

INVESTIGATING THE CREATION PROCESS IN COPYWRITING: A PERSPECTIVE FROM CLASSROOM PRACTICE

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Abstract.

With the increasing use of social media, brands are competing to promote themselves in the vast market by maximizing the use of advertising to increase brand awareness, attract customers' attention and interest, as well as encourage potential customers to take action. Nowadays, in addition to being visually compelling, the brands' advertisements must also convey the brands' value and establish relationship with their customers. To accomplish that, the copywriters' role in utilizing the power of words to promote the brand becomes increasingly important. Utilizing descriptive qualitative method, this study aimed to provide insight on the copy creation process in copywriting for brands from the perspective of its practice in a classroom setting. The study implemented Shaw's (2012) copywriting process, and 31 junior-year university students were assigned with target audience profiling, tone of voice analysis, as well as word bank and brand dictionary analysis of chosen brands prior to creating copies for the brand's content marketing. After conducting the analysis, the students then created copies tailored to match the brand identity, tone of voice, and target audience. The outcome of the content marketing copies created by the students showed a variety of lexical characteristics and syntactic features utilized, with most copies relying on simple sentence structures to ease reader's understanding while incorporating words that meaning-wise reflected the brand's tone of voice.

Keywords: creation process, copywriting, classroom practice

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly competitive market, brands are competing to promote themselves and make themselves stand out. The role of advertising becomes increasingly important as it can greatly assist in increasing brand awareness, capturing a target audience's attention and interest, and persuading potential customers to take particular action (Omoruyi & Chinomona, 2019). Brands with effective advertising will have increased visibility in a crowded marketplace. Aside from that, advertising can also be done as an attempt to build, measure, and manage the value(s) a brand adds to its product or service, as well as establish a relationship with its customers. By doing this, advertising assists in increasing customer loyalty, promoting higher sales, and providing a greater competitive advantage (Keller, 2013). It also helps differentiate the brand. Belch and Belch (2017) supported this by stating that if done consistently and strategically, advertising enables customers to recall a certain brand more easily and influence their purchase decisions. Considering that, it is essential for brands to create a well thought-out and appealing advertising.

Aside from being visually attractive, a brand's advertisement must successfully convey the brand's values or messages. It should also attempt to establish relationships or create a connection with the target audience. To accomplish that, during the advertisement's crafting process, there should be a careful

selection and combination of the visual and verbal components used in the advertisement. Visual components (e.g., pictures and illustrations) tend to be used to grab the audience's attention quickly and establish an emotional connection, while verbal components (e.g., taglines or captions) are used primarily to communicate certain messages or values. A good combination of both elements makes the advertisement more memorable for the audience, and this may result in a change in the audience's emotions, attitudes, or even purchasing decisions to be more inclined to that specific brand (Mzoughi & Abdelhak, 2012; Phillips & McQuarrie, 2004).

The media landscape has significantly changed in recent years, which allows brands to advertise themselves and reach customers in more ways. With a wide range of options, from promotional emails, blogs, small websites, interactive displays, to various social media, customers can now choose which messages they want to see. Consumers nowadays pick and filter the ads they receive and are more interested in visually appealing content that is in line with their interests (Sela, 2024). Creating interesting and relevant content remains important. However, amidst hundreds of stunning visuals that consumers encounter on a daily basis, the significance of an advertisement is still determined by the message it conveys and how it is expressed. Hence, a brand cannot solely rely on visual attractiveness in its advertisements to make them effective. Rather, it should be complemented with a message that is clearly targeted, relevant to the audience, and inspiring, which can be accomplished through copywriting. The copy's clarity, accuracy, and relevance to the audience are the important aspects that need to be considered to communicate the brand's message successfully (Conn, 2020).

The role of copywriter is vital in creating engaging and persuasive copies as they need to craft messages that not only attract attention but also persuade and motivate the audience to take action. The copywriter has to deeply understand the target audience (Bly, 2005) and create copies that communicate the brand's message in an emotionally appealing way and persuasive enough to generate action from the consumers (Sugarman, 2006). Considering the copywriter's important role, it is important for them to have knowledge not only about language but also their target audience.

As one of the jobs that currently remain in demand, it is imperative for future copywriters to be equipped with the required basic knowledge of brand and copywriting. A study by Guo and Jiang (2023) found that students who received training in brand analysis and copywriting were better equipped to create effective advertising copy. In the shaping of future copywriters in a classroom, this can be accomplished by providing students lessons about understanding a brand, analyzing the important aspects in a brand and the target audience, and executing the results of their analysis with copies as the outcome. This process enables the students to develop the skills needed to create compelling messages that resonate with target audiences. Equipping students with these skills will also help them to prepare to succeed in the dynamic field of advertising.

Adapting Shaw's (2012) concept of the copywriting process, the researcher formulated a task-based lesson and assignments focusing on enhancing student's ability in brand and target audience analysis as well as copywriting. This paper is an ongoing research report investigating the copy creation process of university students learning copywriting. It offers insights into how students are taught to analyze brands and their target audience, as well as creating an effective copy based on their analysis results. It also aims to provide more insight into the methods and strategies used to train future copywriters.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this study, the author employed two main theories, namely Bloom's taxonomy of learning as elaborated by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) and the copywriting process adapted from Shaw (2012).

2.1 Bloom's taxonomy of learning

Bloom's taxonomy of learning is a framework which categorizes educational goals into six levels of complexity. The taxonomy, revised by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) to make it more relevant to 21st-

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century education, emphasizes the active nature of learning and helps teachers design curriculum and assessments that promote higher-order thinking skills. The six levels in the revised taxonomy include remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating.

The first level in Bloom's revised taxonomy is remembering, in which students look back or recollect facts, basic concepts, or terms in particular topics. Despite knowing and being able to recollect those aspects, at this level, students do not necessarily understand those facts, concepts, or terms. The focus in this level relies on getting back or remembering relevant knowledge from long-term memory. As this level involves the activity of memorizing, this level acts as a means of building basic knowledge that students can recall when doing more advanced learning tasks in the upper levels of learning (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001).

The second level of Bloom's revised taxonomy is understanding, where students go beyond simply memorizing information. In this level, students comprehend the meaning of previously attained information, and it allowed them to interpret, explain, classify, summarize, infer, compare information, or provide examples related to the said information. Several examples of the student's accomplishment in this level would be the student's ability to explain the main idea of a text, interpret a graph, or summarize a passage in their own words. By understanding the materials taught, students would be able to apply their knowledge in new situations as well as transfer that knowledge into different contexts (Anderson & Krahtwohl, 2001; Mayer, 2002). This level of learning is vital as it is a level where students learn to connect different concepts and gain a bigger picture of certain context and situations, which are important for deeper learning and problem-solving.

The third level of Bloom's revised taxonomy is applying. In this level, students use their knowledge, especially theoretical knowledge, in new situations to solve problems or complete tasks in practical ways. Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) noted that this step is also critical as it allows students to demonstrate what they have learned in practical, meaningful ways. This is further supported by a study by Hattie (2009) which implied that students who applied their knowledge in activities are more likely to retain their learned information and understand the lesson material deeper. In other words, the application level bridges the gap between theoretical learning and real-world practice, enabling lessons to be more relevant and impactful.

The fourth level of Bloom's revised taxonomy is analyzing, which involves breaking down information into different and varying parts to understand the structure of the information and the relationship between one part of information to another. In this level, students examine, compare or contrast, and organize information. Several examples of its implementation include analyzing arguments, comparing and contrasting different theories, or identifying the underlying causes of certain issues. Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) highlighted that analyzing develop the students' critical thinking skills, encouraging them to think critically and independently to prepare them for more cognitively-challenging tasks in the upper study level.

The fifth level of Bloom's revised taxonomy is evaluating, in which students make their judgments on certain situations based on specified criteria. This level requires students to assess and re-assess the validity of certain ideas or actions, then make informed decisions out of the conducted assessment. In this level, students can evaluate the credibility of certain sources, provide critical comments towards a particular work, or judge the effectiveness of a solution to a problem. Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) also highlighted the importance of this step in developing the students' higher-order thinking skills. Through the process of evaluation, students will be able to practice applying specified standards and criteria in their process of thinking and formulating a solution, which enhances their ability to make reasoned and well-supported judgments.

Lastly, the sixth and the highest level of Bloom's revised taxonomy is creating. In this level, students put together various elements to generate, plan, and produce new ideas or products. The outcomes can be exemplified by something tangible, such as literary works, models, or even business plans. This is the level in which Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) emphasized as the "peak" of the students' cognitive processes. Creativity would be the core value in this level as it is an essential component in problem-

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solving and innovation (Sawyer, 2012). By doing creative tasks, students learn to think outside the box in finding solutions towards particular issues, develop original ideas, and apply their knowledge in new and meaningful ways.

2.2 Copywriting and its process

Copywriting is not simply creating messages but also involves telling stories, including in a business context. Copy itself, or the text used in a design, is a specialized form of creative writing that aims to deliver a brand's voice and message. Following this definition, a copywriter is a person who crafts messages that are specified for a target audience, easily comprehensible, deliver significant messages, and encourage the audience to take action. The ability to create messages that resonate with the audience and convince them to do something at the same time is highly valuable for copywriters (Bly, 2005). Sugarman (2006) supported this by emphasizing that copies that are well-written can greatly influence consumer behavior and decision-making. Furthermore, using creative or conceptual idea should also be implemented in the process of copywriting as this helps to establish a strong message or call to action.

Though not explicitly structured in its explanation, Shaw (2012) proposed several important steps in copywriting, which the author adopted to be implemented in the copywriting classroom practice. For copywriters to accomplish their goals in copywriting effectively, it is necessary for them to have a good understanding of their audience first (Keller, 2013). This can be accomplished by target audience profiling, which involves identifying and understanding the audience's interests, preferences, habits, economic status, geographical location, lifestyle choices, or even buying patterns (Conn, 2020; Shaw, 2012). Profiling would greatly assist copywriters in tailoring messages that resonate with the audience. A comprehensive profile can even provide detailed insights into the audience's characteristics and preferences, enabling the crafting of messages that are more likely to engage them.

After building a clear and detailed target audience profile, one of the aspects that copywriters need to utilize to capture the audience's attention is the tone of voice. While the tones of voice that each brand use may differ from one and another, as a bottom line, they have to be clear, engaging, and relatable (Shaw, 2012; Sugarman, 2006). The tone(s) of voice used should also be appropriate for the client's brand and relevant to the audience (Keller, 2013). Another important aspect concerning the tone of voice is consistency. Consistency plays a significant role in enhancing brand recognition and trust (Belch & Belch, 2017). In order to do that, copywriters can utilize tools like a word bank or brand dictionary. These will help copywriters maintain the determined tone in the copies and ensure that the terms frequently used by the brand are used accurately (Bly, 2005).

The third major aspect that the copywriters need to pay attention to is the message intended for the audience. Copies must highlight clear benefits of the features that are being promoted. As some benefits are more compelling than others, copywriters should opt to focus on displaying the core benefits in the process of creating a persuasive message (Anderson & Krahtwohl, 2001). This approach captures the audience's attention, makes the advertisement more memorable, and persuades the audience to explore the offering further (Conn, 2020).

The two theories above became the basis of the author's formulation of the classroom practice design in this research. Bloom's taxonomy of learning was adapted in the process of designing the assignments for the classroom, with level 2 (understand), 4 (analyze), and 6 (create) implemented in the assignments. On the other hand, the theory of copywriting served as the basic knowledge given for the student to process and apply in the provided assignments.

METHOD

This research takes a qualitative approach. As defined by Creswell and Poth (2016), in the qualitative approach, data is collected directly from the site where participants experience the issue under study

with the researcher serving as the primary instrument. Aside from allowing the researcher to focus on the process and the product (Fraenkel et al., 2012) qualitative research helps understand what participants think and feel about their experiences and actions, then looks at the specific context where participants act and how this context affects their behavior (Maxwell, 2005). Qualitative data also allows the researcher to analyze qualitative audiovisual data and digital materials, such as photographs, e-mails, website pages, or social media content (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Qualitative research is chosen as it enables the researcher to provide comprehensive insights, particularly in small-scale studies.

a. Sample/Participants

In this study, 31 junior-year university students majoring in English were divided into 10 groups, with each group consisting of 3-4 members. Each group chose one brand to carry out the copywriting assignments. The data samples for the results and discussion were taken from the assignment results created in each assignment phase, which would be further elaborated in the procedure section below.

b. Instrument(s)

As the research employed a qualitative approach, the researcher became the instrument of the research. As Creswell and Poth (2016) suggested, in a qualitative study, the researcher collected the data through document examination, observation, or interview. The researcher also had a role of gathering and interpreting the information received during the research.

c. Procedures

Adapting Bloom's taxonomy of learning, in the classroom, the researcher as teacher formulated three assignments. The understanding, applying, and analyzing levels were implemented in the first two assignments. The evaluation step was carried out in between assignments, while the creation step was carried out in the third assignment. In the execution of the process, each group was assigned to choose an international brand and carry out the following assignments:

1. *Brand and tone of voice (TOV) analysis*: In this assignment, the students analyzed the brand essence (vision, mission, core values) and tone of voice used in the brand's existing marketing platforms. Students were also required to identify and formulate the brand's word bank and brand dictionary. Afterwards, the students would analyze the brand's tone of voice from the existing content and relationship marketing.
2. *Target audience profiling*: In this assignment, each group selected one product from the brand and created a profiling of its target audience. The profiling included the naming of the target audience group, the target audience's interests, preferences, age, gender, economic status, geographical location, aspiration, lifestyle/habits, attitude, worldview related to the product, how they weigh things, and the tone of messages they may like or not like.
3. *Brief and advertisement*: Based on the TOV, word bank, and brand dictionary analysis of chosen brands conducted priorly, combined with the aspects learned about the target audience in the second assignment, the students create two advertisements: brand awareness ad and direct response ad. During the copywriting process, students were asked to detail their concept and creative direction, which included information about the color palette used, specific words from the word bank/brand dictionary used, and general visual concept that would be used to complement the copy.

In between the four phases, the teacher conducted a feedback discussion with each group related to the content of the assignment, which allowed the students to evaluate their work and revise accordingly.

The four phases were conducted phase by phase from mid-August to mid-September 2024. After the students carried out the assignments, the researcher collected the TOV and profiling analysis, the first generated copies, and the revised versions of the copies from the assignments. Afterwards, the

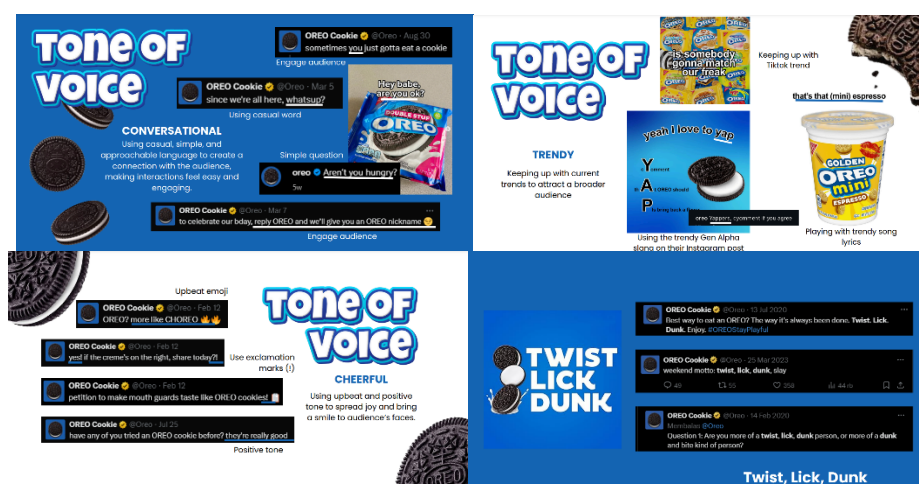
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researcher checked the compatibility of the TOV and profiling with the copies created using textual analysis. Investigating the copies allowed the researcher to better understand whether the students have grasped the concepts taught and executed the concepts in a tangible form accurately. In this paper, the discussion was limited to the results of the TOV, word bank, and brand dictionary analysis (henceforth brand-TOV analysis), a shorter description of the audience profiling, particularly related to the messages that the audience like and dislike, as well as the copy created based on the brand-TOV analysis and target audience profiling conducted.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Based on the assignment outcomes by the time this paper was written, it was firstly found that students who succeeded in understanding the concept of a brand and tone of voice could carry out the brand-TOV analysis in a clear, accurate, and detailed manner. The students who accomplished this identified specific tones of voice within a brand from its existing marketing communication and could narrow down the factors that help them determine the tones of voice. The following is a TOV analysis example by Group A who investigated Oreo (part of Mondelez International) as its brand.



<Figure 1> TOV Analysis & Brand Dictionary (bottom right) Samples from Assignment 1
Source: Author's Data

Based on Group A's TOV analysis and brand dictionary samples, the group determined that the brand has a conversational TOV based on the words or phrases used in one of Oreo's social media platforms. For instance, the group highlighted the use of pronouns "you" to indicate that the brand was attempting to reach out to the audience by addressing them personally. The group also highlighted the use of slang and ongoing trends at the time of the analysis to indicate the trendy tone of the brand's existing advertisements, as well as the use of flame emoji to evoke a feeling of excitement or exclamation marks to deliver energy in a cheerful tone. Group A also listed the words *twist*, *lick*, *dunk* as parts of the brand dictionary, with these words adapted from the existing signature slogan of the product.

In the case that the students could carry out the brand-TOV analysis in a clear, accurate, and detailed manner, they would carry the analyzed aspects in the first assignment and incorporate them into different parts of the second assignment for target audience profiling. This could be accomplished from the use of terms in the brand dictionary or words/phrases closely related to the identified tones of voice, as exemplified by Group A's target audience profiling.

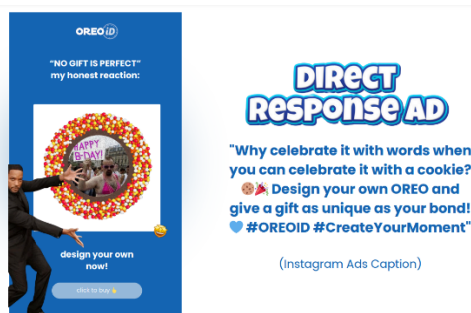
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<Figure 2> Target Audience Profiling Assignment 2 Sample
Source: Author's Data

In the second assignment, students were required to profile their target audience based on a specific product from that brand. This example used Oreo's customable product line called OREOiD. From the product, the students determined the target audience and attempted to create a profile of the audience, with several aspects including the audience's aspirations, lifestyle, attitudes, and the messages that the audience like or dislike. From this profiling formulation, it was discovered that there was a consistency of particular themes and the profile's interconnectivity with the tone of voice and brand dictionary analysis conducted in the previous assignment. In particular, the connection and consistency of themes shown in the analysis results of the two assignments, especially concerning the tone of voice, would be reflected in the copies created in the third phase. In this example, for instance, Group A named the target audience group "OREOdunkers", utilizing the brand's name and one of the words listed in the company dictionary ("dunk") to give the target audience an identity. Several keywords that relate to the cheerful, for instance, are evident in the profiling of aspirations, lifestyle, and attitudes with the use of keywords such as *fun*, *enjoyment*, *humor* or *playfulness*. It is further reflected in the messages that the audience like, which include *humorous*, *playful*, or *friendly*, and words that oppose them or the dislikes such as *formal*, *serious*, or *boring*.

The expected outcome in the third assignment (writing the copy) after the analysis would be copies that are consistent, simple, clear, compelling, and persuasive. Specifically, it was expected that the students' copies would be tailored to the target audience's preference while maintaining consistency in tone of voice and highlighting the brand. The copies created by the students in their first attempt of the assignment showed varying outcomes. In the following direct response ads created by Group A, for instance:



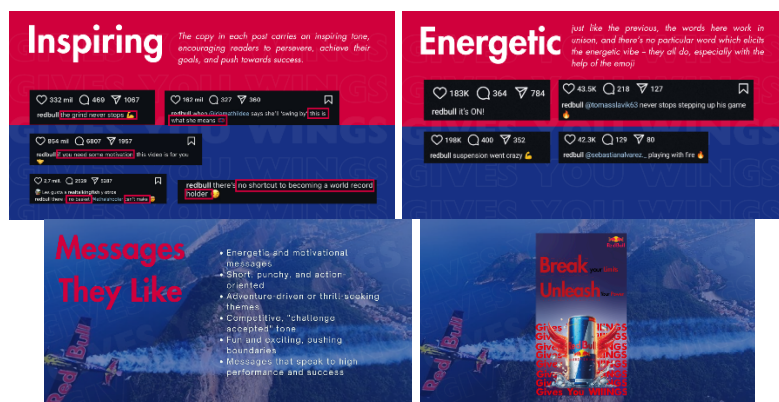
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<Figure 3> Direct Response Ad Sample by Group A
Source: Author's Data

The group attempted to utilize a cheerful and humorous tone in a direct response advertisement, which aimed to persuade its audience to take immediate action upon viewing the advertisement (Shaw, 2012). Group A attempted to deliver the humorous tone, which the group identified as the tone of message that the target audience liked, by using a cut picture of a meme in the visuals of the ad. On the other hand, the visuals were accentuated with a cheerful tone in the caption's copy, with the use of a party trumpet emoji to invoke a fun or happy emotion. In an attempt to reach the target audience, the group also used "you" or "your" in both the image and the caption, which was also a strategy implemented by the brand in their promotional items. The group also used a hashtag relevant to the brand dictionary, namely #OREOID, which indicated the product's name. While the group generally maintained the consistency of the cheerful and humorous tone and kept the copy in simple and clear language for the audience, and at the same time, attempted to generate immediate action from the action from the "click-to-buy" button in the image, the copy itself lacked a sense of urgency for the audience to take action. This down toned the advertisement's purpose in encouraging audience to take action immediately, hence requiring the student to revise so that the copies could better reflect the urgent nature of this type of advertisement.

The examples from group A above demonstrated copies that fulfilled several important criteria in copywriting. While there were groups akin to Group A who were capable of explaining the brand's tone of voice in detail and incorporating the accurate tone of voice in the copies, within the classroom, the students showed a varying degree of ability in analyzing and processing the analysis results into copies. Here are two cases examples.



<Figure 4> Sample Analysis and Copy from Group B
Source: Author's Data

The first example was taken from Group B, which selected Red Bull as its brand. It could be seen that though they were capable of identifying the tones from the existing marketing communication from the brand and addressed them in the target audience's preferred message tone profiling, the students struggled with detailing the language features used when explaining how they determined the tone of voice. However, in the advertisement that the group created, a degree of consistency in the energetic and inspiring tone of voice were observable, and it was also compatible with the message that the target audience liked.

Another case of problem that could be encountered would be related to the suitability of the tone of voice with the copy.

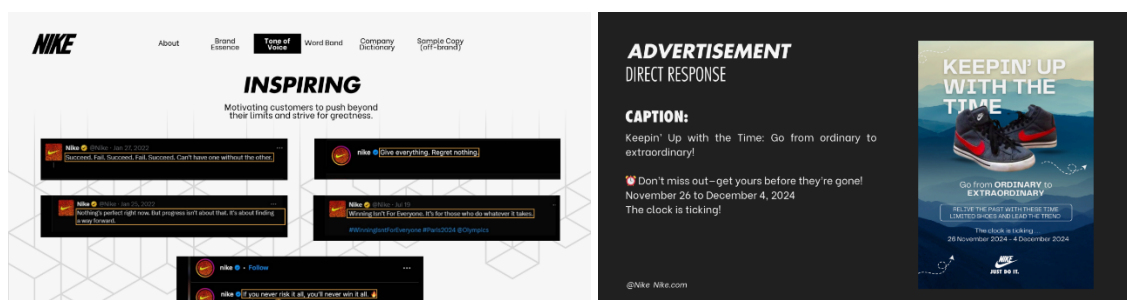
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<Figure 5> Sample Tone of Voice and Copy from Group C
Source: Author's Data

In an ad example by Group C, which selected AirAsia as its brand, the group decided to use inclusive, friendly, and energetic tones to incorporate into their copy, particularly the Instagram caption. The copy attempted to generate a sense of friendliness by referring to the audience directly using “your”, and the energetic tone was conveyed through the notable use of exclamation marks in the copy. However, the “inclusive” tone was not clearly described in the assignment, causing the tone to be unapparent as well in the copy. If an inclusive message was intended for the advertisement copy, then it was yet to be accomplished in this copy creation attempt, and the advertisement would not succeed in conveying the brand’s message to the audience. This was relayed to the group, and the group was encouraged to revise the copy.

Next, the likely problem that could arise would be the incompatibility between the visual and verbal components in the advertisement itself despite the verbal component’s adherence to the brand’s tone of voice analysis.



<Figure 6> Sample Tone of Voice Analysis and Copy from Group D
Source: Author's Data

Mzoughi and Abdelhak (2012) emphasized the importance of the verbal and visual elements in complementing each other to create a solid and impactful advertisement. In Group D’s example, the group determined an inspiring tone of voice for its selected brand, Nike. The group elaborated the tone as motivating the customers to go beyond the ordinary, and this was reflected in the advertisement’s copy “go from ordinary to extraordinary”. Though the group successfully delivered consistent tone of voice, the selection of visual element did not fit a major theme displayed in the copies, which was “time”. The “time” theme was reflected in the copy through the words *time*, *past*, *clock*, or the use of an alarm clock emoji. However, the background image of mountains did not relate to this theme. Hence, the student was recommended to consider another visual element for the background to create more balance and synchronization between the verbal and visual elements within the advertisement.

The ten groups (with one group working on one brand) in this study showed different variations of language features used when creating copies for their respective brands. However, apart from the

variations of the analysis results and the created copies, two of the common traits shared in the copies created by the ten groups (ten brands) in this classroom was the use of emoji dan second-person pronoun “you”. Emojis were frequently used to evoke stronger emotions, while the use of second-person pronouns implied and enhanced the notion of advertisements becoming increasingly personalized. Using emoji to generate particular emotions from the audience and addressing them directly would be the implemented strategies to reach out to the audience. In addition to that, it was also found that students use shorter copies for the images and longer copies in the captions, particularly for ads intended for Instagram posts. The reason behind this, however, is still under investigation by the researcher.

Another important note would be that these were the results from the students’ analysis of existing brands which already have solid profile and identity; hence, the students’ full capability of copywriting for smaller brands with less solid identity would come into question. Moving forward with the research, the researcher planned to assign students to create copies for small, lesser-known brands or small businesses with the process previously conducted in the four assignments. As the students would be required to investigate the smaller brand’s core values and even formulate the tone of voice on their own, the outcome of the copywriting assignments may offer different insights from the ones retrieved in this stage of research.

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