultural allusions, some of which have been discussed above. Through such implicit strategies, advertisers appeal to consumers' desires, values, and emotions, shaping a favorable perception of the product or brand without providing a direct description of its characteristics. Consequently, implicit meaning in Chinese advertising is organically integrated with other pragmatic devices.

4. Conclusions

This study has analyzed the pragmatic devices of manipulative influence in Chinese advertising discourse based on authentic advertising material. The results demonstrate that Chinese advertising employs a wide range of rhetorical and pragmatic strategies aimed at shaping consumer perception and stimulating purchasing behavior. The most frequently used devices include techniques creating a sense of necessity and urgency, parallelism, repetition, quotation, exaggeration, inversion, evaluative vocabulary, superlative adjectives, and implicit meaning. Among these, the strategy of constructing urgency and necessity proves to be the most dominant, reflecting the influence of the rapidly developing digital advertising environment in China. The findings confirm that manipulative influence in Chinese advertising is achieved through the systematic interaction of linguistic form, rhetorical devices, and culturally conditioned implicit meanings. Appeals to collective values, harmony, and social approval enhance emotional engagement and persuasive effectiveness. Overall, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of pragmatic manipulation in Chinese advertising discourse and may serve as a basis for further research in pragmatics and media linguistics.

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