Semiotic Approach Towards Analyzing TV Advertisements: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Article History: Received: 22 Feb 2022 Revised: 19 May 2022 Accepted: 20 June 2022 Available Online: 04 Jul 2022 *Keywords:* Advertisements, Semiotic Analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis, Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority, Islamic ideologies, Ethics. *JEL Classification:* M37, L82	The research intends to explore the ideologies and perspectives behind electronic advertisements shown in Pakistan. It focuses on symbolic images and visuals used in advertisements to reflect gender representation and the spread of information in shaping the minds of consumers. The current study is based on Peirce's Semiotic Theory in 1860s, which unravel the social or cultural contexts underlying signs and symbols in advertising discourse. Grounded in the theoretical framework of critical interpretation, advertisements were interpreted using signs and visual features. The data for this study was comprised of three selected commercials chosen randomly from all broadcasts aired on the most viewed TV channels of Pakistan. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has been used to critically examine TV ads to explore how advertisers construct ideologies about gender stereotypes and power structure to serve their commercial interests. The findings revealed that electronic advertisements highlighting dominance and objectifying gender promote western culture against the Islamic ideologies of Pakistan. Through the lens of CDA, it was found that the advertisement's content conveys the message with false narratives to consumers violating the ethical code of conduct under the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA). The outcomes of this study will help advertising firms, Policymakers, and PEMRA by providing them with deep insights to take strict measures to avoid anti-Islamic content and gender misrepresentation in Pakistan.

Introduction

Advertisement is considered an integral part of media to educate people, create awareness, and spread information to the targeted audience (Iftikhar & Islam, 2016). The flow of information through this advertising discourse is distinctive as it reaches a broader audience and shapes individuals' ideologies. In the contemporary era, the advertisement industry establishes itself as a vital selling medium that captures the attention of a large audience (Iftikhar, Aziz, & Latif, 2011). Advertisement is among the persuasive television products that influence a consumer buying pattern and persuade a million consumers to buy a particular product or service.

Advertisement is a French-originated word that means a body of knowledge, and it is a kind of communication to spread knowledge and penetrate information into human minds (Kalsoom & Ali, 2019). It involved several strategies like endorsing the product through celebrities or influencers to influence consumers' buying patterns (Shaikh, Bughio, & Kadri, 2015). The research found that humans are bombarded with numerous advertising messages in a day. A survey conducted by Gallup found that an average person spends most time of his life in front of a television watching advertisements, but with the emerging use of social media, this number has increased exponentially (Zeb, Saeed, & Masum, 2021; Iftikhar, Aziz, & Latif, 2011). In a book written by Tuten (2008), it was found that television has encountered 98% reach to the general population than the internet. According to recent statistics in 2020, 4.54 billion active media users spend an increasing amount of time searching for information about products and services and engaging with advertisements (Statistica, 2020). Considering these facts, companies usually invest in TV advertisements and marketing to manipulate cultural beliefs and ideological patterns. Previous studies found that the dominance of advertisements captures the attention of consumers through the portrayal of socio-economic norms, values, culture, and beliefs in Pakistan (Arnold, Kozinets, & Handel, 2001; Kalsoom & Ali, 2019; Faisal et al., 2021).

Pakistan is an Islamic philosophical state where people follow fundamental principles, rules, and regulations. It is the largest Muslim country comprising a population exceeding 200 million people having 96.28 % of the individual following the Muslim religion which represents 11.0% of the Muslim world (Niazi, Ghani, & Aziz, 2019). Religious discourse outlines ethical and social norms that individuals should strictly adhere to (Iftikhar, Aziz, & Latif, 2011). Ethics are the values of an individual that play a role in forming an individual's character within the society and define do's and don'ts to shape their behavior (Zeb, Khan, & Ajmal, 2021). The advertisement industry is

demonstrative of the ethics, culture, values, and principles followed by a nation. The content of advertisements represents the ideologies and beliefs embedded in the text or physical surface of television. In recent years, media advertising can be seen as a powerful tool for perpetuating gender stereotypes that affect the gender roles and socio-cultural beliefs of society that are quite conflicting concerning Islamic culture in Pakistan. A study conducted by Aldulaimi et al. (2016) found that media advertisements strategically construct a misrepresentation of gender neglecting the ethical values and Islamic ideologies of Pakistan.

Advertisement agencies create an ethical dilemma due to the false representation of men/women in the advertisement (Niazi, Ghani, & Aziz, 2019; Anjum, Irum, & Naheed, 2015; Faiz et al., 2021). Men and women are assigned different roles in various societies and cultures, that are also socially constructed. In Pakistan, there is a male dominating culture where power is concentrated among male members, which has got serious implications for society. The objectification of gender and portrayal of immoral values in adverts deviate consumers from Islamic values and teachings (Niazi, Ghani, & Aziz, 2019). Advertisements can positively and negatively affect a consumer's mind, as mostly in prime time; families were seeing dramas or other family programs on television. These advertisements use eye-catching pictures, gender-specific symbols, and signs to clutch customers' attention while neglecting the ideological and religious limitations (Zeb, Khan, & Ajmal, 2021).

Islam heavily emphasizes gender roles, in particular, television commercials constructed on physical appearance and female objectification are prohibited in light of Islamic perspectives (Iftikhar, Aziz, & Latif, 2011). Moreover, advertisements withholding information regarding products/services and false narratives being part of media content violate Pakistan's ethical code of conduct. It is tantamount to deception to spread false information by advertisers to make money

and commercial success. According to Iftikhar and Islam (2016), advertisers use conflicting language, visuals, and texts that contradict Pakistan's ideology, and portrayal of misleading information in the advertisement takes away the rights of consumers. The current study engaged semiotic analysis of the signs and symbols used in television advertisements, which is never studied concerning the Islamic teaching of Pakistan.

Semiotics is the theory of signs and art that deals with icons, symbols, and visual indexes and interprets the social reality. Signs are concrete representations and have constructed meanings that have a direct impact on the minds of viewers. It is an approach to discourse analysis, in which they highlight how society represents signs through discourse and derives a connection between society's different verbal and nonverbal patterns (Ch & Chaudhary, 2012). The philosopher Saussure (2011) proposed that one particular sign can have different meanings, and semiotics deals with those signs, codes, words, symbols, and pictures shown in the advertisements that communicate a variety of social and cultural values to the audience. The study will explore how advertisers present specific visuals, texts, and ideologies for the promotion of their products and manipulation of values and beliefs.

Research on advertisements has been popular in Asian countries recently, however very little observation has focused on this critical semiotics approach to advertising (Iftikhar & Islam, 2016; Peng, 2020). This technique helps understand the deep meaning behind texts, visuals, and non-verbal symbols used in advertisements to convey cultural values worldwide (Shaikh, Bughio, & Kadri, 2015). Critical discourse represents the power relations and gender inequalities based on media images and texts, and how women and men are portrayed in the advertisements (Iftikhar & Islam, 2016). Advertisers use different signs, and visual and textual features to propagate the

stereotypical images and culturally constructed information to the consumers (Ch & Chaudhary, 2012).

The discourse of advertising and visual representation is of great interest to many researchers; however, this study is significant as limited research has been conducted to critically analyze electronic advertisements concerning the Islamic perspective and ideologies of Pakistan (Mohammadi, 2012). The media revolution unfolds severe issues like women's objectification, ultra-modern culture, and misrepresentation of Islamic values in recent studies. To date, it is observed that many researchers have investigated the empirical evidence regarding the influence of advertisements on consumers in the western context (Huang & Lowry, 2015), but the Critical semiotic analysis of TV advertisements complying with Islamic ideologies are never been studied in Pakistan's context (Yasmin, Naseem, & Raza, 2018). The lack of focus on signs and symbols depicting gender stereotypes in advertisements has been largely unexplored. This is objectifying males and females and promotes values against Islamic culture. To address these gaps, it has become necessary to analyze the influence of advertisements on consumers' minds and break the stereotypical images of men and women in the society of Pakistan.

To address these challenges, this study explores the following questions: How do the particular Pakistani advertisements resonate with consumers' content intake? How do the Pakistani advertisements differ from our Islamic teachings? How do these advertisements signify false information regarding products through semiotics? In the next section, the literature review further demonstrates various studies on advertisements to understand how much media and consumers have deviated from religious teachings (Murtaza & Kubra, 2017). Furthermore, the remaining sections will cover the methodology for collecting data, research analysis, and findings.

Literature Review

Electronic media advertising influences people's buying behavior, attitudes, and lifestyles. The importance of advertising cannot be overlooked as it is the most readily available source of spreading information, knowledge, and entertainment (Nasir, 2018). Media content, text, and images represent socio-cultural values and strengthen the belief system of a convoluted society. A research study by Patel (2012) argued that these advertisements and commercials create a significant positive and negative effect on shaping the perceptions, behaviors, attitudes, and choices of people. Organizations rely on media advertising to improve the well-being of society. However, on the other hand, it also provides monopolized content that alters the beliefs and opinions of consumers and manipulates the information for commercial purposes.

The role of media became controversial as it bombarded people with conflicting information and constructed the perception and minds of consumers to purchase a particular product. Advertising agencies use different media campaigns to convey their message to their targeted audience and alter their attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions in a specific manner (Kumar et al., 2016). Using celebrity' appealing images, catchy texts, and representing gender stereotypes to divert consumers' attention and achieve the commercial interests of businesses are a standard part of media advertising. Iftikhar, Aziz, and Latif (2011) found that an advertisement is considered successful if it reveals the identity of gender and exposes female models to change customers' purchase intentions against the religious values of Islam. Media content becomes a hindrance by portraying stereotypic gender roles, glorification of women, false representation of oppressed society, and unfair malpractices to represent the negative image of societal values (Nasir, 2018).

Another study by Hussin, Yusoff, and Yusof (2015) was conducted to examine television advertisements concerning the objectification of women. Qualitative analysis revealed that advertisements involve stereotypical representation and gender inequalities, harmful to the general public and broader audience (Ullah, 2014). Pakistan has a unique mix of the cultural heritage of diverse cultures from religious backgrounds, a British colonial past, and a shared history with India. In this way, advertising practices are influenced by diverse societies', cultural values and norms (Kadir & Al-Aidaros, 2015). There are several research studies examining the influence of advertising in a Western context, but only a few studies have looked at advertising from an Islamic perspective, specifically from the context of Muslim consumers (Anjum, Irum, & Naheed, 2015; Iftikhar, Aziz, & Latif, 2011; Iftikhar & Islam, 2016; Nasir, 2018; Aziz & Ahmed, 2021). This current study aims to reflect the advertisement practices in Pakistan from the standpoint of Islamic ethical perspective.

Islamic Ethics and Advertising practices

According to Aldulaimi et al., (2016), Islam is a complete religion that has discussed every aspect of various fields of life to create an ethically strong society. Ethics are the values of an individual or society that play their role in forming an individual's character within the society (Abbasi, Akhter, & Umar, 2011). Ethics are the obligation to deal with evil and good in society. These ethics can be found in the Holy Quran and within the Hadith of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). It has been investigated that in most Islamic countries, including Pakistan, advertising practices do not follow ethical guidelines (Aldulaimi et al., 2016). It has created a serious social and ethical dilemma due to the materialistic focus and false representation of obscenity and vulgarity in the advertisement (Anjum, Irum, & Naheed, 2015). These ethical and cultural misrepresentations that are against the sayings of the Quran and Hadiths are strictly forbidden. As

Prophet PBUH said, "Verily, obscenity and vulgarity are not part of Islam. Verily, the best people in Islam are those with the best character" (Ahmed, 2021). The Hadith strongly excluded vulgarity from Islam and mentioned that the best people who have the best character are not appealing to the desire of the opposite gender in a non-Islamic and unethical way.

According to Ullah et al. (2015), unethical advertising hurts viewers' sentiments and consumers' minds. These advertisements cause embarrassment for the family sitting in front of one screen where advertisements involve dance practices, ultra-modern dresses of celebrities, and non-Islamic culture (Ali, 2016). The commercialization of the media involves advertisements of female models as an object of beauty, which causes immense harm to the image of Islamic society (Anjum, Irum, & Naheed, 2015). It affects the decision power of consumers and manipulates their ideas of choosing right and wrong concerning their needs (Nasir, 2018). In Pakistan, there is a regulatory authority that controls the regulation of media content on television. They are considered moral police, which filters the ideas and expressions of advertisement and comply with the religious teachings of Islam.

PEMRA and its rule against unethical advertisement

Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) was designed in 2002 to regulate the flow of electronic media and control violations against any ethical codes. This institution was founded to provide license and broadcast information in terms of transparency under the PEMRA ordinance. PEMRA reserves the right to represent state regulations and also register the complaints made by Pakistani nationals against media content and advertisement. Moreover, it also ensures that advertisements do not involve violence, malpractices, racism, vulgarity, and obscenity under the PEMRA Amendment Act (PEMRA, 2007). The media content is considered offensive if it does not comply with the local/national laws and harms the sentiments of local people. Given these

regulations, studies have found that brand advertisements decolorize cultural limitations by introducing unaccustomed norms and beliefs contrary to Pakistan's Islamic values. The Code of conduct published in 2007 includes the following sections for the license of advertisement agencies as given below.

 "It ensures that all programmes and advertisements do not contain or encourage violence, terrorism, racial, ethnic or religious discrimination, sectarianism, extremism, militancy, hatred, pornography, obscenity, vulgarity or other material offensive to commonly accepted standards of decency". (PEMRA, 2007).

Some of the advertisements were banned by the PEMRA under section (20a) that were against Pakistan's ethical, and social integrity. One of the examples was a biscuit company in which actresses dance throughout the commercial to advertise biscuits. It was against Islamic values and banned by PEMRA by issuing an advisory to all Pakistani channels (Hussain, 2020). In 2017, one ice cream advertisement was also banned by the sensory board of PEMRA as its seductive ice cream ad, and it was not allowed to air due to a violation of religious values approved by authority (Daily Times, 2017). The core purpose of advertising discourse is to educate consumers about new products, their associated features, and qualities (Schroder & Vestergaard, 2005). Accordingly, this study aims to highlight the advertisement's features including signs, gestures, dressing, and texts to analyze how they become influential in changing the beliefs and values of society.

Theoretical Framework

The present research is based on Semiotic Theory which reflects the meaning of signs and tries to convey the message through those signs (Solik, 2014). This origin of semiotics was first proposed by the Swiss linguist Saussure and philosopher Peirce in the early 19th century. In the light of the work of Saussure (2011), Semiotics is a kind of language model in which media of communication

are signs that do not have an exact meaning, so semiotics helps the receiver understand the interpretation of the message sent by the sender through signs, symbols, and texts (Murtaza & Kubra, 2017). He classified signs into two components a sound component named Signifier and a conceptual component called Signified. The association between signifier and signified is greatly influenced by the culture and context conveyed to the audience.

On the other hand, Peirce's model proposed theories on how signs communicate, deliver ideas, attitudes, and beliefs to their audience. He stresses the dynamic relation between representation, object, and interpretant (Pierce, 1991). Representation is a frame for the sign, the object is for which the sign is sending a message, and Interpretant is a sense created by a sign for conveying a message (Interpretant is not a translator but a kind of work to do). Language is the most prominent way of communication, but symbols, drawings, and lines used in advertisements also have a huge impact on consumers (Kuzu, 2016). Semiotics help to convey verbal, non-verbal, or written communication through different mediums to reach their target audience (Chandler, 2007).

In addition, advertisements are interpreted as media discourse that analyzes the use of language and semiotics to reveal the power structures and gender inequalities in advertising. Critical Discourse analysis (CDA) discovers the patterns of signs and their constructed meanings and identifies how power, dominance, and cultural hegemony have been created by media to influence the buying pattern of consumers. This framework creates the link between ideology and social processes and finds out how advertisers appeal the potential customers through advertisements. Critical discourse is mainly instrumental in revealing the information behind these cultural signs (Shaikh, Bughio, & Kadri, 2015; Qambar & Asad, 2021). In the next section, the research methodology discusses how the research study was undertaken and advertisements were analyzed using semiotic and discourse analysis.

Most of the previous research on advertising discourse was conducted in western societies on a similar line (Huang & Lowry, 2015), however, it was observed that a few studies have been focused on advertisements from an Islamic perspective, specifically from the context of Muslim consumers (Anjum, Irum, & Naheed, 2015; Iftikhar, Aziz, & Latif, 2011; Iftikhar & Islam, 2016; Nasir, 2018). Pakistan has a unique heritage of diverse cultures and undertakes the impact of religion, post-colonial past, and a shared history. This current study aims to reflect on the advertisements in Pakistan for creating gender identities from the standpoint of an Islamic ethical perspective. This study is significant as it has used a critical semiotic approach to analyze the advertisement content and visuals, and how they create a deeper impact on Islamic society. This has subsequently provided advertisers and practitioners with new perspectives regarding how critical discourse of advertising reveals the power structure, cultural dominance, and gender inequality affecting the mindset and ideologies of Muslim consumers (Najafian, & Ketabi, 2011).

Research Methodology

The current study has employed a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze and interpret the data comprised from Pakistani TV commercials. This paper used two-layer analysis; Firstly, Semiotic analysis (SA) to critically evaluate the signs, gestures, symbols, and features of Pakistani TV commercials and unfold the significance through sign systems, and Secondly, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with an emphasis on language-based on underlying ideologies and dominant gender roles. It aims to explore the relation between language and power and represent hidden beliefs and cultural meanings that promote inequality and injustice in society (Kuzu, 2016). According to Solik (2014), In semiotics, there is no sign without ideology in the world. The non-verbal signifiers are examined in semiotic analysis based on icons, images, and indexes. Peirce (1991) proposes these three signs; The icon is the sign that has a resemblance that the wearer can

identify, at the same time, an index is the sign that has a relationship between representative and object, and a symbol is a sign that can symbolize representation through thoughts and feelings.

Data Collection

The data for this study consists of three commercial broadcasts on famous television operating channels in Pakistan. This study's population comprises all commercials aired on Pakistan's most viewed TV channels (ARY, PTV, Geo, and Express). The data has been collected in different phases during the prime-time hours, which require keen observation of aired advertisements.

Selected Sample

The commercials were randomly selected from three broad categories of household, beauty, and telecommunication. These product categories represent those television advertisements that have been given more exposure on Pakistani TV channels (Wahid, Muhammad, & Burfat, 2015). Soap advertisement falls under household product commercial, beauty cream falls under beauty product, and cell phone commercial falls under telecommunication. Three commercials under each category have been discussed. The sampling technique used in this research is non-probability Convenience sampling. The rationale for choosing the commercial from each category lies in its occurrence ratio during the prime-time viewership. Moreover, one commercial from each category has been selected after keen observation, which has been chiefly viewed and contains anti-Islamic content, which misrepresents our culture all over the world (Nisar, 2018).

Data Analysis and Results

To analyze the data, Critical discourse analysis (CDA) has been used to uncover the ideologies and power structures encoded in the text, which is also included in Linguistics. CDA is commonly used to analyze patterns critically and helps to translate the message conveyed by signs and make imaginary pictures of that social reality. For this purpose, the critical discourse and semiotics help

to evaluate the mainstream TV commercials concerning Islamic ideologies, ethical values, cultural hegemony, and gender supremacy that discriminate against oppressed people against the powerful (Najafian, & Ketabi, 2011). It highlights the link between graphics and textual communication and critiques a modernist perspective of promoting power and inequality through language and text in advertising discourse. For this purpose, the observation and note technique is used further to analyze the content in the advertisements. In the observing technique, the researcher observes, watches and critically analyzes the content aired on the media. While in the note technique, the researcher notes the icon, index, and symbol seen from observation (Chandler, 2007). Critical discourse helps to analyze how gender identities have been constructed within social processes and how it highlights the relation between language and power. From the standpoint of linguistics, CDA adopts a critical stance and analyzes the semiotics, and verbal and textual communication to reveal the power conflicts and dominance of group interests through discourse.

Peirce's model analyses the sign and keenly observe how these signs make different perceptions and meanings in the mind of viewers. In this way, the researcher analyzes the dress, setting, expression, gesture, color, and the verbal message conveyed in advertisements through critical discourse analysis (Rizvi, Khan, & Farooq, 2020). This technique is helpful to analyze the commercials to derive the meanings and to understand how women are being represented, gender roles have been enacted and ideologies shaped through the advertisements. In the following section, three commercials have been analyzed through semiotics and critical discourse analysis.

Mobile Phone advertisement

The advertisement is based on a cell phone company Techno in China, but it has expanded its function in the Middle-east, Africa, and Asia over the years. It has a wide range of latest technology in mobile phones. This ad was aired on November 3, 2020. In this advertisement, we can see that "Taivos lab" is written with an LED light. On the top right corner, Tecno is written in the advertisement. In the following advertisement shown in Figure 1, we can see the actress is holding a mobile phone directly from the lab, and then she jumps right into a colorful street full of youngsters. All those youngsters were portrayed as someone inspired by new technology. A girl is

wearing a fan around her neck, and a man is standing outside a high-end car. Then the actress walks into a gate controlled by technology, where she captures with her cellphone that has a feature to capture pictures in slow motion. A boy casts magic with a bubble cloud, then the actress moves

to a nightclub capturing pictures in the dark while dancing. In the end, everybody involved in the advertisement captures a selfie with a mobile phone wide range camera. Towards the end, a cellphone appears with a metallic shine where the slogan appears "Next level Camera phone". Throughout the advertisement, the mobile phone camera was the main focus. On Tecno's mobile set at the bottom model's name and company's logo are embedded as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Mobile Phone Advertisement

Semiotic Analysis

We have observed that the company name or monogram is used constantly in the advertisement from the following advertisement. Mobile phone and model specifications are written throughout the advertisement and are specified as "Next level camera phone", which is the slogan for this ad. Travios lab is also mentioned as the pioneer of smart photography. In this advertisement, Company name and model are used as ICON as it shows a similarity between the represented idea and object, as Peirce (1991) suggested in his research. The primary purpose of using the company's name as an icon is to build trust with consumers that the company focuses on technological advancement to feel connected. Mobile fulfills their need for a smart camera.

They have used a celebrity wearing modern clothing and her being with the younger generation to show their company keeps pace with modern technology. Actresses wearing modern clothes and the younger generation using modern gadgets are utilized in advertisements to connect with the country's younger generation to give a message of modern technology, which is used as INDEX in the advertisement as Khubra (2017) suggested, that index in the sign system indicates casual relation between object and sign. The further ad captures the essence of modern versions of photography as 'Slomos' are trending, and influencers use them to create entertainment in their

videos. Similarly, clubbing is shown in advertisements to connect the young eastern generation to the western as younger generations are inspired by the West.

Thirdly, a smartphone appears with five cameras on the back, and a metallic body appears. The model of the phone is used as SYMBOL in the advertisement. So, while buying mobile products, customers do not mistake it for any other mobile company. Symbols are signs developed over time and become a cultural affiliation (Shaikh, Bughio, & Kadri, 2015). The purpose of showing a mobile phone with high-tech cameras and a beautiful body is a symbol that their products are slim and beautiful with high-end technology.

Critical Discourse Analysis

At the beginning of advertisements, celebrities wear modern clothing, emphasizing how our culture is more defined by modernization than our religious, and cultural values. As the ad proceeds forward, magic is depicted, although it is not really what the ad is emphasizing on the culture of the young generation is indulged in creating such content. They are the primary buyers of high-end mobiles and cameras showing something not part of our Islamic teaching and is prohibited in Islam. It should not have been part of this ad if we consult Quran for its teaching regarding magic which was shown during the advertisement. Witchcraft or magic is also trickery which is forbidden in Islam. They are also known as "The Occult Sciences". They include three types that overlap; the first is Black magic which includes summoning spirit and hurting people through dark arts. The second is theurgy. It includes potion-making, amulets, and the use of plants in sorcery, and the third is white or natural magic that includes vanishing smoothly from sight. In this advertisement, white magic has been shown. Islam denounces magic, and even astrological reading and fortune telling are prohibited in Islam. According to Muslims, it is believed that no

one knows the future or can see the unseen except Allah, and that is why the Quran (7:188) asserts that even Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) does not know the unseen. Concerning this, it says:

"If I knew the unseen, I should have secured abundance for myself, and no evil would have touched me".

After that magic, the actress enters a club where young people are dancing. Dancing and alcohol bars clubs are banned in Pakistan and are against Islamic culture. So, what is the point of showing something that is not part of a culture? Everyone wearing culturally inappropriate clothes. Actresses wearing off-shoulder dresses could have been avoided. Although the ad emphasized the mobile phone camera, it did not show the features of the cell phone. Nor did they talk about prices or guarantees regarding products. So, in this case, they showed half picture regarding the product and did not mention other features like battery, display, speed, visuals, and price of the product.

Beauty Cream Advertisement

Beauty cream is a local product of Pakistan. Beauty creams are top-rated when it comes to women because of the personified standards of beauty of women. This ad of Layla beauty cream was aired in October 2020. In this advertisement, a filtered Proposal picture (Rishta photo) of the bride is shown to the groom. He says 'Yes' to marriage after looking at the picture. In the next scene, the wedding ceremony is held, but the bride still has covered her face with her stoler and is holding a framed photograph of her face. As guests arrive and enquire about her face aesthetics, she shows them the framed picture. Groom is excited to meet his bride. However, as soon as he lifts the veil and sees the filtered framed photo and his bride, he faints, and the bride with the lifted veil with a darker complexion is shown in the next scene as shown in Figure 2. After that, the bride uncovers the cream. It is in a black container, and they are showing that it is made from natural fruit extracts, as soon as she starts applying, her dark skin transforms into a brighter, lighter complexion. In the

end, the beauty cream with the whole packaging is shown with a veiled woman captured on the packaging as depicted in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Beauty Cream Advertisement

Semiotic Analysis

From the following advertisements, it is observed that a filtered image has been shown to the audience. Moreover, towards the end, a dark image of the actress is revealed. Dark complexion is used as ICON in the advertisement. The icon is a similarity between the idea represented and an object shown in an advertisement (Harrison, Thomas, & Cross, 2017). When the packaging of beauty cream is revealed, it is still in the black-colored box, which again validates the idea of beauty cream for helping people with darker complexions to have whiter skin tones.

As INDEX is a causal relation between object and sign (Chandler, 2007). In the following advertisement, a girl getting married has a darker skin tone and has used a filtered photograph for her proposal. The idea is represented to young women getting married to use this product to have a lighter complexion at the wedding. This whole scenario is used as INDEX in the advertisement, and towards the end, when the actress uses beauty cream, as soon as she applies, her dark skin tone

vanishes, and a lighter skin stone appears. Symbols develop over time when the product is used (Chandler, 2007). In this advertisement, an Italic name for beauty cream appears with the black packaging of the product, and it is used as SYMBOL. As soon as people buy this cream, the first thing they will notice is the black packaging of the product. Italic writing with yellow color represents light, and this justifies their campaign of whitening skin complexion.

Critical Discourse Analysis

In this advertisement, it is clear that they are validating the patriarchal society mindset where everyone is measured by a certain beauty standard than others. Being fair or black has nothing to do with what humanity feels towards others. In Islam, nobody is superior to others based on complexion, caste, color, or creed; as mentioned in Khutbah e Hajj by Prophet Muhammad PBUH, the difference lies in piety. So how do we think that being dark is not beautiful and being fair is prettier? Allah has guided us in Quran (49: 13):

"We have indeed created you from one man and one woman and have made you into various nations and tribes so that you may know one another; indeed, the more honourable among you, in the sight of Allah, is one who is more pious among you; indeed, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware."

Then there comes the message of using fruit extracts in their product which is not true. In 2019 ministry of climate change under the World Health Organization conducted a study in which it was revealed that most local brands use mercury in their manufacturing which results in severe skin diseases and cancer (WHO, 2019). So, this ad campaign focuses on false information, which is also prohibited in Islam, and according to the laws of Pakistan under advertisement section (4a), it is wrong to publish false and distorted information in an advertisement (PEMRA Act, 2007).

These beauty products do not work (Shroff, Diedrich, & Craddock, 2018) as the fairness of skin depends upon melanin, so obviously, they are mixing truth with a false claim. As Allah guides in Quran (2:42):

"Do not confound the truth by mixing it with falsehood, and do not conceal the truth while you know (the meaning and outcome of what you do, and that what you strive to hide is true."

Soap Advertisement

The third advertisement is aired in popular soap industry Lux brand, in which the actress enters and gives a glamorous look to an actor. At the same time, the posture and dress code of women portray ideological heterogeneity. The dressing, setting, gestures, and moves of actor and actress show cultural diversity. At the start of the advertisement, the actress gives a sensational expression to the actor then actor came and held the actress's hand and started to dance with her inspired by her look and the actress put a hand on her shoulder of an actor. The actor shows a lusty look over women. In the end, we can see a bathtub where a woman puts soap over her body and wash her face with soap as shown in Figure 3. The main aim of this advertisement is to convey the message that this soap is used to attract a man to women. This advertisement misrepresents the Pakistani cultural values and norms. Such kinds of scenes in advertisements invoke lasciviousness, sexual harassment, brutality, and vulgarity in our society.

Semiotic Analysis

At the start of the commercial and afterward, the Soap brand name is shown in golden words on the left corner of the advertisement. The name of the product is categorized as the sign system of ICON from the beauty products. The primary purpose of the sign system is to tell customers about the main icon of the commercial around which the advertisement revolves (Peirce, 1991, p. 55). This commercial has presented a woman who is using soap and has connectivity with the main

object, categorized as the INDEX sign system of this advertisement (Khubra, 2017). This advertisement is for female consumers because it is commonplace that women want to look beautiful and charming to attract men, which advertisement exhibits and postures.

The Symbol sign system tells the consumer about the type and shape of the product. The phrase "Chand Sa Roshan chehra" symbolizes the concept that a brighter face is a sign of beauty as given in Figure 3. Moreover, the smell, oil, and seven beauty ingredients symbolize thought, idea and object. It gives its consumers essential information about the product, so they do not falsely buy the product.

Figure 3: Lux Soap Advertisement

Critical Discourse Analysis

This commercial is against our Islamic cultural values and norms. In this commercial, the actress is wearing a sleeveless and backless dress. Islam is not in favour of exposing women's bodies in front of strangers. Our Holy prophet said that "Those women who wear clothes as if they are naked

and tend to seduce others are like a camel with their necks bent with pride, they will never be able to enter paradise, and Neither will they be able to get its smell" (Sahih Muslim, 21-28). The relationship of love is considered respectful in our society, but it is not considered reasonable to show such affection in public or on screen. At the same time, an actress holds the actor's hand dancing with him, and puts her arms on his shoulder. The gestures of the actor and actress are sensational and romantic, which is not considered appropriate in our society.

These scenes in the commercial represent flirtation and sexual representation in society (Ullah, 2014). These things prevail in our society, and the viewers see the world as shown and projected on the screen. In this commercial, a girl is represented as an object of beauty (Nisar, 2018). This commercial is anti-Islamic regarding their dress, their gesture, and their expression. In this advertisement, an alluring merchandise approach is used to attract customers and urge them to purchase products. These commercials show the audience an unreal and fake picture of Pakistani society and culture, which makes no sense. As the PEMRA code was formulated to control and evaluate the content of TV channels, they are pressurized by the media agencies, popular demand, and the influence of multinational brands indirectly. All rules and regulations of PEMRA have been buried under Media freedom and the growth of private TV channels (Ashraf, 2014). The study is intended to suggest that policymakers, government, and media regulatory bodies regulate the advertisement content by following Islamic guidelines and banning all non-Islamic and false content for the sake of safeguarding societal wellbeing.

Results And Discussions

This study examines Pakistan's TV advertisements through visual semiotic and critical discourse analysis. The findings revealed that the contents of advertisements misrepresent Islamic culture and teachings by revealing the dominance of patriarchal culture that enact specific gender roles and behaviors. In all the above advertisements, women are symbolized as an object for selling products, whether beauty soap or mobile phones. The main focus of the advertisement is the beauty of celebrities that are being exploited for attracting consumers and selling products. It objectifies the beauty of women through obscenity and vulgarity which is against the notion of Islam (Iftikhar & Islam, 2017). The results are similar to the previous researchers who found that Gender role stereotyping and glorification of celebrities or female actresses are significant in most advertisements (Iftikhar, Aziz & Latif, 2011; Nasir, 2018; Shaikh, Bughio, & Kadri, 2015; Olusola et al., 2021). In the modern era, media advertisements are aimed at misrepresenting the religious and cultural values of a nation solely to promote its products (Zeb, Khan, & Ajmal, 2021).

Secondly, promoting men and women relations other than marriage is also being glorified in many studies (Nisar, 2018; Shaikh, Bughio, & Kadri, 2015). Advertising agencies try to violate norms, and values and go against Islamic ethics to generate more revenues and attract a wider population. Some advertisements containing revealing clothes or dances have already been banned by PEMRA. Most advertisements that are unethical get unnoticed as brands are investing more money in the branding and advertising of their products. Most advertisements highlight every other aspect of the ad except for the product they are selling (Zeb, Khan, & Ajmal, 2021). No meaningful information regarding product, price, or features is being used as means to sell products. Given these circumstances, PEMRA is a regulatory authority whose primary purpose is to regulate and control electronic media content. This study aims to highlight and improve the role of

advertisement in shaping the minds of consumers and also improve the functioning of PEMRA to control the content of advertisements and ban unethical ads abruptly, which misrepresent the cultural values and reflect the wrong image of Islamic society.

Thirdly, advertisements contain false information regarding products such as beauty creams containing mercury and scented soap but in reality, they won't have a scent that lasts long. Wrong information concerning products is key to selling (Murtaza & Kubra, 2017). Not showing the existing culture or revealing a culture that aligns with their motive is a significant part of an advertisement nowadays. PEMRA and government bodies must take serious action against spreading false information and involving malpractices to increase the sales of their products.

Our study analyzed that using signs in an advertisement explicitly create gender identities and social relations. Advertisers by using signs and colors better communicate with the minds of consumers to achieve the goal of popularity and promotion (Yasmin, Naseem, & Raza, 2018; Mager & Helgeson, 2011). Semiotic analysis occupies a significant place within the framework of critical discourse analysis of advertisements to create ideological meaning and cultural representation. These visual and verbal texts are manipulated to produce a multilayered ideology, that puts in question the extent to which the target audience is aware of the messages in advertisements portrayed or they just believe the given information (Yasmin, Naseem, & Raza, 2018). Keeping in view the implications of these advertisements, Government and regulatory agencies must formulate policy guidelines for the advertisers and media industry to control the content of advertisements and the genre of advertising must be utilized to construct a positive image of gender roles in Pakistan's society. Researchers argue here that PEMRA must take serious action for breaking gender stereotypes that have largely represented the culture of Pakistan which would be a great contribution to our society.

Practical Implications

From semiotic and critical discourse analysis, research findings have revealed that brands are not marketing their products but rather celebrities. The advertisements were unable to capture the essence of a product in a marketing campaign. These advertisements are influencing consumer minds in both positive and negative ways. They have less focus on product and more on glamour and the depiction of diverse cultures is quite the focus. Marketing campaigns should comply with the nation's cultural, religious values, and societal ethics while branding a product. A false narrative regarding stereotypes about fair/ dark skin tones like in a beauty cream and soap advertisement should not be promoted. Similarly, in a cell phone advertisement, structure and mobile features should have been discussed and portrayed realistically, so consumers can make the purchase decision rationally.

PEMRA needs to take action before airing such kinds of advertisements. Most of the advertisements that were banned in the past resulted from different public campaigns against these advertisements. The general public and consumers need to decide what they want to see in a marketing advertisement or be misguided by these advertisements.

Theoretical Implications

A comprehensive visual analysis of advertisements has been conducted to view the appearance, manner, and symbols in an advertisement. This study extends theoretical contribution by providing critical semiotics of TV advertisements through the lens of discourse analysis. This study will help advertisement makers by providing them with deep insights and knowledge about the perception and mindset of consumers and the local market. This study will add to the literature on how anti-Islamic content creates a long-lasting impact on our society and how the viewers start to see the

world as it is projected on the screen. Our research has indicated how anti-Islamic content in advertisements and freedom of media harms our society.

Conclusion and Future Directions

This study was carried out through semiotic and critical discourse analysis of selected three Pakistani advertisements. The thought-provoking result of the analysis shows that these advertisements contain unethical and anti-Islamic content which does not truly portray an accurate picture of Pakistani culture and norms. Through these advertisements, we have interpreted that women objectify their beauty and exhibit unethical behavior towards 'Na-mahram' on-screen (Hussin, Yusoff, & Yusof, 2015). Revealing ultra-modern women's dressing in all advertisements takes the new generation in the wrong direction (Iftikhar et al., 2017). Their gestures and expressions are unethical from an Islamic perspective that promotes vulgarity and obscenity at a societal level.

Advertisement's content and symbols create meanings and convey the message with false narratives to consumers violating the ethical code under the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) Pakistan. Pakistani advertisements do not follow Islamic values and principles. Sponsors are using different tactics for marketing and selling their products, and they are responsible for distorting Islamic and ethical beliefs. These advertisement agencies are a real threat to our cultural values and norms (Murtaza & Kubra, 2017). Moreover, this study explores how bad the impact these advertisements left on the mind of viewers. They created a more profound impact on our youngsters and adolescents, who consider it a viable medium to learn their culture, religion, and global values as it is shown on the screen (Ijaz et al., 2020). The signs in advertisements inculcate viewers with such distorted ideological representation of celebrities that will confuse the viewers to identify between what is actual or fake. This research critically

evaluates the electronic advertisements in Pakistan misrepresenting cultural and social values through visual and textual semiotic analysis.

The research tries to uncover every aspect of three famous advertisements being aired on Pakistani television through semiotic analysis. It is recommended that in future studies advertisements other than beauty creams and soaps can also be looked for further analysis concerning unethical content against Pakistan's ideology and ethics. Future research can also capture the essence of other developing countries and the perspective of other cultural and religious teachings. Moreover, research regarding psychological changes in consumers', their decision-making, and purchase intentions when viewing the media content can also be part of future studies.

It has also been observed that most advertisements reflect and promote gender bias and inequality. However, these advertisements have been challenged in the Pakistani context as explored in this research. This study can be replicated by other cultures and other societies to explore the phenomenon of avoiding stereotypes and objectifying gender in advertisements. Furthermore, such research can be significant for those who intend to use media in changing the emerging trends and mindset of the general population. This can open the avenues for advertisers and agencies to break the norm of using obscenity and power structures prevailing in western society to sell their products and focus more on promoting the Islamic culture and religious values. Future research can use a linguistic and multimodal technique to explore the social and cultural context behind media advertising.

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