The Concept of Hype and Its Role in Modern Mass Media and Media discourse

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Abstract: This study investigates the concept of *hype* as a semantic, pragmatic, and discursive phenomenon in contemporary mass media and media discourse. In the digital era characterized by algorithmic distribution, platform capitalism, and the attention economy, hype functions as both a lexical unit and a communicative strategy. The research examines the etymological development of the term, its semantic transformation, evaluative potential, pragmatic functions, and its role in shaping mediated reality. Drawing upon media linguistics, critical discourse analysis, and communication theory, the article demonstrates that hype operates as a mechanism of intensification, persuasion, and ideological framing. The findings suggest that hype has become institutionalized within digital media practices and now represents a structural element of modern media communication.
Keywords: hype, media discourse, media linguistics, discourse analysis, evaluation, digital media, persuasion, attention economy.

Introduction

The contemporary media landscape is defined by rapid information flows, digital interactivity, and increasing competition for audience attention. Within this environment, language becomes a strategic instrument of influence. One of the most prominent linguistic phenomena of recent decades is *hype*. While traditionally associated with exaggerated promotion or publicity, hype has evolved into a complex communicative mechanism embedded in modern media discourse.

The rise of digital platforms has intensified the need for visibility and engagement. News outlets, influencers, brands, and political actors employ emotionally expressive and evaluative language to ensure their messages stand out in saturated information streams. Hype plays a central role in this process.

This study aims to analyze:

- The semantic evolution of the concept of hype;
- Its pragmatic and discursive functions in mass media;
- Its role in constructing media reality and influencing public perception.

The research is grounded in interdisciplinary approaches combining discourse analysis, media linguistics, and communication theory. The concept of media discourse has been extensively examined in discourse studies. Teun A. van Dijk emphasizes that media discourse reproduces social ideologies and power structures. According to his socio-cognitive approach, discourse shapes public knowledge and collective beliefs.

Similarly, Norman Fairclough, in his theory of Critical Discourse Analysis, argues that media texts both reflect and construct social realities. Language choices are never neutral; they serve ideological and persuasive purposes.

Hype, within this framework, can be interpreted as a discursive strategy that intensifies evaluation and directs audience interpretation. Media linguistics examines how language functions in media contexts. T. G. Dobrosklonskaya conceptualizes media language as a system characterized by expressiveness, evaluativity, and intertextuality. Likewise, M. N. Volodina highlights the role of emotional-explicit markers in modern journalism.

Hype operates within this evaluative system. It enhances emotional resonance and amplifies significance, functioning as an intensifier in headlines, social media posts, and promotional discourse.

The philosophical foundations of hype can be linked to Guy Debord and his seminal work The Society of the Spectacle. Debord argues that modern society transforms lived experience into spectacle, mediated through images and representations.

Hype contributes to this spectacle by dramatizing events and creating symbolic importance beyond factual content. The term *hype* originates from "hyperbole," meaning exaggeration. Over time, its semantic field has expanded. In contemporary usage, hype includes:

1. **Promotional exaggeration**
2. **Public excitement or buzz**
3. **Strategic media amplification**
4. **Digitally constructed virality**

In journalistic contexts, hype often appears in headlines such as:

- "The Most Explosive Political Scandal of the Year"
- "The Game-Changing Innovation Everyone Is Talking About"

Semantically, hype performs:

- **Intensification**
- **Evaluation**
- **Dramatization**
- **Foregrounding**
- **Emotional activation**

Unlike traditional exaggeration, hype in digital discourse is institutionalized and normalized. In the digital environment, visibility determines survival. Media outlets compete for clicks, shares, and engagement metrics. Hype increases click-through rates by stimulating curiosity and urgency. Hype pre-frames interpretation. When audiences encounter phrases like "historic breakthrough" or "unprecedented crisis," their perception is shaped before they process factual information. Repetition of hype-laden narratives contributes to agenda construction. Issues framed with dramatic language receive disproportionate public attention. Hype triggers affective responses—excitement, outrage, fear, admiration—which increase engagement and sharing behavior**.**

Social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter (X), and TikTok amplify hype dynamics.

Algorithms prioritize emotionally charged and highly interactive content. As a result:

- Sensational headlines outperform neutral ones.
- Influencers construct hype to build personal brands.
- Political actors exploit hype for mobilization.

Digital media thus institutionalizes hype as a communicative norm.

Hype is not ideologically neutral. It may:

- Distort factual representation;
- Contribute to polarization;
- Create unrealistic expectations;
- Commercialize public discourse.

However, hype also performs positive functions:

- Raising awareness;
- Mobilizing public interest;
- Enhancing cultural participation.

Thus, hype functions ambivalently within media systems. In English-language discourse, hype often carries entrepreneurial and promotional connotations. In other linguistic contexts, it may acquire negative evaluative shades, associated with artificial exaggeration.

Comparative studies reveal that hype adapts to cultural communication norms but retains its core function of intensification.

Conclusion

The concept of hype has transformed from a lexical marker of exaggeration into a structural element of modern media discourse. It functions as:

- A semantic intensifier;
- A pragmatic persuasive strategy;
- A mechanism of agenda construction;
- A tool of emotional engagement;
- A reflection of the attention economy.

In contemporary digital media, hype is no longer peripheral—it is systemic. Understanding its mechanisms is essential for analyzing media influence, ideological framing, and discourse construction.

Future research should explore quantitative corpus analysis of hype markers and cross-linguistic comparisons.

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