



RESEARCH PAPER

Language and Women Empowerment: A Semiotic Analysis of Pakistani Advertisement

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the visual and symbolic narratives of Pakistani women's empowerment in advertisements, aiming to reveal how advertisers meaningfully contribute to the conversation on gender equality and challenge traditional norms by incorporating themes of women empowerment. It explores how society's views on gender roles are both shaped and reflected through advertisements, highlighting the dynamic interaction of body language and cultural symbols that refine and deepen the meaning within empowerment narratives. Using Roland Barthes' semiotic model as the methodology, the researcher interprets both overt and covert meanings present in advertisements while exploring the cultural background that influences these representations. The results reveal multiple layers of meaning hidden in both language and visuals, demonstrating how advertisements can either reinforce existing gender norms or challenge them, thereby shaping public perceptions of women's roles in society. To address existing gaps, it is recommended that advertisers promote inclusive and empowering imagery, avoid stereotypes, and collaborate with gender advocacy groups to drive positive social change.

KEYWORDS Women Empowerment, Advertisement, Semiotic Analysis, Gender Equality, Language

Introduction

Advertisement has great impact on society especially the way women are portrayed is incredibly important. Every word, picture, and frame are carefully chosen to express a message related to women. Now, in a modern time women empowerment is shown through advertisement that challenges traditional gender role, promote gender equality and it also celebrates the achievement of women. The main motive behind these kind advertisements is to show women as strong, independent and challenge stereotype mentality and also bring change in society by giving importance to gender equality and by showing that women are strong as men. It highlights importance of education and career opportunities for women by depicting the independence of women in term of their career, relationship and more important in their life decision and show their decision-making power. Now, these advertisements portraying women as strong, resilient and the one who overcome difficulties and also addresses issues like gender-based violation and discrimination and also traditional myths. Through semiotic analysis, this article shows how Pakistani advertisement portrayed women's empowerment and reveal the layers of meaning that are fixed in these visual tales. The aim of this research is to examine how Pakistani society is experiencing a radical change in the form of gender roles and female empowerment. Researcher explore the cultural background, colors, body language

and symbols that shapes the production and reception of these advertisements. It is an attempt to observe the real message and the effect of subtle, symbolic expressions that influence attitudes and add meaning in changing stories of gender dynamics in Pakistan.

Literature Review

The representation of strong, independent women in the media whether in drama, film, or advertisement is rather important. Because it entices the consumer, advertisement and it has a powerful impact. Its implementation displays a tremendous deal of ingenuity, which gives it the potential to drastically alter people's perspectives. Marketing efforts with themes of female empowerment have multiplied recently (also known as "Femvertising") Although these ads are frequently addressed in the media, not much research has been done to assess the efficacy of femvertising from a marketing standpoint Drake, V. (2017). conduct online studies that use experimental designs. After watching a random exposure to a Femvertising or standard television ad for the same brand, female participants filled out a questionnaire. The findings indicate that Femvertising has positive impact on ad and brand opinions, purchase intentions, and developed emotional connection to brands. Due to their appeal with female consumers, empowerment-themed commercials are starting to gain attention from marketers. However, a number of empirical studies have examined how efficient these ads are at empowering women. (Bue & Harrison,2019). The term "femvertising" and "ad-her-tising" have been used recently to refer to female-targeted advertising that embodies the values of equality, feminism, female activism, and women in leadership. Companies which produce these ads with empowering themes for women intend to show different levels of their dedication to equality; yet, in certain cases, they do so to trick customers into believing they are more progressive than they actually are. However, feminist advertising techniques can question gender expectations, and customers can express their disapproval of them. (Gutiérrez et al,2018).

Feminism is defined as a heterogeneous and sometimes contradictory set of social theories and movements that address the social, political, and economic injustices faced by women. It emphasizes that women's liberation and movement are at the foundation of feminism. The goal of feminist ideas is to define, clarify, and recommend tactics (Enyew & Mihrete,2018). Femvertising' is becoming a popular trend in the media, according to there are number of factors, including brand activism, corporate feminism criticism, growing activism for better representation of women in advertising, increased awareness of gender stereotyping, and increased regulatory scrutiny. The combined effect of these factors is observed to cause the phenomena. According to the report, further research on femvertising should focus on topics like authenticity, the possible dilution of feminist rhetoric, links to social movements, and the overall effect on more women being represented in advertising (Varghese & Kumar,2022).

According to scholar Chafai, the ongoing debate about gender stereotypes in advertising is examined which highlights the ongoing problems while recognizing the notable developments over the years. This study investigate how culturally gendered stereotypes in Morocco and England are affected by commercials, with a special emphasis on the representation of women in relation to males. It explores the ways in ads shape women's decisions and choices, illuminating the sociological, cultural, and economic ramifications in each case (Chafai,2008). Gender stereotypes are constructed in TV commercials, identifying both overt and covert symbols that represent attributes associated with men and women by discourse analysis (Hofmann 2016). Focusing on sex-role stereotypes and the objectification of women, this discourse analysis of consumer reactions to sexually explicit advertising finds common negative impressions across sex and age groups. Positive themes revolve around the creative nature of sexuality and

equality in sexual representations. The discussion of gender consistency in prevailing themes emphasizes the cultural role of advertising as an artistic medium that helps women express their wants through their purchasing decisions (Hagy,2021).

The myths, denotations, and implications concealed in both verbal and non-verbal cues in Barbie's "Imagine the Possibilities 2015" commercial using a semiotic model influenced by Barthes. It finds semiotic codes that stand for femininity and female empowerment through scene-based analysis. The findings emphasize the empowering message that inspires girls to pursue their dreams and objectives, and they offer a useful model for further study within the semiotic framework of advertising analysis. (Wardah, & Kusuma,2022,) The portrayal of black women's empowerment on the front covers of Truelove and Destiny, two South African women's magazines, is examined a semiotic examination of 12 magazine covers is conducted in this study to uncover representations of black women as independent, aggressive, and emancipated. (Mofokeng,2017). The study uses semiotic analysis to interpret the messages presented as it explores how Pakistani TV ads shape female identity. Ten TVCs from well-known Pakistani channels were chosen using stratified sampling, and the results showed that women are frequently portrayed as glamorized sex objects. The results show the need for a more progressive and diversified representation that is in line with the changing roles of women in Pakistani society and the continuation of traditional and constrictive roles for women in advertising. For communication specialists and legislators hoping to shape future advertising practices, this research is important (Iftikhar& Islam2017). Different researches are conducted on advertisement related to women but the aim of this research is to analyze Pakistani advertisements that depict the theme of empowerment. In this study researcher interpret the meanings associated with the body language, and cultural symbols and create meaning how Pakistani society views gender roles and empowerment. The current study is conducted to fill the gap in research as there is no research is conducted on how Pakistani advertisement show women empowerment.

Material and Methods

Researcher examines different Pakistani commercials with common theme of women empowerment by using qualitative, descriptive approach and semiotic ideas which is influenced by Roland Barthes. For selecting advertisement purposive sampling method is adopted. The purpose of this research to explores signs, symbols, and cultural connotations through both language and visual components which reflect the main idea of any advertisement. By explaining denotation, connotations and myth researcher reveals how these commercials create ideas about women's empowerment within the Pakistani context.

Results and Discussion



Figure 1. Female Empowerment and Dual Roles

Denotation

This advertisement of "Shan masala" which is titled as kushian chakh loo and oath for her in which a female doctor takes an oath for dedicating her life for the betterment of human beings, while on the other hand her mother-in-law sitting in the audience and swears that her daughter in law devoted her life to the house and kitchen. When the doctor's husband tries to record the scene, his mother stops him. In the next scene when doctor go to the hospital for performing her duty and hands her son to the mother in law she became sad. While cooking, she remarks that "countless daughters become doctors only to become daughters-in-law and housewives". And in the last scene mother-in-law takes the doctor's lunch to the hospital and highlight important point that "cooking is not only one person's responsibility".

Connotation

This advertisement reflects how women play a complex and dynamic role in both professional and domestic life. Professional women face different challenges and expectation in Pakistani context. In this advertisement the real struggle of a women is shown how she balance both professional duties and daughter in laws duty. Initially the body language of mother in law reflect her stereotype mind. She wanted to lemmatized her daughter in law activities and then subsequent shift to supporting her daughter-in-law's professional endeavours. It reflects a transformation in societal attitudes toward women's roles that women's life is not only limited to kitchen. In the last scene mother-in-law taking the doctor's lunch to the hospital that signifies the importance of support and understanding that women need within familial relationships. This advertisement also portrays cultural and traditional domestic responsibilities that is only associated with women.

Myth

This advertisement portrays a myth related to traditional gender role of a women that emphasizes on women's primary responsibility for domestic duties. This is shown through the mother-in-law's oath, which is contrasted with the daughter-in-law's commitment to her professional life as a doctor. It symbolizes the stereotype notion of society that women's worth is connected to their performance of household duties and caregiving responsibilities, rather than recognizing and focusing their personal growth and professional development.

Sample 2



Figure 2. Breaking Gender Norms

Denotation

It involves a conversation between father and a shopkeeper. Father looking for a cricket bat for his daughter. The shopkeeper assumes the bat is for son so he asked him where is your son? And why you are not bringing him? He surprises when he realizes it's for the daughter. Later on, when they leave, the shopkeeper calls them and gift a Dairy Milk chocolate and encourages the girl to work hard like bisma maroof and other women cricketers.

Connotation

This advertisement challenge societal, cultural norm and some stereotypes related to gender in which girls are not allowed to participate in traditionally male-dominated fields, such as sports. It symbolizes the importance of empowering young girls to follow their passion rather it would be playing cricket or something else. It also highlight the role of father which is supportive and cooperative toward his daughter's interest in cricket and the shopkeeper's positive gesture of encouragement. This ad promotes the concept of self-identity and gender equality. It emphasizes on the importance of creating such environment that motivates and supports girls to excel in sports and other activities. And developed leadership qualities that contribute in the movement of women's empowerment. It highlights women empowerment and how men and women are equal in society. It also breaks the stereotypes role of gender and encouraging girls to participate in sports, particularly in cricket. Cricket is not only boys' game, girls also play it by looking at positive role models.

Myth

All type of sports is often associated with boys especially cricket. Traditionally girls are not be encouraged to participate in sports so the aim of this type of advertisement is to change the stereotype mentality of society. By portraying the image of supporting father, positive remarks from shopkeeper and a role model Bismah Maroof, the advert try to clear misconception that girls are inherently less capable, weak, uncompetitive or interested in sports. It promotes the idea that with the right support from family and society and encouragement, girls can lead any field they choose.

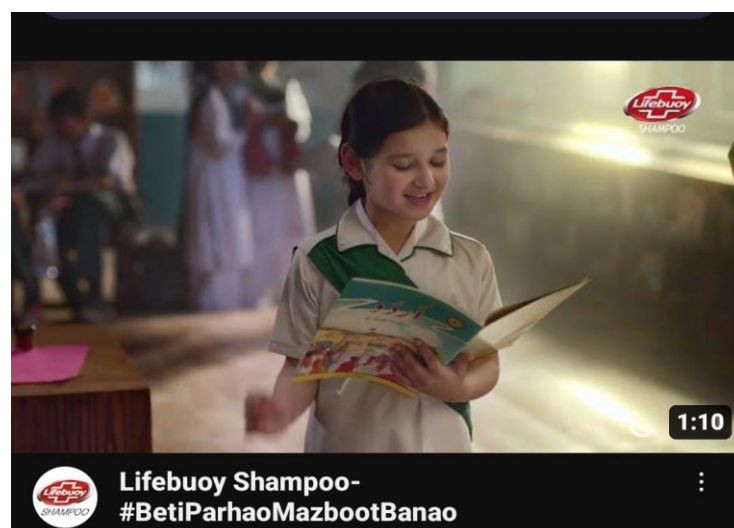
Sample 3

Figure 3. Education and Confidence

Denotation

A young girl with a smiley face, reading a poem from an Urdu book and face ridiculous remarks from boys because this poem is from boy's perspective. She returns home and asked her mother that everyone laugh at her because of this poem. Her mother rewrites the poem, motivate her by saying that she is a strong girl. She also encourages her to perform on stage, with full confidence and when she read poem in front of audience everyone claps and encourage her.

Connotation

The hashtag of this advertisement "Beti Parhaoo, Mazboot Bano" which mean "Teach Your Daughter and Make Her Strong" gave importance to women education and self-identification. This advertisement symbolises the positive role of mother in the personality development of child and also by right support and encouragement, girls can easily overcome societal stereotypes. Education enable girls to challenge gender norms and follow their dreams with determination. The role of mother is also appreciable, she encourages her daughter when she performs in stage with positive gesture that provides strength to daughter. And forced her to believe in inner power and face everything with confidence and determination.

Myth

Traditionally girls are considered as weaker and less confident than boys. This ad breaks the silence by showing journey of empowerment through education and self-confidence of a little girl. This advertisement symbolises that girls are bound by societal expectations which break their confidence. This show how education is a powerful tool for the personality development of girls and enable them to become strong and confident gender in society.

Sample 4

Figure 4. Political Participation

Denotation

This advertisement shows a political campaigning which is run by a girl. A boy from opponents suggest her to leave this campaign because it is very difficult task and just focus on shine of her hairs. The girl confidently replied that she manages both political

campaign and hair. It highlights the idea that women are great at dealing with different task at the same time.

Connotation

The active participation of girls in politics portray them as strong and confident which break the cultural and societal barriers. The body language of girl symbolizes that now women are more interesting in traditionally male-dominated sectors and take part in politics as an active citizen of society and also focus on her their physical appearance. By showing the shiny and bright of hair advertiser convey an important that women are capable doing anything. This ad shows how a girl manage both her political movement and personal grooming and built their own identity.

Myth

Traditionally, male only participate in society, but now because of influence of gender equality and women taking interest in every field including politics make them more powerful and confident. They start doing campaign making decision, include in policy making processing.

Sample 5



Figure 5. Champion Spirit: Advertisement

Denotation

A little girl attempts to kick a football while receiving encouragement remarks "come on champ" from her brother and mother. On the other hand, grandmother remarks discourage her, despite initial struggles, she manages to scores a goal. This statement of girl "which is not done by anyone is done by the champion" reflects the theme of persistence, resilience and struggle of women while facing discouragement from society. It highlights that success often comes from determination and effort.

Connotation

This advertisement is about encouraging and supporting young girls in their passion. It symbolizes that motivation from family help girl to overcome obstacles and achieve success and deal with traditional societal notion that certain activities are exclusively for boys. It promotes cultural diversity and gender equality. It also highlight the personality of girl which is shown as strong and confident. In last when grandmother said "daaugoo kii champion to tamari ami haiee" it symbolizes that a mother make a daughter strong. A girl is not born with championship, her family make her champion.

Myth

Certain activities like football are not exclusively meant for boys. This word “champion” is not only associated with boys. It emphasizes on the importance of girl’s power as they are also champion. This advertisement highlights women as a strong gender and compatible by portraying little girl’s determination, effort which is ended in success by scoring a goal. The aim of this advertisement is to break the silence regarding stereotype gender role according to which girls are not able to perform well in sports and other challenging tasks.

Sample 6

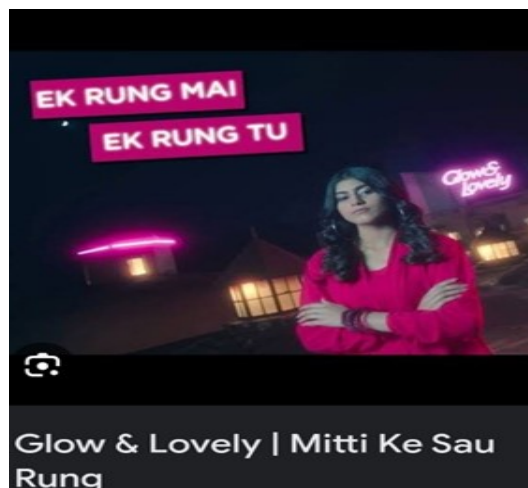


Figure 6. Celebrating Diversity

Denotation

This advertisement of glow and lovely portray diversity in women’s personality on the basis of skin tone. The theme of advertisement “miti ke sau rung” which is translated as hundred shades of earth convey message that there is a place of everyone regardless of their skin colour and it promote gender equality. This ad portrays the image of different professional women’s and highlight important message that “natural beauty lead to self-empowerment”

Connotation

This advertisement shows celebration of women diverse skin tones with theme colour pink and white. This advertisement symbolizes that women is beautiful in any skin colour and challenges the conventional beauty standards and convey a deeper message regarding self-empowerment of women. By embracing natural beauty and cultural authenticity, it encourages women’s to developed their unique and independent identities and also feel confident in their own skin tone.it promote a positive self-image and sense of pride that women must have on the basis of their physical appearance by portraying the image of different professional women’s.

Myth

By represent different skin tone of women it conveys important message regarding women personality that women are beautiful in every skin colour the most important thing

is their professional development as well as self-love. This advertisement reflects that importance of true beauty which is rooted in diverse cultural identities.

Conclusion

This study carries a semiotic research on Pakistani advertisement, with common theme of women empowerment and analyse the role of symbols, signals and societal norms. Researcher focus on visual landscapes of different ads that show how women are portrayed and also its impact on social change. After analysing advertisement, the result show that Empowerment is shaped by the power dynamics and the identity of women is expressed through colour selection and by using fine body language and symbols. In this paper researcher interpreted the visual language used in advertising through the semiotic model of Roland Barthes and highlighting important points through connotation, denotation and myths. Advertisements have dual effect on both spirit of growth that reflect change in society and also on influencing the viewpoints of audience. This study helps us to think about how advertising platforms is not only used for creativity to sell things but have significant impact on dealing with social issues like gender empowerment.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed to enhance the role of advertising in promoting genuine women empowerment in Pakistan. First, advertisers should move beyond tokenistic portrayals and ensure that women are represented in diverse roles that reflect their real-life contributions in professional, political, and social spheres. Brands must avoid reinforcing traditional stereotypes and instead challenge outdated norms by depicting women as leaders, innovators, and decision-makers. It is recommended that advertising agencies collaborate with gender studies experts and advocacy groups to develop campaigns that are culturally sensitive yet progressive, ensuring authenticity and avoiding superficial empowerment themes. Furthermore, media regulatory bodies should introduce guidelines that encourage balanced gender representation in advertisements. Educational campaigns targeting audiences can also help reshape societal perceptions about gender roles. Finally, brands should invest in long-term initiatives, such as mentorship programs and public awareness drives, to complement their advertising efforts and create meaningful impact in advancing gender equality.

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