Billboard Advertisements: A Critical Discourse Analysis on Corporate Social Responsibilities

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Abstract

Billboard Advertisements are one of the easiest ways for the MNCs (Multinational Companies), local companies, and telecommunication offices to reach the common people. In Bangladesh, billboard is something we see every day while doing our daily works. These billboard advertisements can be considered as corporate social responsibility (CSR). CSR is not just to finance someone for branding purpose; it reflects the culture as well. Many national and MNCs are committed to the environment, and some other activities are there as CSR. Among them, uses of language must be considered. Bengali and English both of the languages are used in the advertisements but the stories of the advertisements also matter. This research is a critical discourse analysis of billboard advertisements. This paper critically analyzes some of the billboard advertisements, and finds out the influence of these advertisements on common people, and hence, the advertisements fulfill the CSR. In terms of using the languages, it is found that Bengali and English are being used arbitrarily in the advertisements which are harmful for the dignity of Bengali language. There are also some scenarios found in the background stories of these advertisements. There are few research articles on billboard advertisements based on the billboard background in Bangladesh. The researcher is needed to depend on the theories of Norman Fairclough, Michel Foucault, and Ferdinand De Saussure.

Keywords: Advertisements; Corporate Social Responsibility; Language; Power

1. Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR), the term itself defines what a corporate world should do for the society. It suggests fulfilling the responsibility that corporate world has taken for the betterment of the society. However, there are some debates on this issue. According to Kotler and Lee (2005), “CSR is a commitment to improve community well-being through discretionary business practices and contributions of corporate resources.” As “discretionary business,” they defined a voluntary commitment of business corporate toward the society. Contrastingly, Friedman (1970) argued that people only have responsibility, not the corporate offices. Corporate office is an “artificial person,” thus this office only has “artificial responsibilities.” A corporation will focus only on profit, nothing else. The modern business studies do believe in CSR. Visser et al. (2007) suggested that their definition of CSR has “four different, but interrelated” social responsibilities which Phillip Kotler and Lee (2005) divided into six corporate social initiatives (CSI): Cause promotions, cause-related marketing, corporate social marketing, corporate philanthropy, corporate volunteering, and socially responsible business practices (p. 22-48). Billboard advertisement is an outdoor marketing process. It is also a means of communication. The purpose of this paper is to show the relation between billboard advertisement and CSR.

Billboard advertisement is one of the marketing strategies of public and private institutions. This strategy is used mostly by the MNCs, local companies, and even by the educational institutions. The design of these advertisements has a significant influence on people’s mind. They not only are
influenced by the company profile, but language and context have a great influence also. The business companies think that if their marketing strategy is successful, their sale will go up, and their profit will be high. However, these promoters of their brands have to keep in mind that they not only promote their products but also represent the society. For instance, “Lux-Channel I Super Star” has influenced the society immensely, specially, the young girls. On the other side, “Close-Up Sherakontho” (সেরাকন্ঠ) influenced all the new or upcoming singers in Bangladesh. These are the evidences of cultural influence.

Fair and Lovely Foundation is literally promoting the poor women to be educated and helps them start their own working life. On the other side, “fair and lovely” billboard advertisements are promoting the idea that white complexion means beautiful not only for women but also for men. This can be considered as gender hegemony inflicted in the society.

After the Kyoto protocol and the Cancun conference on environment and ecology, environment has given utmost importance. Every MNCs, national industries, banking sectors, and other corporate offices are working together to save the environment. Some of the billboard advertisements have shown this eco-critical interest.

Billboard advertisements must contain two major elements: Language and context. Bengali and English, both languages are used to express the thoughts of the company. The context is important to deliver the messages with colorful pictures and social ideologies. In this paper, the researcher will critically analyze some of the billboard advertisements and relate the advertisements with the ideas of CSR. During this investigation, it will also be proved that billboard advertisements or any other forms of advertisements are related to the CSI, and thus, related to CSR.

This paper is appropriate for critical discourse analysis (CDA) because the texts (billboard advertisements) have an effect on the society. According to Haque (2008. p. 111), CDA always concerns about social issues embedded in society and tries to analyze hidden power in it. These advertisements have linguistic power through gender and social hegemony and ideologies. Fairclough’s theory of language and power, Foucault’s theory, and Saussure’s theory regarding language use are used to critically analyze the advertisements (Table 1).

1.1. Problem statement

Billboard advertisements represent a company’s branding. It is the reflection of the company’s ideologies and social responsibilities toward society. These advertisements may be a marketing strategy, but the companies cannot deny that they influence the society through these advertisements. These advertisements also represent our culture to the tourists who come to visit Bangladesh on vacation. Therefore, it is essential that the billboard advertisements represent the true culture of the country.

1.2. Purpose statement

The purpose of this research is to notify the business fraternity that their marketing strategy of using billboard is not just a marketing technique. It represents the society and culture. Henceforth, the companies should be careful when they select advertisements for their product’s branding. They should be careful about the language, context, and gender.

1.3. Central research questions

1. How billboard advertisements can influence the common people?
2. Why billboard advertisements may become a liability as CSR?

2. Literature Review

2.1. CDA

According to Haque (2009), CDA started to spread from Europe to other parts of the world during the 1990s. He said CDA was introduced in Bangladesh in 2002 as a course in East West University. It is an
interdisciplinary study of language use in the society, and thus, has power in manipulating language, culture, and society (Fairclough, 1995). He sketched three dimensional CDA: Text production, consumption, and distribution. At first, billboard advertisements are produced as text, then these are observed by the consumers, and they receive the message from the text and distribute the messages to the others. This is actually termed as “dominance” by Dijk (1993). According to him, the power relation between the upper and the lower class people, and its critical discussion can be called as “CDA.” Foucaultian discourse analysis is not purely related to linguistic (Bone et al., 2007). They said that Foucault went beyond linguistics. He conceived discourse in the field of cultural studies, gender studies, and postcolonial studies. Every society has political, economical, racial, colonial classification system. In all these systems, one group dominates the other. In capitalism, the businessmen dominate the consumers. They manipulate with the customers’ emotions. It is one kind of business strategies. Billboard advertisements do this kind of ground playing in business. These advertisements have effects on the consumers’ minds. The languages and images are used in such a manner that the people get inflicted by the ideas of the advertisements.

2.2. CSR in Bangladesh

Many MNCs, national companies, banking sectors have taken initiative to do something good to the society. Some businessmen agree to it, and some work on this. In the process of doing so, Unilever Bangladesh has established “Fair and Lovely Foundation” to help the poor girls in academic and working life. The motto of the foundation is as follows:

“Every girl cherishes a dream of her own what she wants to truly pursue, a dream to carve out her own identity and to make her reach the desired goal. We understand the value of these dreams, and we are always here to assist every girl to become self-reliant to pursue her dream. Because we believe, self-reliance is the crucial building block to create a true identity of a girl’s own” (See. Fair and Lovely Foundation Page). With this motto, the foundation has started its journey from 2003 in Bangladesh.

Similarly, Lifebuoy has started its CSR along with Friendship Center as lifebuoy friendship hospital to help the “char people.” The first floating hospital has started its journey in 2001. At present, there are two other floating hospitals of Friendship. Emirates Friendship Hospital has started its journey from 2008, and Rangdhanu Friendship Hospital from 2012. (See. Friendship Hospital Page).

Moreover, many companies have sponsored in many occasions which they have listed as CSR Initiatives. For instance, Meril-Prothom Alo Puroshkar, Lux-Channel I Super Star, warm clothes distributions, etc.

From the banking sector, The Dutch-Bangla Bank Ltd. provides almost 100 meritorious and need-based scholarships among students. Banking sector mostly prefers to provide scholarships or they work for the betterment of the environment. Many banks in Bangladesh have decided to “Go Green” as CSR initiative. The City Bank Ltd. started their “Go Green” project from 01 October 2015. In this project, the customers will receive their bank statements and other necessary documents through email. However, if any person does not have any email account, they may get paper documents on request.

2.3. Context of billboard advertisements and its power

Billboard advertisements are mostly used by the business companies to promote their products, service as well as to communicate with the common people. This communication system has a long-term influence on the people. According to Fairclough (1989), language and society are relatives to each other. He has said, “A text is a product rather than a process” (24). When a billboard advertisements is designed, it is not just a mere branding of a company’s product. This advertisements becomes a communication process between society and the company. The advertisements will have certain message to the mass people. Then, the text becomes the product of the process. The text can be interpreted critically. Fairclough (1989) has shown this relationship in a simple Figure 1.
If a billboard is a text, then language and images become the context. The process of production is first interpreted and then its social conditions of production are interpreted. According to Goddard (2001), the images and the verbal texts used in the advertisements are the attention-seeking tools (12-16). Sometimes language may influence the consumers very much. CDA discusses these issues in terms of socio-politic, culture, socio-economic, gender discrimination, educational perspective, and many other fields.

3. The Research

The aim of the researcher is to critically analyze the context of the billboard advertisements in terms of language and power, ecocriticism, gender hegemony, feminism and how it is related to the CSR.

The researcher has used the following materials for data collection:
1. Billboard advertisements: The language and images of the advertisements are very essential for critical analysis.
2. Books, journals, and the internet: Data were also collected from books, journals, and the internet.

4. Findings and Results

There is a debate on whether the business companies should have social responsibilities or they should response only when there is a chance of profit. Billboards are used for company’s promotion and branding of the products. However, according to Fairclough (1995), and Foucault (1979) theory of CDA, these billboard advertisements do have some social responsibilities.

4.1. CSR in terms of gender hegemony and feminism

Young girls are always given priorities for any kind of advertisements. Whether it is a beauty soap advertisements or it is related to after shave, female model is always there. In this scenario, we can say that females are given more opportunities than the male models. Unexpectedly, this feature of women does not show respect toward women. Females have just become products in these advertisements.

In Figure 2, there are two advertisements, but the context of the advertisements is absurdly different. The target group of these advertisements is female. The left photo, Advertisements 01, shows the models are wearing national dress, saree, of Bangladesh. Sarees represent the culture of Bangladesh.

Figure 1: Discourse as text, interaction and context

The dressing style of Saree does not show any discourtesy toward the women fraternity. This feature is regular for women in Bangladesh. The advertisements also represent the festivity of Pahela Baishakh (Bengali New Year). On the right side, in Advertisements 02, the females are shown in western outfits. Their dressing style is uncommon in a country like Bangladesh. As the advertisements are related to jewelry, the focus must be on the jewelries. As these outfits are rare in Bangladesh, and generally, the women do not wear these kinds of designer clothes which expose most of the body part, everybody focuses on the bare skin of the models. The outfit does not make any person smart. The nature, culture, and manner make people smart. This feature of female models is only a showcase of their bodies. The males will not look at the jewelry rather they will have their eyes on the female bodies. If the jewelry shop is unable to justify why the women have to be in such short and open dress, then certainly, the female models have become a pleasure to the male eyes.

Now, how these advertisements are related to CSR? These advertisements are shown to the common people. Advertisements 02 will inspire the young girls to wear this type of outfits which is unsuitable for the girls as well as for the society. Advertisements 01 clearly shows Bengali festival. It will make people happy, and inspire them to wear jewelry and colorful dresses in festivals.

Not all advertisements degrade the face of women. Grameenphone created billboard advertisements that show a physically disabled woman. Sheuli Sathi won Gold, one silver, and one bronze medal in the Special Olympics.

Figure 3 and Advertisements 03 might have inspired every person in the country. It shows that there will be obstacles in life but people have to face it bravely. The gesture and posture of Sathi clearly show how much confident she is. These advertisements serve the purpose of CSR although it is a marketing strategy of Grameenphone.
4.2. Findings

People worldwide are working to diminish this sort of social class system. Billboard advertisements, specially, in Indian subcontinent, show that white complexion is more powerful than the dark complexion. If a person wants to be successful in life, he or she needs fair complexion. If a multinational company like Unilever spread this sort of message in Indian subcontinent, they are not doing their responsibilities to the society.

The Figure 4, and Advertisement 04 and 05 suggest that men and women need fair complexion to be successful in life. If a world class cricketer like Tamim Iqbal promote this sort of products then the common people will follow him.

The beauty product companies manipulate people’s mind. Confidence and smartness cannot be installed in a person using fairness brightening products. These are the inner qualities of a person whether the person is male or female. In Bangladesh, still now, complexion, body structure, height, and weight are important for a girl if she wants to get married. Fair skin and slim figure like a Barbie doll are given first priority. Advertisements of fair and lovely products convey these messages more and more. Not only through billboard advertisements but also TV and radio advertisements also contain these ideas. On the other side, Fair and Lovely Foundation is working to fulfill a “girls dream” and to build their “true identity” so that they can have “self-reliance.” This is the motto of Fair and Lovely Foundation that can be found in their website. If we analyze the phrases such as girl’s dream, true identity, and self-reliance, certainly and without a doubt, all the girls desire to fulfill their dreams. They want their own identity. They want to work and earn so that they become self-dependent. However, the “true identity” does not mean a white skin. In addition, Fair and Lovely advertisements are contradiction to Fair and Lovely Foundation’s motto. In the advertisements, they are suggesting men and women must use Fair and Lovely Fairness Cream, or Face-wash to be more attractive and more confident in their life. Fairness achieves all; dark complexion is a burden in life.

Square Toiletries Ltd. has taken a great initiative. The billboard has carried the message to change people’s thought about complexion.

If the photos in Figure 5 are analyzed, it can be seen that Square Toiletries Ltd. has tried to start a fresh beginning. Their tagline is “সরেশ মানেই েুন্দর,” in English, “fresh is beautiful.” The background of both Figure 5 and Advertisements 06 and 07 suggest that people should not care about beauty. Beauty declines but the freshness, the spirit survives always. Advertisements 07 clearly convey a message to the would-be-mothers not to worry about the complexion of their babies. In country like...
Bangladesh people need to think fresh, and think beautiful. The initiative of Square Toiletries to bring a change in social perspective regarding fairness and beauty is definitely praiseworthy in this regard.

4.3. Findings in terms of ecocriticism

Ecocriticism is a new interdisciplinary study. It is a study of language, literature, and ecology. It discusses the criticisms that are found in texts to raise environmental concern. The rise of carbon Dioxide in the atmosphere is increasing in an alarming quantity. The scientists are saying the water level is rising in the ocean. They are worried that in future some of the countries will go under water. From that point of view, Akij cement has designed a advertisement. The tagline of this “Figure 6 and Advertisements 08” is “কার্বনের এই বরষাক্ততার চলুে রদনল সদই েরুনে কার্বনের এই বিষাক্ততার চলুে রদনল সদই েরুনে,” in English, “Let’s Alter the Lethal Carbon into Green.”

Source: http://www.adarchivebd.com/

Figure 5: An endeavor to install a fresh thought in peoples’ mind

Source: http://www.adarchivebd.com/

Figure 6: Advertisement 08: Akij Cement

Source: http://www.adarchivebd.com/
Besides, Akij Group, Square Consumers Products Ltd. also has contributed in the field of ecocriticism (Table 1). Figure 7 and Advertisements 09 is very innovative. It explains why people should not buy open spices. Open spices can be contaminated by fly ashes of cigarette, cement, lead in smoke of vehicles, and in many other ways. These advertisements warn the consumers not to buy open spices. This is a way of fulfilling CSR as well.

Bengal Buckets has another innovative billboard advertisements related to the environment. The billboard advertisements suggest the consumer to save water, not to waste it, not to use it unnecessarily. Thus, Figure 8 and Advertisements 10 can be analyzed in terms of ecocriticism. Certainly, spreading “Save Water”- kind of messages is one kind of CSR.

### 4.4. Findings in terms of language and power

As Fairclough (1995) said, language has an immense power on the people of society. Therefore, the languages that are used in the billboard advertisements should be critically analyzed. The mix of Bengali and English has become a trend in Bangladesh. This is harming the status of Bengali. People have started forgetting the original Bengali word and using English word instead. Figure 9 and Advertisements 11-14 shows the random usage of Bengali and English.

Advertisements 11’s tagline is “পুবটিত শুরু দিন, অ্াকটিভ োরাবদে” in English, “Day Starts with Nutrition, All day in Action.” Pran Group may have used “কম্বর্স্ত” instead of “Active.” The tagline of Aarong Milk is “সরবি হনছে রাংলানদশ,” in English, “Bangladesh is preparing.” The designer could have used “স্ত্রীত” instead of “ready.” Either design the billboard in Bengali or in English or both the languages can be used separately, if necessary. Mixing of both languages is not an innovative idea. In this way, the companies are influencing the new generation to use “Banglish.” It is unaccepted that a national daily newspaper like Prothom Alo has tried to introduce new words like হতাশাউট (হতাশ+আউট),  বরবেলাইনে ইবেয়েরিশাে, etc. These words attract the mass people but using these words our harmful and disrespectful to the Language Movement of 1952. Advertisements 14 has a tagline, “বিজি লাইকে ইজি বিউটিশােল,” in English, “easy nutrition in busy life.” First of all, though the line is written in Bengali, the line itself is not a Bengali phrase. It is read as “easy life are busy nutrition.” The designer has used only a Bengali vowel sound here. On the other side, it has not fulfilled one of the Bengali grammar rules. The rule explains how to write English words as borrowed words in Bengali. The rule suggests when an English word will be borrowed and written in Bengali, the /ʃ/ sound must be written with এ, not with শ/ষ. Similarly, the /n/ sound should be written with এ, not with ণ. It is a major grammatical mistake made by the designer and the company. Finally, the companies are promoting their products using Bengali and English as “Banglish.” This also is a major mistake made by the companies. As the background of the advertisements, the company has chosen a female model who is riding a bicycle. It is a positive side

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<th>Target group of the advertisements</th>
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<td>People of all age</td>
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<td>Deshal</td>
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<td>Radhuni spice powder</td>
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<td>Square pharmaceuticals</td>
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<td>Apan jewelers</td>
<td>Feminism</td>
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Figure 7: Advertisement 09: Radhuni Spice Powder

Source: http://www.adarchivebd.com/

Figure 8: Advertisement 10: Bengal Buckets

Source: http://www.adarchivebd.com/

Figure 9: Language and power in billboard advertisements

Source: http://www.adarchivebd.com/
of the advertisement. It suggests that the Bangladeshi girls are not far behind the boys. They also ride bicycles. It is a suitable way to inform the society about women empowerment, and women’s right.

4.5. Findings in terms of education

Square Toiletries Ltd. designed two billboard advertisements of Senora. The messages clearly express new thoughts and ideas. The company is successful in creating innovative and fresh advertisements. They are trying to teach people through their advertisements.

Menstruation is not a disease. It is not a shameful physical condition of the girls. Parents should be open about it to their daughters. Otherwise, the girls become afraid when they first face it. Figure 10 and Advertisements 15 is that sort of advertisement.

Advertisements 16 are a social approach to stop the early marriage of the girls. Girls must go to school. They should build up their careers. Technically, Square Toiletries Ltd. is not only following marketing strategies but also fulfilling their social responsibilities.

5. General Discussion

CSR, the term explains that the corporate houses must fulfill their duties toward the society. Sponsorship cannot be a part of CSR. If a company sponsors an event and puts their names in the event title, that cannot be CSR, it is marketing of the company. However, if they donate the money, and do not reveal their name, then it will be CSR. The billboard advertisements are designed to influence customers to buy products. However, the context of the advertisements may influence anyone not just to buy the products but also affect them emotionally and psychologically. Therefore, each business company should be careful when it is approving any billboard advertisements to release in the market.

6. Conclusion

Language is a very powerful weapon. It can change society. Language with images can influence the society more prominently. Therefore, a business company should be careful in using languages and images. It is their social responsibility that people learn something positive from them. Billboard advertisements, TVCs, advertisements in dailies, and magazines all of the types of advertisements should fulfill the social responsibility.

Figure 10: Educating the mass people

Source: http://www.adarchivebd.com/
References


