

Hedges in TikTok Advertisements: Their Persuasive Impact on the Viewers

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Abstract—Hedges introduce caution or qualification into statements, contributing to nuanced and flexible communication by expressing varying degrees of confidence. This study analyzed the use of hedges in TikTok advertisements and their persuasive impact on viewers. An exploratory sequential design was employed, beginning with a qualitative phase analyzing ten TikTok ads for hedge usage, followed by a quantitative phase using a survey to measure their persuasive impact on viewers. Thirty-five students of Tangub City Global College (TCGC) participated as respondents. Findings revealed that TikTok ads frequently use hedges such as noun phrases, modals verbs like can, will, and should, adverbial phrases like *as fast as*, subjective phrases like *what I love about this*, and conditional clauses like *if symptoms persist*. These hedges manage expectations, convey flexibility, and acknowledge uncertainty. Viewers generally found hedges to enhance the persuasiveness of advertisements, though some had reservations about complete trustworthiness of the products. Recommendations include engaging students in discussions on the ethical implications of hedges, integrating media literacy into education, and encouraging consumers to seek additional information about advertised products or services.

Keywords—Hedges, Media Literacy, Persuasive Impact, TikTok Advertisements.

INTRODUCTION

Hedges are linguistic tools strategically employed to introduce caution, uncertainty, or qualification into statements, mitigating absolute certainty. These signal awareness of the information's distinct nature, fostering nuance, modesty, or flexibility in communication. In both written and spoken discourse, hedges shape tone for diplomatic interaction. As linguistic nuances, they contribute to communication richness, expressing varying degrees of confidence and reflecting the complexity of ideas.

As highlighted by Thuy (2018), the strategic use of hedges in academic writing not only helps convey writer's ideologies, opinions, and evaluations of issues but also serves as a persuasive tool to encourage readers to accept their claims. A study on TED Talk speeches underscores the persuasive impact of hedges, emphasizing their nuanced role in influential oral communication (Jovic et al., 2023). An exploration of English hedges across diverse first-language contexts reveals extensive research initiatives spanning student papers, dissertations, and journal articles. This comprehensive examination sheds light on how the application of hedges influences reader perception in various academic writing formats (Adrian and Fajiri, 2023). Samaie et al.'s (2014) research on hedge usage in the introduction sections of academic research articles among Persian and English native speakers underscores

the nuanced ways writers from different linguistic backgrounds employ these devices, offering practical insights for language learners. Furthermore, the prevalence of hedges in English research articles over Arabic counterparts, influencing how Arabic learners approach acquiring academic writing skills in an English-speaking educational environment (Kheryadi et al., 2022). The scrutiny of hedges in academic writing among doctoral students from Pakistan highlights the nuanced application of hedging strategies in diverse linguistic and cultural contexts (Shafqat et al., 2022). Despite linguistic and cultural differences, the shared tendency towards cautious and tentative language expression among Vietnamese and English writers, underscores the complex and universal nature of hedging as a rhetorical tool in academic communication.

The existing literature has significantly advanced the understanding of hedges within academic discourses. Despite these valuable insights, a notable gap exists in exploring the persuasive impact of hedges in non-academic settings, specifically within platforms like TikTok advertisements. This exclusion limits the understanding of how hedging strategies function and provides impact in less formal and more interactive communication environments where brevity, informality, and visual elements play crucial roles. Investigating the persuasive impact of hedges in non-academic settings like TikTok advertisements is

essential for comprehending the role of linguistic strategies in shaping consumer behavior. This enhances the researcher's understanding of nuanced linguistic techniques in persuasive communication, informing more effective advertising techniques. Additionally, while the current body of literature provides a broad international perspective, there is a distinct lack of research at the national level, especially within the unique context of the Philippines. This research gap emphasizes the need for more localized studies to understand the specific dynamics of hedge in non-academic communication within the unique context of the Philippines. This research gap emphasizes the need for more localized studies to understand the specific dynamics of hedge use in non-academic communication within the country.

This study aimed to investigate the strategic use of hedges in platforms like TikTok advertisements, going beyond mere identification to explore their impact on viewer perceptions in influential communication contexts. Specifically, the research sought to answer the following questions:

1. What hedges are used in TikTok advertisements?
2. What is the persuasive impact of using these hedges on viewers?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed an exploratory sequential design. This comprised two distinct phases, beginning with a qualitative exploration to comprehend the nuanced aspects of hedges in TikTok advertisements, namely: Loperamide HCI Imodium, Y.O.U. Beauty Acne Plus Oil Control Clay Mask, Neutrogena Hydro Boost Serum, Cetaphil Body Lotion, Avon Make-up, Dove Advanced Keratin Treatment Mask, Cici App, Head & Shoulder Shampoo, Maybelline New York Lumi Matte Foundation, and Dr. Leo Facial Cleansers. Through content analysis, this phase aimed to identify and understand hedge usage. The subsequent quantitative phase was guided by the findings of the qualitative exploration and involved a survey to measure the persuasive impact of hedges on TikTok viewers. Thirty-five research respondents for the quantitative phase were selected through purposive sampling based on specific criteria tailored to the research objectives. The sample primarily included TikTok shoppers or active users of TikTok within the age group of 16-34, ensuring a firsthand understanding of the platform's dynamics. To further enhance the study's depth, participants specifically consisted of BSEd-English students from Tangub City Global College who

possessed a rich understanding of linguistic nuances. The primary research instruments for this study involved recordings and transcriptions of ten (10) TikTok ads for a detailed linguistic analysis of the spoken discourse within the advertisements and a survey questionnaire with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.948 which is designed to measure the persuasive impact of hedges in TikTok advertisements. In the data gathering procedure, the researchers first examined the nuances of how hedges were employed within the selected ads. This involved identifying and categorizing instances of hedges based on type and contextual relevance. Then, they sought permission from the college administration to administer the survey questionnaires to the selected respondents. The survey questionnaires were distributed to the respondents, and their responses were statistically analyzed through weighted mean to interpret the respondents' perceptions of the persuasiveness of hedges in TikTok advertisements.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Presented in this section are the analysis of data, interpretations and implications of the findings. All these were meant to answer the research questions: What hedges are used in TikTok advertisements? and What is the persuasive impact of using these hedges on viewers?

Problem 1: What hedges are used in TikTok advertisements?

In the qualitative phase, there were a total of 12 hedges found in the TikTok advertisements. These were the following:

1. As fast as
2. As low as
3. Can
4. Feel
5. I don't know who needs to hear this
6. If symptoms persist
7. Normal foundation
8. Should
9. Up to
10. What I love about this
11. Will
12. When used regularly

Hedge 1: As fast as

The phrase as fast as is an adverbial phrase that introduces a comparison without making a definitive claim about the exact timeframe or duration. In the Imodium advertisement, the phrase "As fast as 1 hour following a single 4mg dose" suggests a potential

timeframe for symptom relief but acknowledges that individual responses may vary. In the Neutrogena advertisement, the phrase "...in as fast as 4 weeks, bye dull skin" suggests that some users may experience visible brightening and minimized pores within the specified timeframe of 4 weeks, but it acknowledges that individual results may vary. It allows for the possibility that it might take longer for some individuals to see the desired effects.

According to Afreh et al. (2017), adverbial phrases such as as fast as are categorized based on their apparent function. One such category indicates a lack of knowledge on the part of the writer. This means that the writer uses language to suggest uncertainty or limited information about the topic, thereby hedging their statements to acknowledge the possibility of incomplete understanding or data.

Hedge 2: As low as

The phrase as low as is an adverbial phrase that implies a potential price range, without making a definitive claim about the exact cost. In the Dove product advertisement, the statement "... I got my hair repaired for as low as P449.00" suggests that the price of the product could be to a minimum of P449.00, but it does not guarantee that this will be the actual price for everyone or in all circumstances.

Advertisers often utilize hedge phrases before numerical expressions to avoid sounding overly certain (Shi & Li, 2019). For instance, the inclusion of the phrase as low as preceding a numerical value can result in ambiguous information within ads, leading to less precise language.

Hedge 3: Can

The modal verb can introduces a possibility or capability rather than certainty. In the Neutrogena advertisement, the use of can in the statement "You can glow" suggests that the potential for glowing is there, but it does not guarantee that every individual will experience it or that it will happen immediately. In the Avon advertisement, the modal verb in the statement, "Y'all can stop worrying about makeup being bad for your skin," suggests that the product has the ability to ease their concerns about makeup's potential negative effects on the skin, but it does not guarantee that it will do so. In the Cici App advertisement, the statement "Cici can help you solve any academic problems..." suggests the possibility or capability of the app to help with academic problems, but it does not guarantee that it will solve every problem or meet every

requirement. In the Dr. Leo facial cleanser advertisement, the use of can in the statements "It can also remove your dead skin," and "...it can be used as deep cleaner..." suggests that the product has the ability to fix someone's skin but does not guarantee that it will do so.

Adrian and Fajiri (2023) argued that the preference for using can may indicate a tendency to prioritize the expression of possibility or capability rather than introducing an element of certainty. It helps to soften statements or reduce the strength of an assertion. Making the statement less certain turns it into just a possibility, weakens the claim (Incharoensak & Gampper, 2019).

Hedge 4: Feel

The verb feel suggests a subjective sensation rather than being an objective fact. In the Dove hair mask advertisement, the verb hedge in the statement "... my hair is starting to feel smooth..." introduces subjectivity and personal experience. It suggests that the smoothness of the hair is perceived by the speaker as a sensation rather than being an objective fact. While the speaker perceives the hair as feeling smooth, it allows for the possibility that she may have different perceptions or experiences from others when using the product. In the Dr. Leo facial cleanser advertisement, the use of feel in the statement "My skin feels so soft and clean," suggests that softness and cleanliness of the skin is perceived by the speaker as a sensation rather than being an objective fact.

Ardhianti et al. (2023) proposed that verbs such as feel and think belong to a category of cognitive verbs linked to the author's mental processes. This indicates that the author's propositions are based on subjectivity rather than empirical evidence.

Hedge 5: I don't know who needs to hear this

The clause serves as a hedge because it softens the assertion by suggesting uncertainty about who the statement applies to. In the Avon advertisement, the clause implies that the speaker is unsure of the audience's needs or concerns, allowing for the possibility that not everyone may share the same perspective.

The phrase I don't know who needs to hear this illustrates the author's non-commitment and recognition of their incomplete knowledge. This phrase shows that the author acknowledges their limited

understanding due to a lack of information about the audience, making it a hedge (Afreh et al., 2017).

Hedge 6: If symptoms persist

The clause if symptoms persist is a conditional clause that indicates that the product may not be effective for everyone, and that professional medical advice should be sought if the condition persists. This clause is used in the Imodium advertisement. This hedge ensures that the speaker is aware of the limitations of the product and encourages the consumers to seek appropriate medical guidance if needed.

Conditional clauses serve as non-lexical hedges, creating hypothetical scenarios that indicate the author's doubts about the claim's certainty. For instance, a recommendation from a doctor depends on the severity of symptoms. If there are no severe symptoms, no recommendation would be made. This shows the speculative nature of the statement, suggesting that the claim is not entirely certain or applicable in all situations (Agarwal & Yu, 2010).

Hedge 7: Normal foundation

The noun phrase normal foundation in the phrase "made 27% lighter than normal foundation," used in the Maybelline New York foundation advertisement, is a hedge that shows tentativeness, not stating the exact weight or how heavy normal foundations are. While the current product gives a specific percentage, it does not mean every single new foundation will be exactly 27% lighter than normal foundation. Instead of giving an exact weight of the normal foundation, it gives a rough idea and recognizes that there could be differences between products.

Afreh et al. (2017) stated that epistemic nouns serve to hedge the writer's proposition by suggesting that their stance is merely an opinion rather than a definitive statement of fact or likelihood.

Hedge 8: Should

The modal verb should softens the assertion by indicating a suggestion or expectation. In the Head & Shoulders advertisement, the statement, "This should balance the scalp and also remove dandruff," the speaker is suggesting or expecting that the product is effective based on their perspective. It allows for the possibility that individual results may vary and that the shampoo will balance the scalp as the speaker expected.

According to Incharoensak and Gampper (2019), epistemic should expresses an assessment of probability

based on the writer's subjective interpretation of facts, which is less tentative than would. In other words, it concerns the probability of events based on reasoning or logical inference, reflecting the writer's predictions or conclusions (Ardhianti et al., 2023).

Hedge 9: Up to

The adverbial phrase up to acknowledges that individual experiences may differ without asserting a specific timeframe. The advertisement for Cetaphil body lotion included the phrase up to 48 hours suggesting a maximum duration of hydration. That implies that some users may experience hydration for less than 48 hours. It allows for the possibility that individual experiences may vary and that not everyone will achieve the full 48 hours of hydration. This is also used in Maybelline foundation advertisement.

The phrase up to 30 hours suggests a range of possible results without promising the exact timeframe of the outcome. It poses that while some people might get a full 30 hours of wear from the product, others might get slightly less.

In Dr. Leo facial cleanser's advertisement, the phrase up to 50% off is a hedge that suggests the maximum discount available without guaranteeing that all products or purchases will receive the full 50% discount. It implies that some items could have smaller discounts.

This is supported by Shi and Li's (2019) study emphasizing the notion that incorporating hedge phrases like up to followed by numerical data in advertisements results in vague information, making the language less precise.

Hedge 10: What I love about this

This phrase is an example of a subjective phrase which invites the audience to consider their perspective rather than presenting an absolute fact. In the Y.O.U. Clay Mask advertisement, the phrase what I love about this serves as a hedge because by framing the statement in this way, the speaker softens the assertion and invites the audience to consider their personal perspective rather than presenting the information as an absolute truth.

This is supported by Wang (2016) which indicated that personal statements or opinions, along with the use of first-person pronouns and modal particles, signal uncertainty or hesitation. Such phrases, like I think, as far as I can tell, I suppose, and I believe, help soften assertions and express a personal viewpoint.

Hedge 11: Will

The modal verb will expresses probability rather than guaranteeing to achieve the result. In the Y.O.U. Clay Mask advertisement, the use of you will enhances the sense of relatability. The modal verb will softens the assertion by expressing ability or possibility, not guaranteeing that every individual will love the product. It was also used in Dr. Leo facial cleanser's advertisement. The use of will in the statement, "It will make your skin brighter," suggests potential rather than certainty. The product may fix the user's skin but does not guarantee that it will do so.

This is supported by Ardianti et al. (2023) who argued that the use of the epistemic will conveys the author's genuine intent or belief while also softening the assertion, thereby indicating a lack of complete certainty about the proposition.

Hedge 12: When used regularly

The conditional phrase when used regularly expresses that consistent use of the product is necessary to achieve desired results. In the Cetaphil body lotion advertisement, the use of the conditional phrase indicates that users must use the product consistently to achieve a well-hydrated skin. This shows that results may not be immediate and may require ongoing use over time. This hedge helps manage expectations by indicating that the desired outcome may not be achieved with inconsistent use of the product.

von Fintel & Gillies (2015) argued that conditional hedges represent sensible and practical methods for conveying a degree of uncertainty. They convey restricted meaning, and it holds true under certain conditions.

Problem 2: What is the persuasive impact of using these hedges on users?

Table 1. Persuasive Impact of Using Hedges among Viewers

Indicators	Mean	Implication
The presence of hedges in the ad increases the credibility of the product/service.	2.69	Moderately persuasive
The use of hedges makes the information in the ad more trustworthy.	2.40	Slightly persuasive
The use of hedges in the ad makes the message more relatable.	2.66	Moderately persuasive
Hedges used in the ad cause viewers to be more cautious about the product or service.	3.14	Moderately persuasive
Hedges in the ad contribute to a more engaging and memorable viewing experience.	2.71	Moderately persuasive
The video advertisement effectively utilized hedges to create a positive impact on viewer's attitude toward the product/service.	2.91	Moderately persuasive
Hedges in the video advertisement align with the target audience's preferences.	2.71	Moderately persuasive
Through hedges, viewers are very inclined to share the ad to others.	2.69	Moderately persuasive
The use of hedges in the ad is effective that led viewers to have the urge to buy the product or avail the service.	2.91	Moderately persuasive

The table above shows that the inclusion of hedges in advertisements has a generally persuasive impact on viewer perceptions and behaviors. The highest mean score 3.14 indicates that viewers generally agree that hedges used in the ads cause viewers to be more cautious about the product or service, suggesting that hedges are moderately persuasive. This implies that viewers see hedges favorably, perceiving them as enhancing the credibility and approachability of the ads. On the other

hand, the lowest mean 2.40 indicates viewers disagree that the use of hedges made the ad information more trustworthy, making it slightly persuasive. This further implies that viewers perceive hedges as slightly diminishing trust in the brand due to the perceived indirectness of the message. The grand mean of 2.76 reveals the viewers' overall agreement, suggesting that while hedges are moderately persuasive, they are effective in enhancing engagement, aligning with the

audience's preferences, and potentially influencing attitudes toward the product or service. This further implies that viewers see hedges favorably, perceiving them as enhancing the credibility and approachability of the TikTok ads.

According to Oba and Berger (2022), different types of hedges can either enhance or diminish message persuasiveness and perception. They suggest that hedges presented in a personal manner are more convincing and that hedges do not always reduce persuasion. Vandyke et al. (2023) and Aleksić (2014) suggest that hedging can positively affect trust in the message, brand company, and attitude toward the product. It makes advertisements seem more realistic and less exaggerated, which aids in building consumer trust. This explains why audiences respond positively to hedges that enhance the credibility and relatability of advertised products or services, leading to increased engagement, and influencing purchasing decisions. However, excessive and misleading use of hedges can decrease persuasiveness due to perceived uncertainty or lack of confidence in the product. Orazi and Chan (2020) found that the use of hedges through vague and lack of specific claims without specific evidence reduce consumer trust when disconfirmation arises. This is also supported by Ahmed et al. (2025) who highlighted that exaggerated and ambiguous claims lead to declines in consumer trust and reduced brand loyalty. Consumers may see this as the brand's lack of confidence in its products. This posits that hedges can also erode viewer's trust, highlighting the importance for advertisers and speakers to use them judiciously.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, they reveal that hedges in TikTok advertisements are effectively used to shape viewer perceptions and behaviors. Viewers respond positively to hedges, indicating they enhance the credibility and relatability of advertised products or services. This positive response prompts engagement and can influence purchasing decisions. The impact on trustworthiness underscores the need for careful balance in the use of hedges.

Advertisers must ensure they maintain credibility while using hedges to build consumer confidence. Moreover, overusing hedges can undermine this trust, making the message appear less direct and confident. Therefore, strategic use of hedges is crucial for optimizing advertisement effectiveness on TikTok.

The following recommendations were drawn after carefully analyzing the findings:

- Students are encouraged to engage in discussions about the ethical implications of using hedges in communication. They may reflect on whether it is critical to use language techniques that may manipulate or influence other's perceptions, like hedges.
- Teachers are encouraged to integrate media literacy into lesson plans across subjects and use real-life examples of hedges to help students develop skills in analyzing and interpreting media message, including advertisements.
- Educational institutions are recommended to ensure that media literacy education is incorporated into the curriculum at all grade levels to equip students with the skills needed to navigate media messages effectively.
- Consumers and viewers may seek additional information about products or services beyond what is presented in advertisements, including reading reviews or conducting research.
- Future researchers are encouraged to investigate whether the use of hedges can increase the viewer reach or click-through on TikTok video advertisements.

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