Linguistic Creativity in Digital Marketing: A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Paronomasia in Emina Cosmetics' Instagram Advertisements

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Abstract

Keywords: *Paronomasia, Language Style, Advertisement, Instagram, Emina Cosmetics*

This study investigates the use of paronomasia, or wordplay, in the product names and advertising captions of Emina Cosmetics on Instagram. Drawing from Delabastita's (1996) typology of puns—homonyms, homophones, homographs, and paronyms—the research aims to identify the types and functions of paronomasia employed in Emina's marketing strategies. Using a qualitative descriptive method, 21 Instagram posts from March 2015 to July 2024 were selected through purposive sampling. The analysis reveals that Emina Cosmetics utilizes various forms of paronomasia not only to attract attention and entertain audiences but also to build brand identity, enhance memorability, and subtly persuade consumers. The findings demonstrate that humorous and aesthetic language styles are prevalent, often blending Indonesian and English wordplay to appeal to a youthful, bilingual audience. This linguistic creativity reflects sociolinguistic trends in digital advertising, where informal, playful language contributes to engagement and emotional resonance. The study contributes to discourse analysis by highlighting how brands leverage linguistic devices to construct meaning and influence consumer perception. It also suggests practical implications for content creators and marketers seeking to integrate linguistic innovation into brand communication. Further research is encouraged to explore cross-cultural variations in pun-based advertising and its reception across different demographic segments..

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INTRODUCTION

Language is a central medium through which humans communicate, convey emotions, and construct social realities. It functions not only to inform but also to persuade and captivate, particularly in advertising, where word choice plays a vital role in shaping perception. As communication increasingly migrates to digital platforms, the creative use of language in social media has become a powerful marketing tool. One notable phenomenon that exemplifies linguistic creativity in digital advertising is paronomasia, or wordplay, which leverages phonetic and semantic similarities to evoke humor, interest, and persuasion.

In the context of social media advertising, particularly on platforms like Instagram, language is not merely a channel for product description but a strategic tool to influence audience behavior. Instagram has grown into a highly visual and interactive space where brands engage with users through stylized language and imagery. According to Smith (2021), Instagram's visual-centric platform is ideal for building brand identity and fostering consumer engagement. One such brand that has embraced linguistic creativity is Emina Cosmetics, an Indonesian cosmetics brand targeting Gen Z and young adults. Since its inception in 2015, Emina has used clever language and stylistic branding to stand out, particularly through the use of pun-based product names and promotional captions.

Paronomasia, as defined by Delabastita (1996), refers to puns or wordplay that exploits the similarities in form (sound, spelling) or meaning of words. These can be classified into homonyms, homophones, homographs, and paronyms (Lyons, 1977; Nila, 2018). Each type functions to produce layered meanings and cognitive engagement, making advertisements more memorable. According to Zhang (2018), paronomasia in advertising can serve four functions: humorous, sarcastic, aesthetic, and persuasive. These functions are not only stylistic but also sociolinguistic in nature, shaping how language reflects and constructs identity, values, and social norms.

Despite the significance of paronomasia in media discourse, scholarly exploration of this linguistic phenomenon in the Indonesian digital marketing context, especially within the beauty industry, remains limited. Previous research on language creativity in advertising has largely focused on lexical choice or rhetorical figures in general (Yi-bo, 2015), with few studies specifically targeting pun usage in social media brand communication. Moreover, while studies such as those by Apriyanto (2020) and Siburian (2020) explore brand narratives, they do not delve into the types and functions of paronomasia in shaping consumer perception and engagement.

This study aims to fill this research gap by analyzing the use of paronomasia in product names and advertisements of Emina Cosmetics on Instagram posts. By focusing on linguistic structures and pragmatic functions, the study bridges insights from sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, and marketing communication. The research addresses two central questions: (1) What types of paronomasia appear in Emina's product names and advertisements? and (2) What functions do these puns serve in engaging with their audience?

The study is grounded in sociolinguistic theory, particularly the concept of language style as outlined by Trudgill (1983), Spolsky (1998), and Keraf (2004), which emphasizes how language choices are influenced by social context, identity, and communicative purpose. In this framework, paronomasia is not merely a stylistic embellishment but a deliberate communicative act shaped by the brand's positioning and audience expectations.

By examining Emina's Instagram posts from 2015 to 2024, the study contributes to both theoretical and practical knowledge. Theoretically, it expands the understanding of how paronomasia operates within digital discourse and contributes to the brand's linguistic identity. Practically, the findings offer insights for marketers, content creators, and linguists on how language play can enhance engagement, memorability, and emotional resonance in

advertising. Furthermore, this study contributes to the underexplored field of Indonesian brand discourse, offering a culturally specific case study that can inform cross-linguistic and cross-cultural analyses of paronomasia in global media.

METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze the use of *paronomasia* in Emina Cosmetics' product names and Instagram advertisements. The qualitative design allows for an in-depth exploration of linguistic creativity in digital discourse, focusing on textual meaning and language strategy rather than statistical generalization. As Creswell (1994) and Denzin & Lincoln (1994) emphasize, qualitative research prioritizes interpretive analysis and contextual understanding, making it especially appropriate for studies involving media texts and semiotic elements. This study is grounded in descriptive qualitative research, as defined by Moleong (2014), which focuses on capturing linguistic phenomena through systematic observation and textual interpretation.

Data for this study were collected from Emina Cosmetics' official Instagram account, covering the period from March 2015 to July 2024. Out of approximately 93 available posts, 21 posts were purposively selected based on the presence of paronomastic elements in product names or advertising captions. The selected data include both monolingual and bilingual (Indonesian-English) wordplay, reflecting Emina's distinctive branding strategy.

Data collection involved systematically reading and examining each post for language creativity. Posts containing puns, sound-based humor, or dual-meaning expressions were identified and documented. Visual elements such as captioned images and product labels were saved, and the paronomasia instances were listed, categorized, and interpreted.

Data analysis was conducted in four stages. First, the identified puns were grouped and categorized using Delabastita's (1996) typology: homophones, homonyms, homographs, and paronyms. Second, the semantic and phonological features of each pun were examined. Third, the context and connotation of each paronomastic instance were interpreted to assess meaning and relevance. Finally, the functions of paronomasia—such as humorous, aesthetic, or persuasive impact—were evaluated, drawing on frameworks from Zhang (2018) and Yi-bo (2015). This analytical process reveals how Emina strategically employs wordplay to enhance consumer engagement and brand identity on digital platforms.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Types of Paronomasia

After doing research, the type of paronomasia mostly found from 21 data in product name and advertisement of Emina Cosmetic on Instagram post is homonyms by 13 paronomasia (62%), then it is followed by homophones type found on 5 paronomasia (24%), and the last paronymy on 3 paronomasia (14%) that identified in this study.

From 21 selected data, the types of paronomasia found were:

1.1 Homonym
Homonyms (13 items): e.g., "Water Color", "Sugar Rush" — words with multiple meanings or similar forms.

Datum 1

Figure 1.1 Example of Homonym Paronomasia Datum 1
(Source : Emina Cosmetics Official, 2024)

Water Color

The name product above was taken from Emina Cosmetic Instagram post in January 2024. The homonym paronomasia on Datum 1 there when Emina Cosmetic presented their lip serum product with name *Water Color*. The use of the word *Water Color* indicated that there is a homonym in this product name. The clause *Water Color* on this name has the basic meaning a paint that is mixed with water and used to create a picture or drawing. But in this product name, *Water Color* means lip serum that has the function to brighten and moisture the lips.

Datum 2

Figure 1.2 Example of Homonym Paronomasia Datum 2
(Source : Emina Cosmetics Official, 2017)

Sugar Rush

The product name above was taken from Emina Cosmetic Instagram post in February 2017. Emina Cosmetic named their product *Sugar Rush* on product lip scrub. The word *sugar rush* indicated there homonym in this clause because has different meaning with the basic meaning that a *sugar rush* is an old saying for when someone feels happy and energetic after eating sugary foods, like lollies, often associated with hyperactive children. But in this product name, the meaning is lip product that is used to treat the lips, with combination granulated sugar and apricot seed, this product has the function to exfoliate, softening and smoothing lips. Why use this clause in this product name because the material uses a sugar and apricot seed to make this lip scrub, making the customer need more sugar in self-care needs like a *sugar rush*. So, using this clause is related to the original meaning of *sugar rush* itself besides to get attention from customers of the creativity, so their product will be unique and get attention in the market.

1.2 Homophone

Homophones (5 items): e.g., "Soulmatte", "Pore Ranger" — words pronounced alike but different in meaning or spelling.

Datum 1
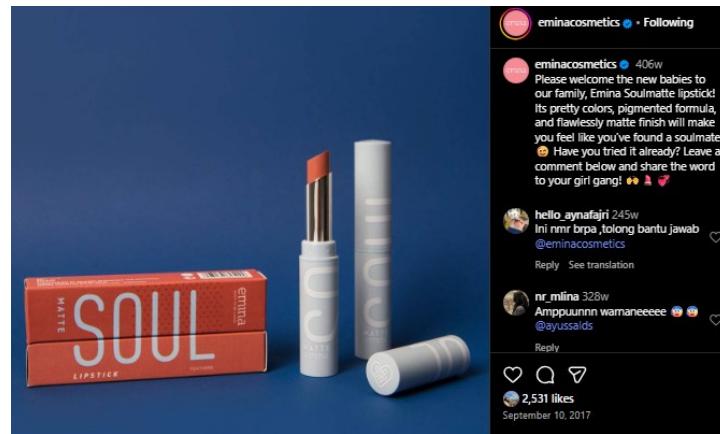
Figure 1.3 Example of Homophone Paronomasia Datum 1
(Source : Emina Cosmetic Official, 2017)

Soulmatte

The product name *Soulmatte* by Emina Cosmetics employs homophone paronomasia on the similar pronunciation with "Soulmate" that have meaning a close friend. The literal meaning of *Soulmatte* refers to the lips product of Emina Cosmetic that have a matte finish, non-shiny, and have smooth texture. Using this name indicates that the product is the perfect friend for daily use, also the combination of "soulmate" and "matte" creates a fun, memorable, and engagement, so this product can stand out in a massive market.

Datum 2
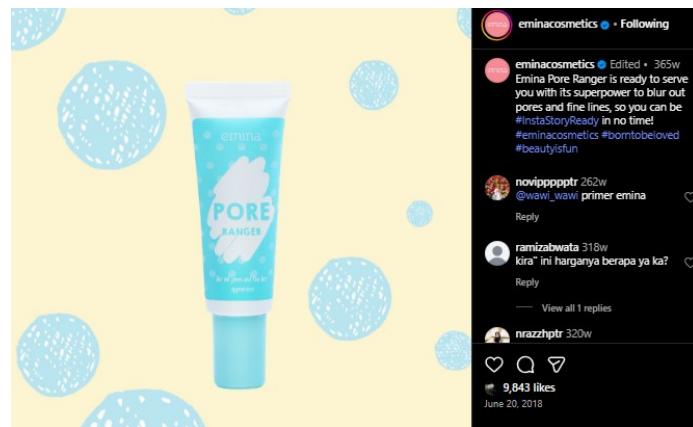
Figure 1.4 Example of Homophone Paronomasia Datum 2
(Source : Emina Cosmetic Official, 2018)

Pore Ranger

The Emina Cosmetics product name *Pore Ranger* uses homophone paronomasia because it sounds similar to the superhero term "Power Ranger." According to its literal definition, *pore ranger* is a product that effectively controls or minimizes the appearance of skin pores. Actively patrolling and protecting the pores is what the term "ranger" implies. The function of this name is playful, creating a memorable name. Using this name makes the product as a protector or hero, powerful and comes to the rescue of the skin problem. It is connected with the iconic superhero series "Power Ranger", so it can reach more customers.

1.3 Paronym

Paronyms (3 items): e.g., "Glow Up", "Skintuation", "Funtasix" — words with similar forms and meanings.

Datum 1
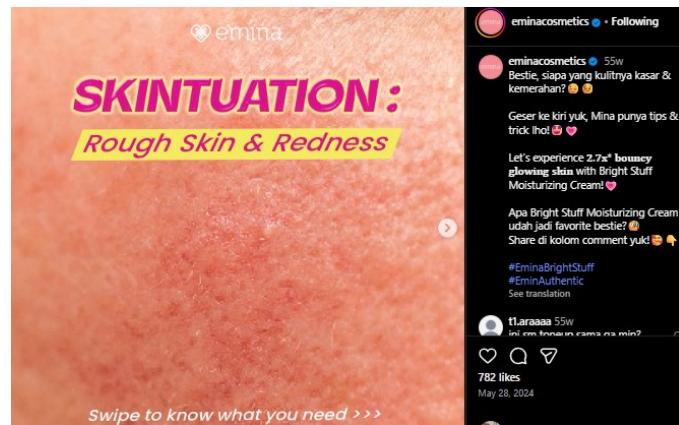
Figure 1.5 Example of Homophone Paronomasia Datum 1
(Source : Emina Cosmetic Official, 2018)

Skintuation

The paronymy paronomasia in the picture above is *Skintuation*. The phonetically mirrors "situation" that a creative blend of "skin" and "situation", by replacing "sit" with the word "skin" , making the term have a different meaning. The word *skintuation* refers to the condition of skin that is rough and redness, then links with the next slide that the solution is Emina's skincare that is concerned with that problem skin. It explains to the audience to care about their own skin condition, and explore or try Emina's products that are related to their skin problem.

Datum 2
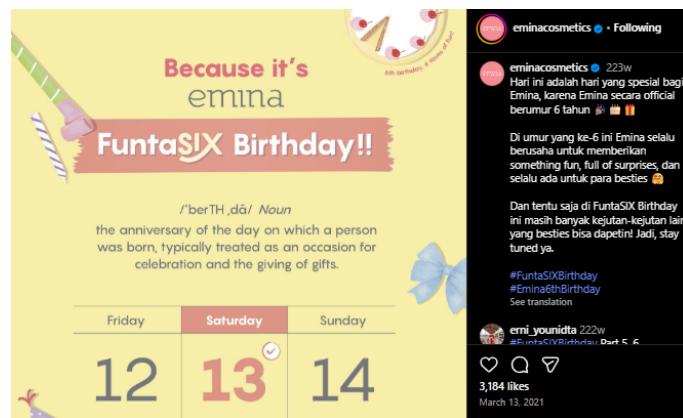
Figure 1.6 Example of Paronym Paronomasia Datum 2
(Source : Emina Cosmetic Official, 2021)

FuntaSix

The paronymy paronomasia on the picture above is *FuntaSIX Birthday. By combining the words "fun"* and *"six",* it refers to the brand's sixth anniversary on March, 13ᵗʰ 2021. *Funtasix* phonetically with the word "fantastic" that used to describe something enjoyable or interesting. Change the "fantas-" with the word "fun" and "six" for suffix, it sounds like the original word while introducing a new meaning. The word "fun" means the brand's

personality that is cheerful and creative, then "six" means the sixth birthday event celebration, also reflects Emina's innovation as a younger target audience. Using this term makes the fun branding, making it feel more exciting for the target audience to participate in the celebration.

These types were often bilingual in nature, using English and Indonesian word associations to appeal to the youthful Indonesian market.

2. Functions of Paronomasia

The main function of all data that found is :

This proves that the use of paronomasia in Emina Cosmetics works as a strategy for persuasion and engagement. It helps increase the product appeal to customers and strengths the brand identity as a unique and creative brand. As a result, it encourages more interest and interaction from customers. Each pun served at least one of the following functions:

Persuasive: the most dominant function, aiming to attract consumers and make brand identity memorable. Examples like "Funtasix" and "Glow Up" grab attention.

Datum 1
Funtasix

Figure 1.7 Example of Persuasive Paronomasia Datum 1
(Source : Emina Cosmetic Official, 2021)

The paronomasia of the word *"Funtasix"* on the caption entitled *"Funtasix Birthday"* that refers to the brand's sixth anniversary is a persuasive function because it combines the words *"fun"* and *"six"* to create a playful and memorable term. This wordplay makes the celebration sound exciting and joyful, helping to engage the audience and build a positive image of the brand (Zhang, 2018).

Datum 2
Glow Up

Figure 1.8 Example of Persuasive Paronomasia Datum 2
(Source : Emina Cosmetic Official, 2023)

The paronomasia of the word *"Glow Up"* on the caption entitled *"Ready to Instant Glow Up"* is a persuasive function because it plays on the popular phrase *"glow up"*, which means a big improvement in appearance or style, while also referring to getting glowing skin. This makes the product sound trendy and effective, attracting people who want quick and visible beauty results. The persuasive function dominated because these puns promote engagement, shareability, and memorability on Instagram.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the use of paronomasia in Emina Cosmetics' Instagram product names and advertisements, focusing on both the types and communicative functions of wordplay as a linguistic and marketing strategy. The analysis revealed that Emina frequently employs three main types of paronomasia—homonyms, homophones, and paronyms—with homonyms being the most prevalent. These puns often bridge Indonesian and English, reflecting Emina's branding as playful, creative, and youth-oriented. The findings indicate that paronomasia in Emina's advertising serves four primary functions— humorous, sarcastic, aesthetic, and persuasive—with persuasion emerging as the dominant purpose. These linguistic choices not only enhance product memorability but also strengthen consumer engagement, demonstrating how paronomasia can serve as an effective rhetorical tool in digital marketing discourse. From an academic standpoint, this research contributes to sociolinguistic studies of language in advertising, particularly within the underexplored Indonesian beauty industry. Practically, it offers insights into how strategic wordplay can influence branding and consumer perception on social media platforms. Theoretically, it validates the relevance of Delabastita's typology in a bilingual advertising context and supports Zhang's functional framework for paronomasia. Nonetheless, this study is limited in scope to a single brand and platform, with data drawn from a purposive sample of 21 Instagram posts. Broader cross-brand or cross-platform studies would be needed to generalize findings. Additionally, audience reception and interpretation of paronomasia were not explored, which could provide further understanding of its effectiveness. Future research could investigate how consumers perceive and respond to paronomasia in digital advertising or expand the analysis across different languages, cultures, or cosmetic brands. Integrating multimodal analysis could also yield richer insights into how visual and verbal elements interact in digital wordplay. This study demonstrates that paronomasia is more than playful language—it is a powerful semiotic and persuasive device in contemporary marketing that merges creativity with consumer psychology to shape brand identity in the digital age.

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