
Original Research Article

The influence of English slang usage in social media advertising on campaign virality and youth appeal

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Abstract: This paper shifts the research focus from marketing demand to language learning demand, exploring the significant value of English slang in social media advertising for improving learners' pragmatic competence, cross-cultural language application ability, and ability to analyze language in real contexts. Through a comprehensive analysis of various social media advertising campaigns, linguistic theoretical frameworks, and language learning-related studies, it reveals how the strategic use of English slang in advertising can serve as a valuable teaching resource to enhance learners' language skills. The findings suggest that in-depth analysis of slang-infused ads can help learners understand the pragmatic functions of slang, grasp cross-cultural language usage rules, and improve their ability to interpret language in real communication scenarios. These are crucial factors for promoting effective language learning and avoiding cross-cultural pragmatic failures.

Keywords: English slang; social media advertising; pragmatic competence; cross-cultural language application; real context language analysis

1. Introduction

In the contemporary digital landscape, social media advertising has not only become a dominant platform for commercial marketing but also a rich repository of real-language materials. For language learners, especially those engaged in advanced English learning, the dynamic and context-rich characteristics of English slang in these ads provide an ideal carrier for improving pragmatic competence and cross-cultural language application ability. English slang, with its flexibility, cultural specificity, and context sensitivity, is no longer just a tool for brands to attract consumers but a valuable resource for language learning that reflects real-language usage.

This paper aims to explore the influence of English slang usage in social media advertising on three key language learning aspects: learners' pragmatic competence, cross-cultural language application ability, and real-context language analysis ability. In advanced English learning, learners often face difficulties such as inadequate pragmatic competence, lack of sensitivity to cross-cultural language differences, and inability to accurately interpret language meaning in real contexts. The analysis of slang in social media advertising can effectively address these pain points. By dissecting how slang functions in advertising contexts, learners can gain insights into the practical application of language rules, understand the cultural connotations behind language use, and thus enhance their comprehensive language application abilities.

2. Literature review

2.1. Social media advertising as a real-language learning context

Social media advertising differs from traditional written materials in that it features authentic, interactive, and context-specific language use, which aligns with the requirements of real-context language learning. Previous language learning studies have shown that learning through real-language contexts can significantly improve learners' ability to apply language in practice. For example, the natural integration of slang in advertising contexts allows learners to observe how language adapts to specific communication purposes (e.g., attracting attention, establishing rapport) and communication objects, which is crucial for cultivating pragmatic competence.

2.2. English slang and pragmatic/cross-cultural language learning

English slang is not only an integral part of youth culture but also a typical embodiment of language pragmatics. It carries rich cultural connotations and pragmatic functions, reflecting the dynamic adaptation of language to social communication needs. Slang terms are often created and popularized based on specific social scenarios and cultural backgrounds, and their correct use requires learners to grasp not only their literal meanings but also their pragmatic scope, emotional overtones, and cultural implications. For language learners, understanding the pragmatic rules of slang is an important part of improving cross-cultural language application ability, as improper use of slang can easily lead to cross-cultural pragmatic failures.

2.3. The intersection of slang, advertising, and language learning demand

There is limited research on the direct value of English slang in social media advertising for language learning, especially in terms of enhancing pragmatic competence and cross-cultural language application ability. However, some language teaching studies have suggested that integrating real-language materials into teaching can effectively improve learning outcomes. As a form of language closely linked to real communication, slang in advertising can help learners bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-language use. When learners analyze slang in advertising contexts, they can better understand how language functions to achieve specific communication goals, thereby improving their ability to apply language in practical scenarios.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data collection

This study collected a sample of social media advertising campaigns from popular platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter. The campaigns were selected based on their extensive use of English slang and rich contextual information. A total of 100 campaigns were analyzed, covering a wide range of industries including fashion, beauty, technology, and food. These campaigns were selected not only for their marketing data value but also for their representativeness in reflecting the pragmatic functions and cross-cultural characteristics of slang.

3.2. Data analysis

The analysis shifted from simple data description to language function analysis, using linguistic terms to interpret the slang functions behind the data. For the data related to campaign performance (such as the number of shares, likes, and comments), a "linguistic interpretation" was added to explore the specific linguistic mechanisms of slang. For the analysis of language learning value, a qualitative analysis was conducted from the perspectives of pragmatic function, cross-cultural language rules, and real-context language interpretation to assess how slang-infused ads can help improve learners' language abilities. This involved analyzing the pragmatic functions of slang in ads, the cultural connotations reflected, and the language adaptation strategies in specific contexts.

4. Results

4.1. Impact on enhancing learners' understanding of pragmatic functions

The results showed that advertising campaigns incorporating popular and relevant slang terms had significantly higher interaction data, which can be interpreted through the pragmatic functions of slang. For example, a fashion brand's campaign on Instagram that used trendy slang in its captions and hashtags saw a 30% increase in engagement compared to its previous non-slang campaigns. Linguistic interpretation: This data reflects the pragmatic function of slang in reducing "language distance". Slang often breaks the traditional polite principles in formal language (e.g., using "bet" to express "certainty" instead of the formal "I agree" or "That's correct"), which belongs to the "infringement" of the politeness principle in pragmatics. However, this "impoliteness" in a specific context shortens the psychological distance between the communicator (brand) and the recipient (user), making the language more intimate and authentic. For language learners, this data and its linguistic mechanism reveal how slang realizes the pragmatic goal of establishing rapport through context-

adaptive language use, helping learners understand the flexible application of pragmatic principles.

4.2. Impact on promoting cross-cultural language application ability

Qualitative analysis showed that young users had a higher recognition of advertising campaigns using English slang, perceiving them as more authentic and in line with cultural preferences. For instance, a technology brand's TikTok campaign that used gaming-related slang received overwhelmingly positive feedback from young gamers. Linguistic interpretation: This feedback reflects the cultural indexing function of slang. Gaming-related slang (such as "GG" for "good game" and "no cap" for "no lie") is a typical example of "community-specific language". It carries the cultural norms and identity symbols of the gaming community, enabling users to quickly identify with the brand that uses the slang. For language learners, this phenomenon shows that slang is a carrier of subcultural information. Understanding the cultural background and usage scenarios of slang can help learners avoid cross-cultural pragmatic failures caused by improper use of language (e.g., using gaming slang in formal business communication). At the same time, it can improve learners' sensitivity to cross-cultural language differences and enhance their ability to apply language appropriately in specific cultural contexts.

5. Discussion

5.1. Facilitating the understanding of pragmatic functions

The use of English slang in social media advertising fully demonstrates the contextual adaptability of language pragmatics. Slang, as a "context-sensitive language form", adjusts its pragmatic functions according to the communication context of advertising (informal, interactive, and persuasive). For example, the use of slang such as "vibe" (for "atmosphere") and "flex" (for "show off") in advertising not only conveys information but also realizes the pragmatic functions of emotional communication and identity recognition. For language learners, analyzing these slang terms can help them understand that language use is not only about following grammatical rules but also about adapting to communication contexts to achieve specific communicative effects. This deepens learners' understanding of pragmatic competence and helps them master the skills of applying language in real communication.

5.2. Enhancing cross-cultural language interpretation ability

English slang is constantly evolving with cultural changes, and its use in advertising reflects the latest cultural trends and social phenomena. For example, the popularity of slang terms such as "woke" (for "socially conscious") in advertising is closely related to the social attention to equality and justice. By analyzing the use of these slang terms, learners can not only grasp the changes in language but also understand the cultural connotations behind the language changes. This helps learners break the limitations of textbook knowledge, establish a connection between language learning and cultural understanding, and improve their ability to interpret language in cross-cultural contexts. At the same time, it enables learners to recognize the regional and group differences of slang, avoiding misunderstandings caused by ignoring cultural background factors.

5.3. Potential challenges in language learning applications

However, using English slang in social media advertising for language teaching also faces potential challenges. Firstly, slang has strong timeliness and may become outdated quickly, which requires educators to continuously update teaching materials. Secondly, some slang terms have multiple meanings or ambiguous connotations, and improper interpretation may mislead learners. For example, the slang "lit" can mean "exciting" or "drunk" depending on the context. In addition, slang's regional differences (e.g., differences between British slang and American slang) may also increase the difficulty of learning. Therefore, in the process of applying slang advertising cases to teaching, educators need to guide learners to accurately grasp the context, meaning, and usage scope of slang to ensure the effectiveness of language learning.

6. Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated the significant value of English slang usage in social media advertising for enhancing learners' pragmatic competence, cross-cultural language application ability, and real-context language

analysis ability. The in-depth analysis of slang-infused advertising campaigns can provide practical guidance for advanced English teaching, and the specific enlightenment for advanced English teaching is as follows:

In terms of classroom activity design, teachers can select representative slang advertising cases and design interactive analysis activities. For example, organize group discussions on "how slang realizes the persuasive function in advertising", let learners analyze the pragmatic mechanisms of specific slang terms (such as the "emotional appeal function" of slang in improving advertising acceptance), and then simulate the creation of short advertising texts using slang, so as to apply the learned knowledge to practice. In addition, teachers can use the interaction data of advertising campaigns (such as the 30% increase in engagement) to guide learners to explore the relationship between slang's linguistic functions and communication effects, deepening their understanding of the practical application of language.

In terms of avoiding cross-cultural pragmatic failures, teachers can take the cultural specificity of slang in advertising as a teaching focus. By comparing the differences in the use of slang in different cultural backgrounds (such as the differences in the acceptance of "impolite slang" in Eastern and Western cultures), learners can understand the scope of application of slang. At the same time, analyze typical cases of cross-cultural pragmatic failures caused by improper use of slang (such as using regional slang that is not understood by the target audience in cross-cultural communication), and guide learners to master the skills of selecting appropriate slang according to communication objects and scenarios.

In the future, research can further explore the long-term impact of applying slang advertising cases to English teaching on learners' language ability improvement, and study the adaptation strategies of slang teaching in different learning stages and learning groups to provide more targeted support for advanced English teaching practice.

References

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