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**THE ANALYSIS OF LANGUAGE-RELATED  
ADVERTISING TECHNIQUES ON WIKIPEDIA  
BA thesis**

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**TARTU  
2023**

## **ABSTRACT**

Wikipedia holds immense value as a comprehensive source of information covering a vast array of subjects. Its value, however, hinges on the reliability and verifiability of the information presented. Unfortunately, the open nature of Wikipedia, where virtually anyone can make edits, has given rise to a significant challenge: the presence of non-neutral content, including instances of advertising, on the platform. This BA thesis analyses some of the language-related advertising techniques employed on Wikipedia. The BA thesis aims to answer the research question: What linguistic features are utilised in the employment of language-related advertising techniques, such as comparative advertising, CSR advertising, buzzwords, and puffery on Wikipedia? To achieve this, 40 randomly selected Wikipedia articles were analysed, revealing the advertising techniques used.

The thesis begins with an introduction, where author gives a brief description of Wikipedia and advertising. The literature review section gives an overview of the functions of advertisements, the four language-related aspects of advertising, Wikipedia and its NPOV policy, and previous studies about advertising on Wikipedia. The empirical study section provides an overview of the study's methodology, analyses and discusses the obtained results. The thesis ends with a conclusion.

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## INTRODUCTION

Wikipedia is quickly becoming a real-time reference tool, allowing public entries to be updated by anyone with access to the necessary technology and time. As a result, it is easier than ever for people to not only access information but also to create and share it (Wikipedia 2023c). Wikipedia has received praise for enabling the democratization of knowledge by covering a vast range of topics and having a unique structure and culture (Wikipedia 2022a: para. 1). It is maintained by a community of volunteers and is expected to be presented from a neutral point of view (Wikipedia 2022a). However, the fact that almost anyone can edit almost any page (Wikipedia 2022b: para. 1) has also led to issues with prohibited content, such as advertising finding its way onto the platform.

Advertising is more than just the commercial promotion of branded products; it can also refer to texts whose purpose is to improve the image of organisations and companies (Goddard 2001: 10). In her book, Goddard (2001: 5–6) argues that we all recognise advertisements in newspapers, magazines, and on TV, but around us are also texts such as manufacturer's logos on clothes and university brochures that could also be considered advertisements. Similarly, advertising can also be found on Wikipedia, often in the form of native advertising, where promotional content is made to match the form and function of Wikipedia's original content.

The aim of this bachelor's thesis is to provide an overview of four language-related aspects of advertising, which are frequently used to promote companies and their products on Wikipedia. These aspects include comparative advertising, buzzwords, corporate social responsibility (CSR) advertising, and puffery. Comparative advertising often involves presenting a company's products as superior to a competitor's. Buzzwords are trendy vocabulary items used to catch consumers' attention. CSR advertising highlights a company's efforts to integrate social, environmental, and ethical concerns into its operations.

Puffery involves using exaggerated language to promote a product or service. The research question of this thesis is: What linguistic features are utilised in the employment of language-related advertising techniques, such as comparative advertising, CSR advertising, buzzwords, and puffery on Wikipedia?

The first part of this thesis covers the functions of advertisements and provides background on the four language-related aspects of advertising. Additionally, it includes details on Wikipedia and its policies, and studies related to Wikipedia and advertising. The second part of the thesis investigates how the linguistic features of comparative advertising, CSR advertising, buzzwords, and puffery are expressed in selected Wikipedia articles. The thesis ends with a discussion of the results and a conclusion.

## **1. LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this section of the thesis, the author gives an overview of the functions of advertisements and the four language-related aspects of advertising. In addition, the author writes about Wikipedia, its neutral point of view (NPOV) policy and previous studies of advertising on Wikipedia.

### **1.1 Functions of advertisements**

Santilli (1983) has argued that in contemporary society, advertising serves two fundamental and interconnected purposes: informing and persuading consumers. Advocates of advertising tend to emphasize its informative function, as advertising provides valuable information to consumers about products, services, and prices, which helps them make rational purchasing decisions. Conversely, critics of advertising tend to see its persuasive function as more prominent. Advertising not only informs consumers about a product but also encourages them to purchase it (Santilli 1983: 27).

Since advertising on Wikipedia is prohibited, these functions are achieved through means which adapt to Wikipedia's form and function. One such approach is native advertising, in which an advertiser leverages Wikipedia's credibility and presents their promotional content in a format that blends in with Wikipedia's original content (Wojdyski and Golan 2016: 1403). Native advertising research indicates that consumers may not always recognise native advertising as promotional content, even if disclosures are made. Some marketers may want to keep native advertising a secret since this lack of awareness is likely the reason for native advertising's better performance compared to banner advertising (Campbell and Marks 2015: 602).

## **1.2 Language of advertising**

The following section will provide background information on the characteristics of the four advertising techniques being investigated in this thesis: comparative advertising, buzzwords, CSR advertising, and puffery.

### **1.2.1 Comparative advertising**

Comparative advertising is a marketing technique that involves presenting a product as superior to its competitors either through a comparison of features or based on its value and cost (Eyada and Milla 2020: 32). According to Teodorescu (2015), comparative advertising language involves the use of comparative and superlative degrees to convey the unparalleled quality of the product or service advertised. The use of comparative degrees without mentioning the product it is being compared to implies the product being ‘better’ or ‘faster’. On the other hand, superlative degrees are utilised to suggest that the advertised service or product is the best of its kind (Teodorescu 2015: 117).

In some cases, advertisers support their claims with scientific data and technical language to substantiate their superiority claims. For instance, Apple has highlighted the advantages of its M1 chip by comparing its performance statistics to Intel chips they used previously: “M1 delivers up to 3.5x faster CPU performance, up to 6x faster GPU performance, and up to 15x faster machine learning, all while enabling battery life up to 2x longer than previous-generation [Intel based] Macs” (Apple.com 2020: para. 1). However, the accuracy of statistical claims in advertising has been a subject of scrutiny. Wilkes et al. (1998) conducted a study to assess the accuracy of scientific data presented in pharmaceutical advertisements. The study examined 109 full-page pharmaceutical advertisements from 10 prominent medical journals and evaluated them based on FDA guidelines. Among the findings, the reviewers discovered that 30% of the statistics in the

advertisements were derived from inconclusive studies. It is important to note that the study focused specifically on pharmaceutical advertisements in medical journals, which may not capture the entirety of advertising practices. The study also highlights the potential use of statistical data derived from inconclusive studies which raises concerns about the accuracy and reliability of information presented in advertisements.

Moreover, according to Miskolczi-Bodnár (2004), comparative advertising does not only concern the product that is being advertised but also the product of a competitor. The identification of the competitor can be direct, through explicit mention, or indirect, through implication or insinuation (Miskolczi-Bodnár 2004: 34). Goddard (2001) explains that advertisers often use comparative language to imply the superiority of their product without explicitly stating the comparison. She highlights how readers tend to fill in the missing comparative element with a positive one. For instance, a statement like “X washes whiter” does not specify what the product is being compared to, but readers tend to add in the part “than all its other rivals” by themselves (Goddard 2001: 104).

### **1.2.2 Buzzwords**

Buzzwords play a significant role in advertising by highlighting a product’s unique selling proposition and reflecting what is considered important to consumers at a given time (Goddard, 2001: 105). These terms are often vague and lack specific meaning, serving primarily to impress consumers (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2023). An example of this would be the use of the term “solution” in a sentence: “In 2019, Cleveron introduced the world’s first robotics-based grocery pickup solution Cleveron 501.” (Wikipedia 2023b: para. 7). In comparison, a more informative sentence would be “In 2019, Cleveron launched Cleveron 501, an outdoor parcel robot for grocery pickup.”



Goddard (2001) highlights that certain phrases like “climate solutions” and “climate responsibility” function as buzzwords in an era marked by concerns about pollution and the environment. However, she notes that the specific terms that acquire buzzword status change over time and differ across cultures. As an illustration, Goddard points out that the term “buzz” now sounds outdated, with “spin” being more commonly employed to describe the creation of a favourable narrative (Goddard 2001: 105). Cluley (2013) argues that buzzwords enable individuals in positions of power to thrive without possessing expert knowledge while simultaneously captivating and controlling their audience. By adeptly employing buzzwords, managers can establish an image of competent leadership, irrespective of their actual expertise. Furthermore, buzzwords allow managers to attribute the outcomes of their decisions to external factors or other individuals, enabling them to navigate challenging situations without assuming full responsibility (Cluley 2013: 37).

The dual nature of buzzwords, being both obvious and ambiguous at the same time can be problematic. On the one hand, the obviousness of buzzwords can be used to avoid questioning the further meaning behind them (Cornwall 2007: 472). On the other hand, the use of “expert language” reinforces the managerial elite who use seemingly intellectual and scientific terms, effectively excluding laypeople and reinforcing the idea that only experts can understand these issues (Standing 2007: 517).

### **1.2.3 Corporate social responsibility advertising**

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a concept that involves companies taking responsibility for their societal impacts and integrating social, environmental, ethical, human rights, and consumer concerns into their operations (European Commission 2011: 6). CSR advertisements often use keywords related to the specific topic of concern, such as “eco-friendly,” “organic,” and “recycling,” to draw attention to their efforts for protecting

environmental resources (Kwon and Lee 2021: 706). However, these advertisements can sometimes use vague and ambiguous language, making it difficult for the consumer to fully comprehend the significance of the company's CSR efforts (Pracejus et al 2003/2004: 26).

In the context of consumer perceptions, Chernev and Blair (2015) conducted a study to investigate the impact of CSR on consumer perceptions of product performance. Through four experiments, they found that a company's socially responsible behaviour positively influenced consumer perceptions, leading to products from socially responsible companies being evaluated as performing better. Moreover, the study highlighted the potential effectiveness of third-party sources and social media in communicating a company's benevolent actions, as they are perceived as more credible and authentic sources of information.

Despite the seemingly beneficial applications of CSR advertising for companies, it is not immune to criticism. One critique is that CSR advertisements may serve to mask the overall impact of a company's harmful actions. Jahdi and Acikdilli (2009: 107) argue that advertisers, who are often pollutant producers such as Shell and BP, may make claims about their green initiatives; however, these claims do not negate the overall environmental impact of their operations.

#### **1.2.4 Puffery**

Puffery is a term used to describe the practice of using exaggerated or extravagant language to promote or advertise a product or service. This language is often not entirely truthful or accurate and is intended to make the product or service appear better than it really is (OED Online 2023). Preston (1998: 54–55) has developed a “gradient of intensity” of puffery in advertising which includes six categories from strongest to weakest. The strongest category is “best” (as in Goodyear's “The best tires in the world”), followed by “best

possible,” “better,” “specially good,” “good,” and finally “subjective qualities” (as in Budweiser’s “Taste the future”). In the United States, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) generally will not pursue cases involving obviously exaggerated or puffing representations, meaning those that the average consumer does not consider to be serious (Federal Trade Commission: 1983: 4).

Several studies have been conducted to explore the effects of puffery on consumer behaviour and attitudes. In their study, Stern and Callister (2020) aimed to investigate the distinct effects of puffery advertisements compared to nonexaggerated ads, focusing on different levels of intensity. They recruited 597 participants from various general education courses at a large university. The participants viewed different advertisements and completed a questionnaire during class time. The study found that puffery ads did not differentiate themselves from nonexaggerated ads in terms of their effects on consumer behaviour and attitudes. This suggests that puffery claims may be functionally inert due to their prevalence.

In another study, Amyx and Lumpkin (2016) conducted a 2 x 2 experiment to explore the interaction effects of ad puffery and consumer ad scepticism on consumer persuasion using print ads for jeans. The participants, a student sample, were randomly assigned to view either a puffery ad or a non-puffery ad. They had 15 seconds to view the ad before completing a questionnaire that assessed various variables, including attitude toward the ad, attitude toward the brand, purchase intentions, perceived deception, and perceived exaggeration. The study revealed that puffery did not have a positive effect on consumers’ attitudes or behavioural intentions toward the product. On the contrary, puffery often led to a negative backlash effect, increasing the perception of deception and exaggeration. As the study was conducted among students the generalisability of the results on the wider population may be limited. Additionally, the subjects having to look at one ad for 15 seconds

does not reflect normal circumstances how ads are usually consumed. The implications of the study suggest that marketers should adapt to changes and producing advertisements following the same principals of marketing is not a viable strategy, particularly when targeting Generation Y consumers who are sceptical of traditional advertising methods.

Despite the findings that puffery may not be the most viable marketing strategy to attract consumers, it is important to consider that its use may still persist due to other factors. For instance, companies may still see puffery as a viable option, being unaware of the changes in consumer attitudes. Additionally, some companies may see puffery as a harmless marketing tactic and may employ it in more subtle ways.

### **1.3 Wikipedia**

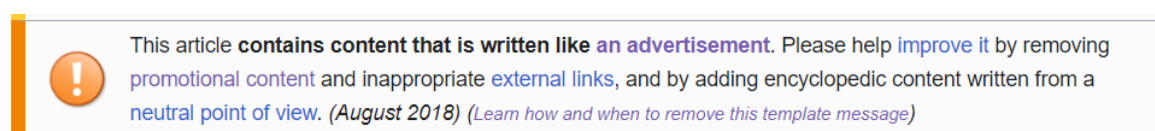
Wikipedia is a free online encyclopedia written and managed by a volunteer community using open collaboration and a wiki-based editing system (Wikipedia 2022a: para. 1). It hosts over 6 million articles in English and there are close to 130 thousand active users on Wikipedia (Wikipedia 2023a).

Collaboration and communication are crucial to the creation of Wikipedia, as the wiki format requires a community effort to build the encyclopedia. The project relies on the contributions of many individuals, necessitating coordination among them to ensure the project's success (Wikimedia Meta-Wiki 2023). Reagle (2010) states that Wikipedia has hundreds of thousands of contributors who may have made contributions in the past. Some of these contributors remain anonymous, i.e., those who are not logged in, while others engage in small tasks such as fixing typos and updating outdated information (Reagle 2010: 8).

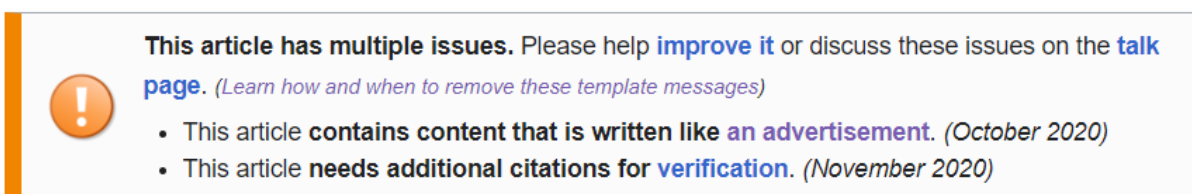
Wikipedia is founded on three primary principles, namely the neutral point of view (NPOV), verifiability, and no original research, with this thesis focusing specifically on the

NPOV policy (Wikipedia 2022c: para. 1). The neutral point of view policy aims to achieve neutrality by every contributor being responsible for their content being written using non-judgemental language, avoiding stated opinions and assertions as facts, and ensuring the prominence of opposing viewpoints (Fichman and Hara 2014: 69). According to Matei and Dobrescu (2011), the concept of a neutral point of view (NPOV) policy on Wikipedia is idealistic and its interpretation remains unresolved. While the wording of the NPOV policy is clear, the editorial process and discussions surrounding it are not. Therefore, NPOV is not solely defined by its explicit definition, but rather by how members interpret and apply it (Matei and Dobrescu 2011: 45).

Wikipedia uses tags to address issues within its articles (see Figure 1). The tag appears at the top of the article section containing the issue. If the issue permeates the entire article, the tag may be placed at the outset of the article. In instances where there are several problems with the article, the tags may be combined (see Figure 2). For issues such as buzzwords or puffery, a warning may be displayed in superscript after the sentence (see Figure 3). After a tag has been added to an article, it is included in a category of all articles featuring that issue.



**Figure 1.** Content warning for advertising, marketing, or public relations



**Figure 2.** Content warning for multiple issues

CDS Global provides [ecommerce](#) and [web store](#) solutions<sup>[buzzword]</sup>,<sup>[13]</sup> including [cross-selling](#) and [conversion marketing](#).

### **Figure 3.** Superscript content warning for buzzwords

A tag that is predominantly used to flag articles containing advertising language is the tag “Advert”. This tag is added to articles that in whole or part are advertisements masquerading as articles (Wikipedia 2022d). Two tags, “Peacock” and “Puffery” are used to flag instances of puffery, such as when an article uses subjective terms like *acclaimed*, *brilliant*, or *remarkable* (Wikipedia 2017; Wikipedia 2023d) The “Buzzword” tag is used when an article contains a large number of buzzwords (Wikipedia 2022e).

## **1.4 Previous studies of advertising on Wikipedia**

### **1.4.1 Advertising on Wikipedia**

Previous research on Wikipedia and advertising on its platform has focused on political advertising and public relations interactions with Wikipedia. Göbel and Munzert (2018) argue that Wikipedia is a highly attractive platform for political candidates to advertise themselves to their constituents because of its popularity and reputation for neutrality. To support their argument, they collected data on edits made to German MPs’ Wikipedia pages and identified those linked to the Bundestag IT network. They discovered that 51% of the MPs represented in the last three parliamentary sessions had their Wikipedia page edited from an IP address associated with the parliament. The motivation behind the edits was political advertising. MPs used these edits to supplement their biographical information with content that generates sympathy and helps them connect with their voters.

Thompson (2016) examined Wikipedia’s interactions with public relations and uncovered a practise of making edits on Wikipedia in exchange for money. As Google

frequently lists Wikipedia among its top results, the platform attracts a significant amount of traffic, making it a prime target for public relations efforts. Thompson highlights a case in which a public relations firm used incentives to persuade editors to violate Wikipedia's terms of service and informal rules of operation, though he notes that some of these practices are not always visible or understood by users making edits on the platform. In many cases, the information deleted from the articles tends to be restored and, in some cases, this suppression of criticism is also reported in later revisions.

#### **1.4.2 Bias and puffery detection on Wikipedia**

In previous studies, Wikipedia has also been used as a source for researching bias and puffery on its platform, with researchers utilizing machine learning and automatic language processing techniques. Bertsch (2021) attempted to build a model based on machine learning to detect whether sentences on Wikipedia contain peacock (puffery) phrases. While the project was successful in identifying peacock phrases, the use of sentiment analysis alone was not adequate. She found that to improve performance, a possible solution is to incorporate a screening step for sentences with high positive sentiment.

Hube and Fetahu (2018) also observed in their research that detecting language bias is a difficult task since it is subjective and often requires the interpretation of subtle linguistic cues in context. They developed a bias word lexicon in their study, which they used along with other features to scrutinize Wikipedia statements at both the syntactic and semantic levels. Using a supervised model, they were able to determine if a statement was biased or unbiased and achieved a reasonably precise result with a precision score of  $P = 0.74$ .

## **2. EMPIRICAL STUDY**

In this section, the author will discuss the methodology and aims to answer the research question of what linguistic features are utilized in the employment of language-related advertising techniques, such as comparative advertising, CSR advertising, buzzwords, and puffery, on Wikipedia. The section ends with the discussion of the results.

### **2.1 Choice of Wikipedia articles**

In order to analyse advertising language in Wikipedia articles, a specific set of articles needed to be chosen. As this thesis focuses on promotional content, all the articles were selected from the Category: All articles with a promotional tone. To further refine the selection, the results within this category were filtered by the topic “Business and economics” which was deemed most relevant for the study of advertising companies and their products. The search query “articletopic:business-and-economics incategory:"All articles with a promotional tone"” was utilised in each search and advanced search was used to find instances of the five aspects of advertising.

This thesis concerns four aspects of advertising: comparative advertising, buzzwords, CSR advertising, and puffery. To find instances of each aspect, Wikipedia’s advanced search was used to find tags in the case of the buzzwords and puffery aspects and keywords in the case of CSR advertising and comparative advertising aspects. The number of articles responding to each search is displayed in Table 1. To examine the use of comparative advertising, CSR advertising, buzzwords, and puffery in Wikipedia articles, 10 unique articles were randomly selected for each advertising technique, resulting in a total of 40 articles. While a larger sample size may provide more comprehensive insights, the author considered the selected number of articles sufficient to explore and draw meaningful conclusions regarding the use of comparative advertising, CSR advertising, buzzwords, and puffery in Wikipedia articles within the scope of a BA thesis. To achieve more variety, all



search queries were modified to display results in a random order. The analysis of each article was conducted based on the version that contained the Advert tag. By rule, the version used for the analysis was at the time the latest version of the article.

Since comparative advertising on Wikipedia is not flagged with tags, keywords “compared” and “superior” were used in Wikipedia advanced search. These keywords were selected because they are commonly used when making comparisons, making them effective indicators for finding examples of comparative advertising. To ensure that the resulted articles were relevant to comparative advertising, the context of the keywords was examined to eliminate articles that did not pertain comparative advertising. The first five articles that utilized the keyword “compared” and the first five that utilized the keyword “superior” in the context of comparative advertising were selected for analysis.

Articles containing instances of CSR advertising were selected similarly. Because CSR advertising can take on different forms and terminologies, an advanced search using the keywords “social responsibility,” “philanthropy,” and “sustainability” was conducted on Wikipedia to identify articles that incorporate these concepts. These keywords had to appear in the subheadings of articles. The first four articles with the keyword “sustainability” in the subheading, and the first three articles with the keywords “philanthropy” and “social responsibility” in the subheading, were selected for analysis. In total, ten articles were chosen for examination. The reason for selecting four articles with the keyword “sustainability” and three articles each with the keywords “philanthropy” and “social responsibility” was because sustainability had the most search results, while philanthropy and social responsibility had fewer results.

To examine the advertising aspect of buzzwords in Wikipedia articles, 10 articles containing the tag “Buzzword” were selected. Initially, the search query "Wikipedia articles containing buzzwords" was utilized in Wikipedia's advanced search, resulting in articles

tagged with the term “Buzzword.” However, the majority of the search results predominantly featured articles where the term marked as a buzzword was “solutions.” To ensure a wider range of buzzwords for analysis, the search query "This article appears to contain a large number of buzzwords" was selected instead.

Two tags, “Peacock” and “Wikipuffery,” are used on Wikipedia to flag articles containing puffery. To locate articles with these tags, the advanced search function was employed with the queries “Articles with peacock terms” and “Articles with Wikipuffery.” The first five articles from each search were then selected for analysis.

**Table 1.** Results of Wikipedia advanced search

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Tag or keyword used in advanced search</b>	<b>Number of articles</b>
Buzzwords	Wikipedia articles containing buzzwords [tag]	196
Puffery	Articles with peacock terms [tag] Articles with Wikipuffery [tag]	110 90
Comparative advertising	compared [search term] superior [search term]	344 132
CSR advertising	social responsibility [search term] philanthropy [search term] Sustainability [search term]	170 253 414

## **2.2 Analysis of linguistic features and structures related to advertising**

### **language**

#### **2.2.1 Comparative advertising**

Comparative advertising is a powerful marketing strategy that aims to highlight the advantages of a product or service over competitors. In the analysis of ten different Wikipedia articles, it was observed that all ten articles utilized comparative degrees or comparative constructions as a technique of comparative advertising. Words like “superior,” “more,” and “better” were commonly used to highlight the advantages of the advertised

products or services over their competitors. For example, the article about Rhone Apparel positioned itself as using superior materials for longer-lasting clothes, while the article on SRAM Corporation boasted about one of the company's product's abilities to provide "more precise shifting", "faster setup", and "lower maintenance". In addition to comparative degrees, comparative constructions were also employed to emphasize advantages over competitors and previous versions of companies' own products. The article on Volkswagen Golf Mk7, for example, focused on its "roomier cabin" with "greater shoulder room" compared to its predecessor, highlighting the improvements made in the newer version of the vehicle. Similarly, the AutoZone article compared their products to OEM (original equipment manager) parts, positioning their "Duralast Elite" brand as superior to the design and performance of OEM parts.

Based on these findings it was observed that comparative advertising primarily employs the use of comparative degrees with explicit mention of the product being compared. In these articles, the comparative degree is used to suggest that the advertised product is "better," "superior," or similar to a specific competitor, category of products or previous generation product. The use of superlative degrees, implying the product as the absolute best in its category, was not identified in the analysed comparative advertising examples. Therefore, it can be concluded that comparative degrees were predominantly used in comparative advertising to directly compare the qualities or attributes of the advertised product with a specific competitor or product category.

In addition to comparative degrees, the analysis of the articles revealed that technical terminology and specific details were employed in four articles to enhance the perception of superiority in the advertised products or services. For instance, the article on Soitec emphasized the use of their "Smart Cut™ technology" in the production process, showcasing a specific technical feature that sets their product apart. The Volkswagen Golf Mk7 article

provided precise measurements to highlight the car's dimensions in comparison to its predecessor, adding a quantitative aspect to the comparison. Additionally, the Artic Silver article utilized measurable percentages to underscore their 12% performance advantage over a competitor, substantiating their claim with quantifiable data. By incorporating technical terminology and specific details in the Wikipedia articles about these companies, the information presented effectively affirms to consumers that these companies are superior and leaders in their respective industries.

Furthermore, the results of the study also provided support for the theory that comparative advertising can involve both direct and indirect comparison with competitors. The analysis revealed that only one company directly compared themselves to competitors in the same industry. The Wikipedia article on Rhone Apparel explicitly mentioned brands like Lululemon, Nike, and Under Armour as competitors, emphasizing their aim to distinguish themselves by using superior materials and creating long-lasting clothes. However, it is worth noting that the direct comparison in this case did not follow the exact pattern of indirect comparison described by Goddard (2001: 104). Rather than implying the superiority of their product without explicitly stating what it is being compared to, Rhone Apparel's Wikipedia article directly called out specific competitors. This variation in the application of comparative advertising demonstrates that strategies can differ among companies and industries.

Positive descriptors were a prominent feature in all ten of the analysed articles. Terms like "superior," "improves," and "better," were employed to imply enhanced performance, durability, functionality, or effectiveness of the products. For instance, the Freightliner Cascadia article highlighted the truck's interior changes, including a "complete overhaul," "all-new dashboard," and "more ergonomic seats." These positive descriptors were utilized to differentiate the Cascadia from other trucks, emphasizing its improved interior design and

enhanced ergonomics, which could potentially attract new customers. Similarly, in the article on SmartWater, the term “superior” was used to describe the product’s comparison to DNA. This usage of “superior” suggests that SmartWater is positioned as having an advantage over DNA in terms of its effectiveness or reliability. The positive descriptors used in the article were clearly intended to highlight the advantages of the product, emphasizing superiority over competitors, and enhancing its perceived value and appeal to consumers.

Lastly, brand positioning strategies aimed at appealing to specific target audiences and distinguishing themselves from competitors were observed in the analysed articles. The Wikipedia article on Arcimoto may have positioned the company’s product, the Rapid Responder to appeal to agencies acquiring emergency vehicles. The article utilised terms such as “smaller footprint” and highlighted the vehicle’s ability to “arrive more quickly and easily” compared to traditional emergency vehicles. These linguistic choices were likely intended to emphasize the unique selling points of the vehicle, appealing to the needs and preferences of the target audience in the emergency services sector. Similarly, the article about Natural Dog Food Company employed brand positioning strategies by emphasizing the use of specific terms such as “100% natural ingredients,” “herbal premix,” and “natural vitamins.” These choices aimed to convey a sense of authenticity, purity, and superiority in comparison to synthetic alternatives. By highlighting the natural aspects of their product, the company sought to differentiate itself from competitors and attract consumers who prioritise natural and organic options for their pets.

### **2.2.3 Buzzwords**

Buzzwords are commonly employed in advertising to make an impact on consumers, yet they often lack clear and specific meaning. This observation was reinforced through the analysis of ten different companies’ Wikipedia articles, where buzzwords were identified in

and examined within the context of advertising strategies. The Wikipedia articles on several companies such as TechnoServe, Flagler Global Logistics, Alida, The Network Inc, and National Research Corporation utilised buzzwords to describe their services or business operations. However, the terms like “business solutions,” “market systems,” “supply chain management solutions,” “strategic asset,” “direct connectivity,” “cloud-based Microsurvey solution,” and “Patient & Family Experience” used in these articles may be vague and fail to provide clear and specific information about the actual offerings or benefits provided. While these buzzwords may be intended to impress consumers and convey a sense of innovation or expertise, it is important for consumers to critically evaluate and seek more specific details to truly understand the value and relevance of these claims.

Certain buzzwords often serve as markers of what is considered important to consumers at a given time. In recent years, artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as one such buzzword, closely associated with a product’s unique selling proposition and consumer interests. While AI-related terms can be effective selling points, it is important to ascertain whether these buzzwords maintain their true technical meaning in appropriate contexts. The analysis focused on two Wikipedia articles that discussed AI in the context of business operations. In the case of Coversica, terms such as “AI-driven,” “natural language understanding,” “deep learning,” and “machine learning” appeared to be used accurately and aligned with the company’s core reliance on AI technology. Although these terms are often associated with AI buzzwords, in the case of the article on Coversica seemed to employ them legitimately rather than as mere marketing tactics. However, further investigation would be needed to determine if AI was used as a buzzword in the Wikipedia article of Orange Business, as it did not reveal how AI was integrated into their practices. While buzzwords like AI can attract consumer attention, it is vital to carefully examine the specific context and implementation to understand their genuine meaning and impact.

In the analysis of buzzwords, it is important to consider that terms are often associated with specific industries. In the analysis of two articles from the logistics industry, buzzwords were prominently used in the subsections describing the companies' services. The article on Flagler Global Logistics employed terms like "consolidation and deconsolidation," "multimodal transportation," and "multimodal distribution complex." The article about Daher utilized buzzwords such as "supply chain services" and "inbound, outbound & aftermarket logistic flows" to summarize their services. These buzzwords may serve as advertising tools, aiming to capture the attention of potential clients by highlighting unique selling points, specialized services, and infrastructure capabilities. It is also worth highlighting that these terms can also be used to reinforce companies' positions as experts in their respective areas, creating a sense of authority and professionalism. The use of technical language and industry jargon can also inadvertently exclude individuals who are not familiar with the intricacies of the logistics industry.

Finally, it was observed that two Wikipedia articles employed acronyms as buzzwords. The articles about Vecna Technologies and Digital Remedy specifically utilised acronyms as buzzwords. In the case of Vecna Technologies, the mention of acronyms such as HL7, X12, XML, and web-services without explaining their meanings can be seen as an attempt to impress the readers with technical terminology. These acronyms are commonly used in the healthcare and data exchange fields, but their specific meanings may not be readily understood by a general audience. By using these buzzwords, Vecna Technologies aimed to position itself as a provider of advanced and sophisticated solutions in the healthcare industry. Similarly, in the article about Digital Remedy the article specifically employs acronyms like IO (Insertion Order), ROAS (Return on Advertising Spend), CPA (Cost per Action), KPI (Key Performance Indicator), and OTT (Over-the-Top) as buzzwords. By using these industry-specific acronyms as buzzwords, Digital Remedy's

Wikipedia article aims to create an impression of technical expertise and insider knowledge within the advertising field. This can potentially exclude readers who are not familiar with these terms, reinforcing the idea that only industry insiders can fully understand and engage with their services.

### **2.2.3 Corporate social responsibility advertising**

The analysis of Wikipedia articles featuring subheadings related to corporate social responsibility provided valuable insights into the incorporation of social, environmental, ethical, human rights, and consumer concerns within the companies' Wikipedia articles. All ten articles were found to report on different concerns related to CSR advertising. For example, the Drew & Napier article highlighted their provision of complementary legal advice at legal clinics and their assistance to charities and non-profit organizations with legal matters, while Elders Limited, James B. Nutter & Company, and GoDaddy articles reported on their involvement in community support initiatives, such as restoring damaged property and supporting various charity projects, including the YMCA. Revlon, whose products are primarily marketed toward women, focused their philanthropy efforts on issues concerning women, such as breast cancer treatment and domestic violence. On the other hand, companies like Imerys, Herman Miller, Novelis, Graphik Dimensions, and CPL Aromas placed a strong emphasis on sustainability efforts, aligning with the environmental aspect of CSR. These examples demonstrate how reporting on CSR activities serves as a form of CSR advertising, allowing companies to showcase their commitment to sustainable and ethical practices, which can positively influence consumer perceptions and preferences.

The analysis further delved into the usage of keywords in CSR advertisements. The articles with the subheadings "Philanthropy" and "Corporate Social Responsibility" featured keywords such as "charities," "community initiatives," and "donating" while the four articles



which had the subheading “Sustainability” prominently featured keywords associated with environmental responsibility and sustainability. Terms such as “eco-friendly,” “organic,” “recycling,” “green electrical energy use,” “green design principles,” “eco-responsible,” and zero-initiatives like zero landfill disposal and zero air emissions were employed to draw attention to the companies’ commitment to sustainability. However, it is important to note that the mere use of these keywords does not guarantee the actual implementation or impact of the sustainability initiatives mentioned. A comprehensive review is necessary to assess the companies’ sustainability performances beyond surface-level claims. Therefore, the findings support the theory that CSR advertisements often include keywords related to the topic of concern, a deeper analysis is required to evaluate the companies’ actual sustainability practices and their impact on the environment.

The analysis also uncovered instances where CSR advertising employed vague and ambiguous language. Articles on Herman Miller and Graphik Dimensions featured broad claims about their sustainability initiatives, simply stating that they “engage in a number of them”. However, the specific details of these initiatives and their overall impact are not provided in the Wikipedia articles. By making broad claims about engaging in sustainability initiatives without providing specific information, these articles create an impression of the companies’ environmental consciousness and social responsibility.

On the other hand, Imerys’s CSR initiatives listed on Wikipedia reveal their active engagement in various projects aimed at sustainability and environmental conservation. Their efforts include landscape-scale restoration, biodiversity preservation, and greenhouse gas emissions reduction, showcasing their commitment to addressing environmental concerns. However, in this case as well, it is important to critically assess the overall impact of the company’s operations and the potential discrepancies between their CSR claims and their actual environmental footprint. Despite their CSR endeavours, Imerys operates in over

40 countries and maintains more than 230 industrial sites, which raises questions about the potential adverse effects that such a large-scale mineral extraction company may have on the environment. As the theory by Jahdi and Acikdilli (2009) suggests, minor CSR projects can sometimes overshadow the broader impact of a company's harmful actions. Therefore, further research is necessary to comprehensively evaluate the environmental impact of Imerys's mineral extraction activities and assess the efficacy of their CSR efforts in mitigating any negative effects.

#### **2.2.4 Puffery**

The analysis of the ten Wikipedia articles revealed the effective use of puffery to emphasise the desirable qualities and characteristics of the companies' products and services. Through the employment of exaggerated language, such as phrases like "popularized," "cutting-edge," "surpassing," and "rapid growth," the articles aimed to create an exaggerated sense of impact or influence. These linguistic choices emphasized superiority over competitors and showcased notable achievements, contributing to the perception of the products or services being promoted as exceptional. Numeric data and statistics, such as figures like "400 million" and "500,000 users per month," were also employed in the articles about CharityBuzz and EduBirdie to further enhance the impression of significance and impressiveness. As the numbers were presented without any specific references for comparison, it is evident that their addition was mostly intended to create a sense of impressiveness. Additionally, terms like "analytics and data science" and "research" were used in the articles to establish authority and credibility. However, the analysis of the Wikipedia article on "EduBirdie" revealed that the company's claimed "research" could not be obtained through any academic sources. This suggests that the mention of research might have been primarily for the purpose of gaining popularity and creating a perception of

credibility, rather than being based on verifiable academic studies. The observed linguistic features in the analysed Wikipedia articles demonstrate how puffery is employed to create a perception of exaggerated impact or influence, effectively highlighting the strengths, achievements, and unique selling points of the companies' products or services to capture attention and persuade audiences.

One unique example of puffery was found in the article about Craven A cigarettes which featured several vague and unsupported claims. The article asserted that "Craven A became a household name in over 120 countries" and implied that notable historical figures such as Charles de Gaulle and Muhammad Ali Jinnah were avid smokers of the brand. However, the article lacked substantiated evidence to support these claims suggest that puffery was used to enhance the brand's reputation. These findings further reinforce the understanding that puffery involves the use of language that may not align with factual reality to create a more positive perception of the product or service being advertised. The observed discrepancies between the claims made in the article and the lack of evidence to support them underscore the deceptive nature of puffery and its intention to make the brand, in this case, "Craven A," appear better than it truly is.

The results of the analysis also align with Preston's gradient of intensity in puffery in advertising. The use of subjective qualities such as "aspirational, stylish, modern," "very strong design identity," and "blends traditional and contemporary" in the article on W Hotels aligns with the category of "subjective qualities" in Preston's gradient. These descriptors aim to create a positive and attractive perception of the hotels, emphasizing their desirable attributes without making specific factual claims. Furthermore, the marketing claim in the article on LZR Racer that states it is the "world's fastest swimsuit" falls into the category of the strongest puffery, "best." This claim makes an exaggerated statement about the product's

performance, positioning it as the top-tier option in terms of speed and implying superiority over other swimsuits.

Furthermore, the findings align with the theoretical understanding of the Federal Trade Commission's approach to exaggerated or puffing representations. The analysed article on the "LZR Racer" swimsuit employed statements that strongly implied the product's significant role in the success of athletes wearing it during the Beijing Olympics, with a notable 94% of swimming races won in the suit. Additionally, it included the swimsuit's marketing claim as being "the world's fastest swimsuit." These statements aimed to create a perception of the swimsuit's exceptional performance and its role in the athletes' achievements. However, it should be noted that the average consumer would not interpret these claims as a guarantee that wearing the swimsuit would grant them the same level of success as professional athletes.

Puffery techniques were also strategically employed in the articles to emphasise desirable and distinctive attributes of the products or services. The article on "Ticketclever" strategically highlighted the qualifications and expertise of the company by mentioning that it employs three Oxford University alumni with advanced degrees. This statement aimed to enhance the perception of the company's credibility and expertise, making it more appealing to potential customers. Additionally, the "Smart Roadster" article employed puffery by associating the car's features with Formula 1. Specifically, the mention of "Formula 1-style paddle-shifters" implied that the car possesses advanced technology and performance capabilities similar to those found in professional racing vehicles. By making this association, the article added a desirable attribute to the car, suggesting that it offers an exhilarating and sporty driving experience.

Moreover, puffery techniques were observed in three articles to create a sense of innovation and uniqueness by highlighting distinctive features, advanced technology, and

exclusive qualities. The article on the Smart Roadster utilised puffery by emphasizing the unconventional nature of the car's design. Descriptive phrases such as “radicality of the car’s design” and comparing it to the iconic bubble cars of the 1950s positioned the Smart Roadster as a ground-breaking and innovative vehicle. These statements aimed to portray the car as a one-of-a-kind product, setting it apart from other vehicles on the European market. Similarly, the “LZR Racer” article employed puffery to highlight the swimsuit’s technological advancements. The claim that it was “patented in Italy and protected worldwide” suggested a high level of innovation and uniqueness. By emphasizing these exclusive qualities, the article aimed to position the LZR Racer as a superior product in the market. Additionally, the FaceKoo article featured a statement emphasizing the unique nature of its face recognition system. By stating that FaceKoo offers a “unique way of face recognition system to connect each member to create a social circle,” the article implied that FaceKoo's system is distinct from others available. This statement aimed to establish the superiority or distinctiveness of FaceKoo’s face recognition technology.

Lastly, two of the selected articles for analysis did not align with any of the identified use cases associated with puffery. The article about Furlane (shoe) showed minimal signs of puffery, with one instance being the claim that the shoes have been worn at the Venice Biennale, a well-known cultural exhibition. This may add an element of exclusivity and cultural significance to the product. On the other hand, the article about Winklevoss Capital Management included a claim that the brothers began buying bitcoin when its value was in the single digits, which could be seen as puffery. This statement emphasizes the Winklevoss brothers’ foresight and potentially implies significant financial gains.

## 2.3 Discussion

The analysis of comparative advertising techniques in Wikipedia articles identified the prevalence of positive descriptors, comparative degrees and constructions. These language-related strategies were frequently observed, likely due to the keyword “superior” used to select relevant articles for analysis, which aligned with both categories. The prominence of positive descriptors and comparative language can be attributed to their effectiveness in conveying advantages and superiority in comparative advertising.

In contrast to Goddard’s (2001: 104) observation that readers tend to fill in missing comparative elements themselves, the use of explicit comparative degrees with mentioned products was found in the analysed articles. This indicates a departure from implied comparisons and suggests a more direct approach in conveying advantages. However, it is important to note that Wikipedia’s content policies strictly prohibit overt advertising, which may explain the absence of implied comparisons and superlative degrees. The focus of Wikipedia articles appears to be more on relative advantages rather than claiming absolute superiority.

The analysis revealed that technical terminology and specific details were used subtly to imply advantages over competitors, rather than for blatant advertising purposes. By incorporating such information, the articles aimed to enhance the perception of superiority and highlight unique features or qualities of the products or services.

Direct comparisons with competitors were relatively rare in the analysed articles, with only one instance found. It is possible that indirect comparisons, made either to a whole market segment or by highlighting relative advantages, were deemed more effective in conveying the desired message while avoiding explicit advertising.

Furthermore, brand positioning strategies aimed at appealing to specific target audiences were observed in articles about products targeting niche consumers. The language

used in these articles resonated with the preferences and needs of the target audience, aiming to establish a unique value position and differentiate themselves from competitors.

Turning to the analysis of buzzwords, it was evident that they tend to be vague in nature. This deliberate vagueness serves the purpose of creating an impression and impressing consumers. The use of buzzwords can be attributed to the fact that Wikipedia contributors often gather information from other sources, which may themselves employ buzzwords as a common practice. However, these contributors may not critically evaluate or question the meaninglessness of these buzzwords when incorporating them into the articles.

The buzzword “AI” was in line with Goddard’s (2001:105) theory, which suggested that certain phrases like “climate solutions” and “climate responsibility” can function as buzzwords in an era marked by heightened concerns about pollution and the environment. However, it became evident that not every term serves as a buzzword in every case, despite some words being commonly used as such. Failing to recognize this distinction could have led to the misclassification of the article on Conversica as containing buzzwords.

The association of buzzwords with specific industries aligns with Standing's (2007: 517) theory, which highlights the use of buzzwords as “expert language” that excludes laypeople and reinforces the idea that specialized knowledge is required to comprehend and engage in these industries. Companies’ use of industry-specific buzzwords aims to capture the attention of potential clients by positioning themselves as knowledgeable and experienced in their respective fields.

Additionally, the analysis revealed the use of acronyms as buzzwords in the analysed Wikipedia articles. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that this strategy can alienate readers who are unfamiliar with the specific terminology, thereby compromising the article’s informing and promoting functions.

Articles featuring Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) advertising highlighted the inclusion of social, environmental, human rights, and consumer concerns in the companies' practices. This aligned with the definition of CSR provided by the European Commission (2011: 6), which encompasses these same issues. Furthermore, the analysis revealed that CSR advertising strategies often make use of similar keywords. This finding is consistent with the theory that CSR advertisements frequently employ keywords that are relevant to the specific areas of concern. As Kwon and Lee (2021: 706) pointed out, terms like “eco-friendly,” “organic,” and “recycling” are commonly used in CSR advertisements to highlight the companies' efforts in environmental conservation.

The inclusion of companies' CSR efforts on their Wikipedia pages can be attributed to the finding by Chernev and Blair (2015) that third-party sources conveying a company's benevolent actions are often perceived as more credible and authentic sources of information. Wikipedia, being commonly perceived as a reliable source of information, may have been considered an appropriate platform to highlight and showcase these CSR initiatives.

The analysis also revealed the use of vague language in the CSR sections of the articles. This deliberate vagueness enables companies to align themselves with the concept of sustainability without being held accountable for measurable outcomes or specific actions. However, the findings on the article on Imerys, which make claims about addressing environmental concerns while operating in 40 countries and maintaining 240 industrial sites, align with the theory by Jahdi and Acikdilli (2009: 107) which suggests that minor CSR projects can sometimes overshadow the broader impact of a company's harmful actions.

The analysis of Wikipedia articles containing puffery revealed a prevalent use of this technique to emphasize the desirable qualities and characteristics of the companies' products and services. These findings align with the theoretical understanding of puffery as a common



advertising technique. The linguistic features observed in the analysed articles demonstrate how puffery is used to create a perception of exaggerated impact or influence, effectively highlighting the strengths, achievements, and unique selling points of the products or services to capture attention and persuade audiences. Furthermore, the results of the analysis support Preston's (1998: 54–55) gradient of intensity in puffery, as evidenced by the use of subjective qualities in the W Hotels article and a strong puffery claim in the LZR Racer article. Certain instances of puffery in Wikipedia articles can be observed as “riding the coattails” when they mention renowned organizations and institutions such as Formula One and Oxford University. In these cases, the articles may lack sufficient credibility on their own and have to rely on the reputation and credibility of these well-established entities to bolster their own claims. Additionally, the analysis highlights the limitations of using tags to identify issues in Wikipedia articles, as most tags do not specify which sentences or words are problematic. This suggests the need for more specific guidelines and interventions to address the use of puffery in Wikipedia content.

Overall, the factors that have contributed to the results of this study boil down to actual, no matter how minor or major, attempts of advertising on Wikipedia made directly on the behalf of companies themselves or by individuals for whose interests it is to present these companies and their products in the positive light. The second contributing factor is the inadequate following of Wikipedia's terms of service, especially concerning Wikipedia's NPOV policies. The lack of awareness and compliance with Wikipedia's NPOV policies has allowed for the inclusion of biased and promotional content within the articles analysed in this study.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis aimed to investigate the language-related aspects of advertising frequently used to promote companies on Wikipedia. The study focused on four specific aspects of advertising: comparative advertising, buzzwords, corporate social responsibility advertising, and puffery, providing an overview of how they were employed for advertising purposes.

The motivation behind this thesis was the intriguing nature of tags on Wikipedia, which often indicated the presence of advertising. The literature review in this thesis briefly discusses the functions of advertising and then delves into the linguistic characteristics of the four advertising categories chosen for analysis.

Upon analysing 40 Wikipedia articles that had been marked as potentially containing advertising, it was found that nearly all of them indeed contained sections that could be seen as advertising. However, for three articles (Conversica, Winklevoss Capital Management, and Furlane), it was not determined with complete certainty whether they contained advertising content.

The analysis of the four language-related aspects of advertising answered the research question and revealed that each aspect employed unique techniques to convey advertising messages to Wikipedia readers. Comparative advertising articles utilized comparative degrees, technical terminology, specific details, positive descriptors, and brand positioning strategies. These linguistic choices and tactics aimed to highlight superiority, substantiate claims, differentiate from competitors, and resonate with target audiences.

Buzzwords were observed to lack clear meanings and intentions due to their vague nature. They were used in contexts associated with specific industries and often employed as acronyms. These strategies aimed to convey a sense of expertise in respective industries and enhance the professional image of the companies.

In corporate social responsibility strategies, companies reported on their CSR-related activities, such as donating to charities and integrating environmental sustainability projects into their business operations. Vague language and keywords associated with CSR advertising were commonly employed, although the study highlighted the need for further analysis to assess the actual impact behind these keywords.

Puffery was identified as a technique used to create an exaggerated sense of impact or influence regarding the businesses and products discussed in Wikipedia articles. It was also employed to emphasize desirable and distinctive attributes of products and services.

Overall, it is evident that despite Wikipedia's strict guidelines against advertising content, both subtle and overt promotional content manages to find its way onto the platform. With its vast collection of information contributed by numerous volunteers, Wikipedia serves as a primary source for a diverse range of language-related research projects.

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## RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL  
ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

**Mario Rimmel**

**The analysis of Language-Related Advertising Techniques on Wikipedia**  
**Wikipedias esinevate keele ja lingvistikaga seotud reklaamivõtete kasutamise analüüs**  
**Bakalaureusetöö**

2023

Lehekülgede arv: 45

**Annotatsioon:**

Käesolev bakalaureusetöö uurib Wikipedias esinevate keelega seotud reklaamivõtete kasutamist. Töö eesmärk oli Wikipedia artiklite analüüsi tulemuste abil anda ülevaade neljast reklaamitehnikast, mida tihti kasutatakse Wikipedias toodete ja teenuste reklaamimiseks.

Töö jaguneb kahte peatükki: kirjanduse ülevaade ja empiiriline uuring. Kirjanduse ülevaates kirjeldatakse reklaamide rolli, antakse ülevaade neljast keelega seonduvast reklaamivõttest, Wikipediast ja Wikipedia neutraalsest vaatepunktist lähtumise põhimõttest ning eelnevatest Wikipedia ja reklaamiga seotud uurimistöödest. Empiirilises uuringus antakse tutvustatakse antud uuringu meetodikat ning analüüsitakse töö tulemusi. Empiirilise uuringu osa lõpeb tulemuste aruteluga.

Analüüsi aluseks valiti koostatud meetodika alusel 40 Wikipedia artiklit. Pea kõigis artiklites leiti reklaamile vastavaid keelelisi tunnuseid. Analüüsi aluseks võetud neljast reklaamitehnikast ilmnisid eraldi unikaalsed keelelised tunnused, mille abil reklaamile vastavat teksti Wikipedias levitati.

**Märksõnad:**

Inglise keel ja keeleteadus, Wikipedia, lingvistiline analüüs, reklaamikeel

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