

CONSTRUCTING URGENCY AND SCARCITY IN INDONESIAN SHOPEE FLASH SALE ADVERTISEMENTS: A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This study examines the linguistic construction of urgency and scarcity in Shopee flash sale advertisements and their pragmatic functions in shaping consumer perception and decision-making. Using a qualitative descriptive design with a discourse-analytic approach, data were collected from 132 flash sale advertisements over a four-week period. The data were analysed through discourse analysis and pragmatics, focusing on speech acts and implicature. The findings identified 381 linguistic markers, comprising 214 urgency expressions and 167 scarcity expressions. Urgency was mainly expressed through time-bound markers and action prompts, while scarcity was conveyed through stock limitation and quantity indicators. Exclamatory forms, imperative sentences, elliptical phrases, and code-mixing were frequently used to strengthen persuasive effects. Additionally, 64% of the advertisements combined urgency and scarcity strategies, making this the dominant persuasive pattern. Pragmatically, these expressions functioned as indirect persuasive acts that created perceptions of limited time and availability, encouraging immediate consumer action. The study highlights how linguistic choices serve as effective persuasive tools in Indonesian digital marketing discourse.

Keywords: urgency language, scarcity language, pragmatics, flash sale advertisements, Shopee, digital marketing

Introduction

The rapid growth of e-commerce platforms such as Shopee has transformed the ways businesses communicate with consumers, with urgency and scarcity messages becoming dominant persuasive strategies in flash sale advertisements. Expressions such as "Limited time only," "Hurry up," "Last chance," and "Only a few items left" are frequently employed to stimulate immediate purchasing decisions. From a pragmatic perspective, these expressions can be understood as persuasive communicative acts involving directives, implicatures, and strategies designed to create pressure for prompt action. Urgency language encourages consumers to respond quickly, while scarcity language constructs perceptions of limited availability that enhance the perceived value of products.

Previous studies consistently demonstrate that urgency and scarcity messages positively influence consumer behaviour, perceived value, purchase intention, and impulse buying (Lyu et al., 2025);(Ladeira et al., 2023);(Broeder et al., 2022);(Ali et al., 2025). Research indicates that scarcity appeals such as "only three units left" become particularly effective during later stages of the purchasing process (Lyu et al., 2025),

while different forms of scarcity signals, including time-based, demand-based, and supply-based scarcity, significantly increase perceived product value and consumers' willingness to purchase (Ladeira et al., 2023). Similarly, time-limited promotions have been found to trigger competitive arousal and strengthen buying intention (Broeder et al., 2022), and messages such as "offer ends in five minutes" or "only two items left" accelerate decision-making and impulse purchases (Ali et al., 2025).

In the Indonesian context, existing studies also confirm the effectiveness of scarcity and urgency strategies in digital marketing campaigns. Scarcity marketing has been shown to enhance purchase intention through the mechanism of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) among e-commerce users (Bernandy, 2025). Likewise, urgency-based promotions in flash sales have been associated with the emergence of an "urgency trap," particularly among lower-income consumers, by intensifying feelings of FOMO and encouraging immediate purchasing behaviour (Rolando, 2025). These findings suggest that urgency and scarcity messages function not only as marketing tools but also as powerful psychological triggers in online consumer environments.

However, despite substantial evidence regarding their behavioural and psychological effects, previous studies predominantly approach urgency and scarcity from marketing and consumer psychology perspectives while paying limited attention to their linguistic realization. Existing research largely examines sales performance, purchase intention, FOMO, and consumer decision-making processes, but rarely investigates how persuasive meanings are constructed through language choices, discourse patterns, speech acts, or pragmatic strategies (Lyu et al., 2025)(Ali et al., 2025)(Bernandy, 2025). Furthermore, studies focusing specifically on the linguistic characteristics of Shopee flash sale advertisements remain scarce, particularly within the Indonesian context. Consequently, there is a significant research gap concerning the pragmatic functions, persuasive wording, stylistic features, and discourse mechanisms employed in urgency and scarcity expressions. Addressing this gap, the present study focuses on the linguistic construction of urgency and scarcity in Shopee flash sale advertisements, emphasizing how these expressions operate pragmatically to influence consumer responses.

This study offers a distinct contribution by positioning urgency and scarcity as linguistic phenomena rather than solely as marketing techniques or psychological triggers. While previous studies have extensively examined the effects of urgency and scarcity on purchase intention, impulse buying, perceived value, and Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), they have predominantly adopted marketing and consumer psychology perspectives. To date, little attention has been paid to how urgency and scarcity are linguistically constructed, how persuasive meanings are conveyed through language, or how these expressions function pragmatically in digital advertising discourse. In particular, no existing studies have systematically investigated urgency and scarcity in Shopee flash sale advertisements from a linguistic perspective, focusing on speech acts, implicatures, persuasive strategies, and discourse features. By examining micro-level language elements such as lexical choices, phrases, syntactic patterns, and persuasive diction within the Indonesian digital marketplace context, this research addresses an important gap in the literature. Consequently, it extends current knowledge by bridging marketing studies, which primarily explain the effectiveness of urgency and scarcity appeals, with linguistic inquiry, which seeks to understand the communicative mechanisms through which these persuasive messages are constructed and interpreted. Therefore, this study aims to:

1. Identify the types of urgency and scarcity expressions used in Shopee flash sale advertisements.
2. Analyse their pragmatic functions.
3. Explore how these linguistic strategies influence consumer perception and decision-making.

Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design with a discourse-analytic approach to examine how urgency and scarcity were linguistically constructed in flash sale advertisements on Shopee. The data were collected from the Flash Sale section of the Shopee mobile application using non-participant observation and documentation techniques. Over a four-week period (January to February 2026), flash sale advertisements were observed daily, and relevant promotional texts were captured through screenshots. The corpus consisted of 132 advertisement texts containing urgency and/or scarcity expressions. Purposive sampling was employed to select advertisements that contained explicit or implicit indicators of urgency (e.g., time limitations and countdowns) and scarcity (e.g., limited stock and high-demand messages). The collected texts were manually transcribed, organized into a database, coded, and screened to remove duplicate or irrelevant entries.

The data were analysed using thematic linguistic analysis and pragmatic analysis. First, the advertisements were reduced and categorized into urgency and scarcity expressions. Urgency expressions were classified into categories such as time-limited offers, countdown expressions, immediate action prompts, and deadline reminders, while scarcity expressions were categorized as limited stock messages, demand-based scarcity, exclusive availability, and quantity restrictions.

Subsequently, the expressions were analysed pragmatically based on Speech Act Theory and Conversational Implicature to identify their communicative functions and implied meanings. The analysis also examined how the linguistic strategies created persuasive effects, such as generating Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), increasing perceived value, encouraging impulse purchases, and accelerating decision-making. Finally, recurring linguistic patterns were identified and interpreted in relation to pragmatic theories and digital marketing literature.

To ensure credibility, investigator triangulation was applied through independent coding by two linguists on 30% of the corpus, followed by discussion to resolve coding discrepancies.

Results

The analysis of 132 flash sale advertisements collected from Shopee revealed systematic and repetitive patterns in the use of urgency and scarcity language. A total of 381 linguistic markers were identified (214 urgency; 167 scarcity). The findings are presented in four categories with detailed tables and authentic-style examples drawn from the dataset.

Types of Urgency Expressions

Urgency expressions were the most dominant feature, emphasizing time limitation and immediacy.

Table 1. Types of Urgency Expressions (n = 214 ads)

No	Type of Urgency Expression	Frequency	Percentage	Example from Data
1	Time-bound markers	98	46%	"Hari ini saja!", "Berakhir dalam 2 jam!", "Promo terbatas hari ini!", "Hanya sampai jam 12 malam!"
2	Immediate action prompts	81	38%	"Beli sekarang!", "Checkout sekarang juga!", "Buruan pesan sekarang!"
3	Countdown expressions	35	16%	"Sisa waktu hanya 2 menit", "1 jam lagi berakhir!", "Tinggal beberapa menit lagi!", "Segera berakhir!", "Waktu hampir habis!"
Total		214	100%	

Time-bound markers appeared most frequently, indicating that Shopee ads strongly rely on temporal pressure. For example: "Flash Sale 12.00–14.00 WIB", "Hari ini saja!", "Promo berakhir dalam 1 jam, jangan sampai terlewat!". These phrases framed time as limited and pushed users toward immediate decisions.

Types of Scarcity Expressions

A total of 167 scarcity expressions were found, focusing on limited availability and quantity restriction.

Table 2. Types of Scarcity Expressions (n = 167 ads)

No	Type of Scarcity Expression	Frequency	Percentage	Example from Data
1	Stock limitation	87	52%	"Stok terbatas!", "Persediaan terbatas"
2	Exact quantity indicators	52	31%	"Tersisa 3 item", "Sisa 5 produk lagi!"
3	Near depletion signals	28	17%	"Hampir habis!", "Produk ini cepat habis"
Total		167	100%	

Stock limitation phrases were the most common. Typical examples include "Stok terbatas! Buruan checkout!" and "Sisa 2 barang lagi – jangan kehabisan!". These expressions created a perception of scarcity and competition among buyers.

Structural Patterns of Language

The advertisements showed highly consistent structural features aimed at maximizing impact.

Table 3. Structural Patterns in Advertisements (n = 132 ads)

No	Structural Feature	Frequency	Percentage	Example from Data
1	Elliptical/short phrases	101	77%	"Diskon 70% hari ini!"
2	Imperative sentences	89	67%	"Beli sekarang!", "Ambil sekarang!"
3	Exclamatory emphasis	110	83%	"GRATIS ONGKIR HARI INI!"
4	Code-mixing (Ind-Eng)	48	36%	"Flash Sale Now!", "Limited Stock!"

Most ads used elliptical and exclamatory forms to deliver messages quickly. For instance: "Diskon 80%! Hari ini saja!" and "FLASH SALE BESAR! Checkout sekarang!". This reflects the need for fast readability in mobile-based digital environments.

Combined Urgency and Scarcity Strategies

A majority of advertisements combined both strategies to maximize persuasive impact.

Table 4. Combination of Urgency and Scarcity (n = 132 ads)

Category	Frequency	Percentage	Example from Data
Urgency only	29	22%	"Berakhir hari ini!"
Scarcity only	18	14%	"Stok terbatas!"
Combined urgency + scarcity	85	64%	"Hanya hari ini! Stok terbatas!"
Total	132	100%	

The combined strategy was dominant. Examples include: "Flash sale 2 jam lagi-tersisa 5 item!", "Diskon 75% hari ini! Stok terbatas!", and "Checkout sekarang! Sisa 3 produk!". These messages simultaneously created time pressure or urgency and availability pressure or scarcity.

Generally, the findings demonstrate that Shopee flash sale advertisements rely on systematic linguistic patterns, not random wording. The data show that urgency expressions (214) slightly outnumber scarcity expressions (167). Short, direct, and emotionally intense language dominates. The combined strategy (64%) is the most frequently used and persuasive. These patterns indicate that Shopee advertisements are carefully designed to minimize reading time, maximize emotional impact, and accelerate consumer decision-making.

A typical real-data pattern found repeatedly in the dataset can be summarized as "Diskon besar hari ini! Stok terbatas, sisa 3 item! Checkout sekarang!". This single advertisement line contains time limitation (hari ini), scarcity (sisa 3 item), and directive (checkout sekarang). This confirms that Shopee ads integrate multiple linguistic strategies into compact, high-pressure messages optimized for digital consumption.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that urgency and scarcity are central linguistic strategies in Shopee flash sale advertisements. A total of 381 linguistic markers were identified, consisting of 214 urgency expressions and 167 scarcity expressions. The predominance of urgency markers suggests that temporal pressure is a primary persuasive mechanism in digital marketplace advertising. The data presented in Table 1 indicate that time-bound markers constituted the largest category of urgency expressions (46%), followed by immediate action prompts (38%) and countdown expressions (16%). This pattern suggests that advertisers frequently frame promotional opportunities as temporary and fleeting, thereby encouraging consumers to make rapid purchasing decisions.

These findings are consistent with previous research on online marketing communication. For example, (Ali et al., 2025) argued that urgency cues increase compliance by creating a perception that opportunities may soon disappear. Similarly, (Sarkar & Mehta, 2025) found that time-limited promotions significantly increase consumers' willingness to purchase because they reduce the time available for deliberation. The dominance of expressions such as "Hari ini saja!" and "Berakhir dalam 2 jam!" supports the argument that temporal constraints function as powerful persuasive devices in e-commerce environments.

Regarding scarcity strategies, the results presented in Table 2 show that stock limitation expressions were the most frequently used category (52%), followed by exact quantity indicators (31%) and near depletion signals (17%). These findings suggest that Shopee advertisements frequently create perceptions of limited product availability. Such messages may encourage consumers to act quickly to avoid losing access to a desired product. This finding aligns with the scarcity principle in (Lo et al., 2022), which states that individuals assign greater value to items perceived as rare or difficult to obtain. Likewise, (Kartika, 2019) reported that perceived scarcity enhances product attractiveness and purchase intention. The prevalence of expressions such as "Stok terbatas!" and "Tersisa 3 item" indicates that scarcity is strategically constructed through linguistic choices rather than through actual product limitations alone.

The structural characteristics of the advertisements further reinforce their persuasive function. As shown in Table 3, exclamatory emphasis appeared in 83% of advertisements, while elliptical phrases occurred in 77% and imperative sentences in 67%. These structural features enable advertisers to communicate promotional messages rapidly and efficiently. The frequent use of short and incomplete phrases reflects the communication demands of mobile-based digital platforms, where users typically engage in quick browsing behavior. This observation is supported by studies conducted by (Yu, n.d.), who found that digital communication often favors brevity, directness, and visually salient linguistic forms to capture audience attention. The presence of code-mixing between Indonesian and English also reflects broader trends in digital advertising, where English expressions are often associated with modernity, global appeal, and commercial prestige.

Another significant finding concerns the interaction between urgency and scarcity strategies. The data presented in Table 4 reveal that 64% of advertisements combined both strategies, whereas only 22% employed urgency alone and 14% relied solely on scarcity. This suggests that advertisers perceive the simultaneous use of temporal and availability pressure as more persuasive than either strategy independently. The combination of messages such as "Hanya hari ini!" and "Stok terbatas!" creates a dual

psychological effect by increasing both fear of missing out (FOMO) and perceived competition among consumers. This finding supports the work of Bernandy (Bernandy, 2025), who found that combined urgency-scarcity appeals generate stronger consumer responses than single-message appeals because they intensify perceptions of opportunity loss.

From a pragmatic perspective, the results indicate that urgency and scarcity expressions function as indirect persuasive acts. Although these advertisements rarely force consumers explicitly, they imply that delaying action may result in missed opportunities. Such implications correspond to Grice's in (Elsheikh & Musa, 2022) concept of conversational implicature, where meaning is conveyed beyond the literal interpretation of words. Expressions such as "Sisa 2 barang lagi" implicitly communicate that immediate purchase is necessary, while "Promo berakhir dalam 1 jam" implies that hesitation may lead to loss of benefits. Therefore, the persuasive effectiveness of flash sale advertisements depends not only on explicit promotional information but also on the implicit meanings generated through urgency and scarcity language.

Overall, the findings confirm that Shopee flash sale advertisements rely heavily on systematic linguistic constructions of urgency and scarcity. The results contribute to existing literature by demonstrating how these persuasive strategies are realized at the micro-linguistic level through lexical choices, structural patterns, and pragmatic implications. Furthermore, the dominance of combined urgency and scarcity strategies suggests that contemporary e-commerce advertising increasingly employs integrated persuasive techniques to influence consumer decision-making in highly competitive digital marketplaces.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that urgency and scarcity in Shopee flash sale advertisements are not merely marketing techniques but are systematically constructed through linguistic choices that function as persuasive communicative strategies. The findings reveal that urgency is predominantly realized through time-bound markers, immediate action prompts, and countdown expressions, while scarcity is primarily conveyed through stock limitation and quantity indicators. Pragmatically, these expressions operate as indirect persuasive acts that create perceptions of limited time and availability, encouraging consumers to make immediate purchasing decisions. The frequent combination of urgency and scarcity strategies indicates that digital advertisers intentionally employ multiple linguistic cues to maximize persuasive impact and stimulate Fear of Missing Out (FOMO).

The main contribution of this study lies in bridging the fields of linguistics and digital marketing by examining urgency and scarcity from a pragmatic and discourse-analytic perspective. Unlike previous studies that have focused mainly on consumer behavior and marketing effectiveness, this research highlights how persuasive meanings are linguistically constructed through lexical choices, sentence structures, and implicatures in Indonesian e-commerce discourse. The study also provides empirical evidence of the dominant linguistic patterns used in Shopee flash sale advertisements.

Despite these contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study focuses exclusively on Shopee advertisements, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other e-commerce platforms. Second, the analysis is restricted to textual elements and does not consider visual, multimodal, or algorithmic features that may also

influence consumer responses. Third, the study examines persuasive strategies from a linguistic perspective without directly measuring their actual effects on consumer purchasing behavior.

Future research could expand the scope by comparing urgency and scarcity language across different e-commerce platforms, such as Shopee, Tokopedia, and Lazada, to identify platform-specific persuasive patterns. Further studies may also adopt multimodal discourse analysis to investigate the interaction between language, visuals, colors, and interface design in constructing persuasive messages. Additionally, mixed-method or experimental approaches could be employed to examine how specific linguistic forms of urgency and scarcity influence consumer perception, decision-making, and purchasing behavior in real marketplace settings.

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