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Thematic Discourse Analysis of Gender Objectification in Billboard Advertisements of Pakistan

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Abstract

The current qualitative study endeavoured to investigate the multi-layered meaning of billboard advertisements by elaboration, exploration and elucidation of intended meanings and cultural norms demonstrated in billboard advertisements. For this purpose, the content of eight (8) billboard advertisements was thematically analyzed utilizing Fairclough's 3-Dimensional Model: Description interpretation and explanation. The obtained results showed that these billboards had underlying meanings in terms of gender objectification, female portrayal, and social stereotypes as prominent themes. Furthermore, all the selected advertisements were based on a fine designed semiotic study to motivate the users.

Key Words: Gender Objectification, Social Stereotype, Billboard Advertisements, Female Portrayal, 3-Dimensional Model

Introduction

Advertisements are an integral part of today's society. It develops our choices between right and wrong. The advertisement agencies, amidst billboard advertisement, convince the masses towards their products and also present an ideal representation of genders, which creates confusion among the public (Ali & Shahwar, 2011). This paper investigated how advertisement attracts people to buy a company's products through the assistance of billboards. Billboards are used in advertisements of products, but they also have a hidden meaning (Davidson, 2013). These meanings are a matter of concern as they can influence the mind of the public (Wang, 2016). These intended hidden discourses can be analyzed through Fairclough's (1993, 2013) 3-

Dimensional (3D) Model: Description interpretation and explanation (Hassan, Shafi, & Masood, 2021).

This paper highlighted the agenda behind the depiction of foreign faces instead of using local talent in the advertisements. It also analyzed how billboard advertisements constructed and delivered the belief system of being flawless and perfect. First, it depicts gender disparity to investigate why so much money is spent on billboards. Second, it seeks to expose the mindset underlying investing money in ads rather than providing enhanced expertise. The primary goal of this study is to discover the stereotyped depiction of gender stereotypes in billboards. This research aimed at answering the research question: What parts do gender play in the advertisements?

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Problem Statement

Advertisement through billboards is an inroad to reach out to the masses. Billboards are in sight throughout every nook and cranny. Billboard advertisements make brands well known. It depicts the company's ideologies and social responsibilities toward society and constructs the genders, significantly influencing society ([Ahmed, Shafi, & Masood, 2021](#)). Since the advertisements show the indigenous culture, the portrayed culture should be relatable to the community. This research paper highlighted how these billboards represent men and women while keeping the native culture in mind. The current study is delimited to the billboard advertisements of Rawalpindi during the year 2020.

Significance of the Study

This study uncovers the hidden ideologies that advertisements are promoting, keeping Pakistani culture in mind. The way men and women are presented and the goals advertisers want to achieve by portraying gender in advertisements is highlighted in the current study. It is essential to conduct this research as these billboards are seen every day by everyone; hence their importance cannot simply be ignored. They portray glamour and perfection in every possible manner. Men and women presented are shown higher to the reality than the commoner's level. The ad-makers employ hyperreality—makeup, professional photography, and editing help build this perfection contradictory to reality.

Literature Review

For many decades, advertisements have been a critical marketing medium, enticing people to buy certain products from a specific brand ([Shaikh, Bughio, & Kadri, 2015](#)). Language is a social transformation phenomenon (Masood & Shafi, 2020), and language embeds ideologies ([Masood, Shafi, Rahim & Darwesh, 2020](#)). There are some hidden notions within every advertisement ([Masood, Shafi, & Darwesh, 2020](#)), and these notions are emotional carriers ([Shafi, 2019](#)). Both men and women are objectified in the advertisement industry

for the sake of selling products ([Vantomme, Geuens, & Dewitte, 2006](#)).

The research was carried out by [Orth and Halancova \(2004\)](#) on advertisements. They inferred that the advertisements which portray gender roles are appreciated more. The depiction of women as a sexual entity in different advertisements are there. Men and women are separately objectified. In some advertisements, women are projected as independent women. Gender portrayal in advertisements by the ad-makers is delineated because they think that the description of gender in such advertisements would attract the masses. This made-up picture of women forces other women in the public eye to purchase particular items to accomplish the degree of flawlessness ([Adorno, 2013](#)).

According to [Fowler \(1994\)](#), discourse analysis finds its way through the essential roots of ideology. It helps produce a different and unique discourse that can be moulded in various ways to be shown to the public. Many people are not familiar with this technique. The advertisements are produced by keeping specific ideas in mind that pinpoints the central perspective of those advertisements. [Anusha \(2008\)](#) stated that media abstain from giving the fair image of a woman. Advertisements are delightful entities which by highlighting specific parts of a females body, objectify women and sell their products.

Kilbourine (1999) called gender objectification a direct alarm for society. The sole purpose is to make the public believe that advertisements do have some influence and are not purposeless. There are some business motifs that a company spend a large amount of money on advertisements. The industry forces women to nullify their ideology and personality and adopt some other disposition. They strive to attain perfection in advertisements that have done much damage to our society. Girls want to copy whatever ideal has been shown to them. They even reduce their diet for their look.

[Pandey, Garg, Kataria and Dhasmana \(2016\)](#) watched the social qualities and philosophies uncovered by the advertisements. They analyzed advertisements that were appeared on Eastern and Western channels. Examination depended on how

females and males were appeared in several perspectives in these promotions remembering sexual orientation uniformity. The advertisements were investigated by utilizing essential conversation examination and semiotics as instruments. This technique helped the analyst to be covert the concealed plans.

[Fairclough's Model \(1993\)](#) depends on Text analysis, process analysis and cultural analysis of the conversation. The outcomes demonstrated that the promotions broke down supported sex disparity. Ladies are externalized and displayed by utilizing a few techniques. Advertisements did a significant job in supporting men driven states and dealing with social power relations ([Fatima, Ahmed, & Shafi, 2021](#)). In addition, if the advertisement makers are the people of the government, they would make such advertisements that would highlight the supremacy of the government in power ([Reichert and Lambiase, 2014](#)).

[Ali et al. \(2012\)](#) distributed an examination article about the portrayal of ladies in advertisements as indicated by social norms. Advertisements were analyzed on two scales: First, the semiotic assessment was completed, and second, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was implemented to discover the sexual orientation represented by females and men in these advertisements. The purpose of this article was not, to sum up, the outcomes, yet its sole purpose was to break down the social viewpoint. It was seen from the literary investigation that the advertisements concentrated on an explicit belief system, and the belief system is very influential in creating and rearranging thoughts ([Roohi, Masood, & Mushtaq, 2021](#)).

The male and female characters worked by taking some social roles and critically took out the capability among sexual orientation and sex direction inside the enormous predominant male society ([Fatima, Rahim, & Musaddiq, 2021](#)). Advertisements put a significant part of the exertion in building up the viewpoint towards gender. The outcomes that men are appeared to be free and robust are represented in the advertisements. They are significantly more specialized and prudent ([Ali, 2019](#)). If there is an occurrence of insight, they will be

much superior to females. Females are enthusiastic, touchy reliant and stand out from those males in management and other duties ([Ullah, Arif, & Qaisar, 2020](#)).

[Mohammadi \(2011\)](#) was of the view that the rise in the predominant discussion of one sexual orientation in the advertisements unknowingly and in a roundabout way impacts the customary arrangement of gender and gender roles. This examination work was done in Iran, so the analyst concluded that Iran has opened up forthcoming ladies to participate in Bodoni spaces. As of the late number of females have expanded in various talks. They can be seen at the number of open offices as businesspeople, cops, law transport officials, engineers, specialists, clergy members, ministers, and many more; therefore, the media should portray the exemplary representation of women and their roles.

According to [Matthes, Prieler and Adam \(2016\)](#), both males and females are objectified in T.V. advertisements around the world. Several studies on the objectification of men and women in T.V. commercials over time were produced. Nevertheless, at the same time, a clear depiction of gender objectification is still absent because of growing societal restrictions towards women. The analysts have tried to fill this hole. Based on the cliché delineation of gender in T.V. promotions, information is gathered from 13 European American and Asian countries. One thousand seven hundred fifty-five advertisements were collected as a test. The information investigation depends on the sexual orientation of the fundamental character, age, and setting. The outcomes indicated that the cliché component is a substantial piece of the promotions. The results even uncovered that the cliché component in the advertisements broke down had no relationship with sex balance being polished in a nation. The way of life does not impact much on the portrayal of sexual orientation in promotions. In the most recent four decades, many research works have been done on sexual orientation in T.V. commercials.

The marketing specialists, the ad-makers rely upon the depiction of men and women in advertisements. They accept that this distinction in gender is significant in making and displaying

frameworks and accomplishing their objectives by focusing on social affairs. Gender portraying advertisements use such pictures that achieve the purchaser's purpose.

Activists and approach producers accept that the depiction of men and women in advertisements is dangerous for some apparent reasons. The patrons advance the gender cliché component and lead it to speculation, which may end sex value and harm society all over. Assembled actualities and experimental evidence show that sex is astoundingly antique in ads. The exploration chip away at sexual orientation conventional has been done on promotions from one nation. However, this examination paper experienced advertisements of several nations. Such work is specifically locale, and at a specific time, this cannot be used to see at revelations across countries ([Masood, Shafi, Shah, Kamran, Yousaf, & Saleem, 2020](#)). For instance, if we see a complexity between two examinations from two fascinating countries, we may not verify whether the watched variance reveal social differentiation or it can be pursued back to contrast the necessities genuinely required.

The depiction of men and women were inspected transversely over America, Asia and Europe. The nations were chosen based on two criteria. The first was to select the countries that have a particular score on various gender lists. At long last, the decision was driven by practical reasons, for instance, access to T.V. channels and language capabilities of our coders. The most recent data from all sexual orientation cliché records were used ([Masood, Shafi, Sultana, & Firdous, 2021](#)). The examination completed by the flow scientist filled many holes and regions that were missing. T.V. commercials have been breaking down by several explores broadly and globally and on many levels.

[Abid, Ahmad and Iqbal \(2016\)](#) on Discourse the Analysis of billboard advertisements. This information in this paper is given as for the language used as a piece of notice advertisements. It examined the declaration maxims with the assistance of Halliday's Hypothesis of metafunctions (1994). 50 Billboard advertisements from Lahore were randomly investigated for sustenance, attire, adaptable framework, refreshments, greatness

chemicals, shampoos and shoe advancements. Results were produced with the assistance of SPS programming.

There is gender objectification because of two reasons: First, it is prominent that sex generalization speculations in advancing can affect sex part specification in the open field, furthermore engendering sex and sex awkwardness ([Siddiq, Arif, Shafi, & Masood, 2021](#)). Second, gender roles in Television advertisements appear far and wide, self-ruling a given sex correspondence status in a particular country. After that increasingly unique country does not generally describe women—to the extent of sexual direction decency—in progressively powerful courses in Television publicizing. We believe our assessment drives a discourse among analysts, advertisers, and controllers on the overall prevalence of sex stereotyping in promotions ([Ahmed, Shafi, & Masood, 2021](#)).

The objectification of males and females is generally examined of the promotions taken from T.V., likely that no examination has been done exclusively on the sexual orientation delineation in billboard ads. The boards are seen by everybody having a place from each class of society; their significance cannot be overlooked. The sexual orientation portrayal on them has a significant relevance which should accord to the way of life of one's general public it does not occur in Pakistan. The researcher has tested to break down such billboard advertisements that are most regularly observed and convey the majority's shrouded belief systems. Besides, the billboards picked are from the expressways where several individuals travel each day.

Research Methodology

Theoretical Framework

The analysis of the chosen billboards is based on Fairclough's 3D frameworks. Language, according to Fairclough, is a sort of social practice. It focuses not only on the substance but also on the method. On the contrary, the language highlights society through the canvas of digital media, and its understanding has yet to be seen in connection to the usual interaction and

the social environment in which the language is generated.

On the basis of these principles, Fairclough developed his 3D Model. Each communication event, he believes, consists of three aspects. It is a language that can be spoken, written in images, or a mix of both of the above. It is a time-consuming method that entails the creation and analysis of messages. It falls within the scope of social practice. Fairclough developed 3 phases of CDA in relation to the three layers of discourse. Each level necessitates a distinct sort of reasoning:

Text Analysis (Description)

This level is engaged with the linguistic examination, which includes lexicon, transcription, grammar and syntax. With text analysis, language and themes are seen, which includes font and colour as well.

Processing Analysis (Interpretation)

The term "interpretation" refers to the relationship between text and its composition. Communication is evaluated as a discursive practice rather than linguistically. Beyond linguistic characteristics, some other elements must be examined. It also contains two important procedures: the discourse phase and the editorial phase.

Social Analysis (Explanation)

In this final level, Fairclough reveals the text's connection in a social setting. It makes an allusion to interconnectedness. By combining these three methods, you can reveal hidden linguistic information as well as societal and contextual characteristics.

Research Design

The current qualitative study is descriptive in nature as the thematic analysis was carried out in the light of Fairclough's 3D Model, and the advertisements were analyzed in three stages.

Sampling

The sample of the study consists of eight (8) advertisements collected through convenient

sampling from Rawalpindi City, Pakistan, during the year 2020.

Analysis and Discussion

Slice Juice



In the light of the 3D Model, the first step, description (also the text analysis), of the billboard is a phrase on the left stating "pure pleasure," which is prominent in a small case. In the middle of the picture, an Indian actress named Katrina Kaif is visible with her hair open. Her right-hand index finger is placed between her lips with drops of slice juice on it. On the right side, a pack of the Slice is present with mango, and a splash of fluid is at the bottom, with the word "Slice" being prominent with a black background.

In the light of process analysis, the word "pure pleasure" is written in small letters because of less importance than the word Slice, which is prominent on the right. It is used to make a meaningful difference. Moreover, the word "pure pleasure" along with the image of the Model gives sexual annotation. It is not the "joy of drinking", but a "joy of sex"; therefore, the woman and her posture in the image with a finger between her lips is purely representing women abuse. It is one of the common trends in the media industry. This very step is carried out for attraction to male entities of South Asian societies. For that purpose, a woman is objectified and is used to attract an audience with the advertisement. The black background adds to the sexual meaning of words as it intensifies the action portrayed by words.

The third step, explanation, gives cultural analysis as this thought of sexual abuse of women and sexual connotations are less used in public discourse. In this advertisement, it is carried out with a difference of surface and deep meaning. This very thought of sexual connotations and female abuse is

carried out smoothly in the advertisement. The black background of the picture is also significant, as it portrays the night in popular culture. This sexual annotation is associated chiefly with nighttime, as prominent in the picture. The portrayal of Katrina Kaif, an Indian model, also makes it controversial in Pakistan because of the age-old rivalry between Pakistan and India. This picture has, in short, portrayed the women abuse as well as the sexual annotation deep down the advertisement of the actual product, i.e. juice.

Telenor 4G



There is a destructive and aggressive tone along with women abuse in the billboard of Telenor. While analyzing it for Fairclough's 3-dimensional Model, the first step is a description, a text analysis of the billboard. The billboard study provides us with two encircled crosses on both sides with two different colours as green on the left and red on the right. Both these encircled crosses have texts under them with all capital letters. Ironically the text on the left states that "NAA DAIEN" meaning "No Right", and the text on the right says "NAA BAIEN", representing "no left". The woman is cross-armed in the middle of the picture, indicating two crosses with texts under it with index figures of cross hands.

According to Fairclough's dimension of interpretation, these billboards can create instant aggression because of the prominence of two crosses, their colours and the cross arms of the girl. It can also result from psychological ambiguity because the cross arms of this billboard have confusing texts about directions. This instant aggression and psychological ambiguity can result from an accident as these billboards divert the attention of drivers. The text on the left states that "NAA DAIEN" meaning "No Right", and the text on the right says "NAA BAIEN", pointing to "no left". The woman is cross-armed in the middle of the picture, indicating two crosses with

texts under it with index figures of cross hands. The place of words might be justified from the Model's perspective in an advertisement, but, again, her cross arms strengthen the first idea that instant confusion leads to instant attention towards advertising.

Shoe Box



The billboard advertisement is of shoe brand Shoebox, which has recently launched its winter collection. The image includes young males and females who are dressed in winter attire. For the interpretation and explanation stage, it is judged that it is an advertisement for a shoe manufacturer; the emphasis should have been on the footwear instead of the genders. The gender depiction in the billboard is not suitable. They could show more articles if their principle were solely on shoes. Even without visiting the store, people could notice the design they are offering. As this advertisement is taken from Pakistan, it should be likewise the culture of Pakistan. The makers are trying to attract the masses through gender exploitation. The way they are sitting together in western dresses is not a part of Pakistani culture. The advertisement showed the concept of perfection through skin colour, dress, hair, and makeup. The makers publicize their products and employ elite and western attire to grab the attention of the masses. They promote different ideologies along with the product.

Fair and Lovely



This advertisement belongs to the famous miracle cream Fair and lovely, according to the first stage of furlough's Model i-e description. It can be observed that the image in this advertisement is Bollywood actress Yami Gautam has been given. She already has flawless and fair skin and comes in every aspect of being perfect as she is an actress and Model. The image of her face is given. In the interpretation and explanation level, we can see that the ad-makers have chosen the Indian actress on purpose as they are well aware that Pakistan follows the Bollywood trend. It shows how we lack confidence in ourselves. The criteria of being beautiful and attractive are limited to Bollywood only.

Moreover, the underlying agenda the researcher found is of keeping Fairness to be the standard of being beautiful. It is not valid. Beauty cannot be defined in terms of fair complexion. It is simply an exploitation strategy these beauty product manufacturers have utilized. They generate such discourse, which unconsciously attracts women to buy these appropriate products. They start perceiving that they would get the fair tone of the actress, but the reality is quite the opposite. These actresses are even average looking. The high camera effects, editing, and makeup power make them look extraordinary. These fairness creams create complexity in women.

Careem Bike



This advertisement is for Careem bike and the tagline "Apni Shadi Se Bhagna Hou Tou Careem Bike Karo!" with the female depiction in the bride costume. In the interpretation and explanation stage, the bride is in red, associated with alarming situations. Here, the wedding dress is alarming for a woman as it might be possible that the bride is unwilling to marry or escape from her marriage. Moreover, on the other hand, the colour of the billboard is green, which makes it more

significant because the Green colour indicates freedom and peace and is the colour of the Careem App. These billboards are exposed to every class member of every age group. Hence they should be following the culture, but this advertisement is contrary to this idea. The hidden ideology behind putting up advertisements with opposite cultures as the native state promotes giving up one's culture to follow the concept and trends they have shown. This advertisement is not according to Pakistani culture because it is not our culture to run from the wedding. The makers show liberalism by saying that we give you the last chance to lead a beautiful life by offering these Careem bike services. Unconsciously masses would adopt such things which are against their norms and values. It has become a part of our culture to go against the importance to present ourselves as liberal.

Adidas



This billboard advertisement belongs to the famous company Adidas. On the left side, the picture of a man is given with an attractive body. On the right side, there is a phrase stating, "IMPOSSIBLE IS NOTHING" prominent in capital letters. The background of the picture is black. The second important step in furlough's Model is interpretation. It is also known as the process analysis of the text (image). The overall image can be interpreted as toughness, power and strength, the traits associated with masculinity. According to this analysis, the word "Impossible is nothing" is capitalized to emphasize its significance. This billboard gives a clear picture of the advertisement maker's intention, which is the impression that men can do everything, no matter how impossible or burdensome the situations seem. They are the ones who dominate

society because of their power. In the third stage, the explanation gives cultural analysis in our community; males are more important than females. They are considered as rough n challenging but highly significant part of society. For them, everything is possible to do and to achieve without having any kind of superiority. They are the backbone of society. They are considered independent figures.

Mobilink Indigo



This is an advertisement for famous telecommunication, namely Mobilink indigo. In the image, a couple is seen happily rejoicing in each other's company. The company title says "Share the Joy", suggesting the communication as "Supplementary connection". The reason behind their affection and happiness is because of the product being advertised. The company's image is constructed as a necessity for every happy couple as it helps in communication between them. It may give the impression that the key to a happy and healthy relationship lies in touch, which Mobilink effectively provides. A couple is portrayed in the advertising in an idealized but culturally non-accepted manner. It is a bit far from reality, as mere usage of communication tools does not always bring joy, happiness and perfection.

Molty Foam



This is an advertisement for a mattress company, namely Molty Foam. In the description stage, we can see the bride with a man that might be her father. He is blessing her for her married life. Moving towards the interpretation and explanation stage, we can see that the company of the mattress is associated with the stereotypical approach of marriage with the mattress to be given in dowry. It is shown to be the only thing that has significance as a dowry. Bringing this idea to reality, a significantly less focus is on the mattress. The hidden ideology behind this advertisement is that women must be given quality products as dowry. Which creates societal and peer pressure on people to accept this trend, or they would be outcasts in society. As society is stratified into different classes, not everyone can afford to marry their daughter with excessive dowry or show and pomp.

Conclusion, Implications and Futuristic Vision

This research study analyzed eight advertisements from published billboards and tried to include the most common and most viewed advertisements by viewers—billboards from Slice juice to Molty foam mattresses. The advertisement makes use of genders to sell their products. Some of the producers employ western agenda. They promote western culture by making men and women wear traditional dresses. Few ad-makers have used stereotypical eastern trends to depict men and women. They show gender in perfection, which is achieved using different camera lenses. However, professional makeup and the images are edited after the shot. Instead of focusing on the detailed product description, which is significant, the men and women are highlighted.

They depict gender in every possible way. The advertisement makers of the brand, operating locally, seem to lack confidence in their faces, or they lack the budget that they have to employ foreign faces. Trends of hiring Indian faces are also common as Pakistani's tend to follow their directions. Everything with a foreign image attracts the locals. The ad-makers employ this perception to create such discourse with preferably alien photos. To achieve this, either they use foreigners or make the locals adopt their getups. Women in these advertisements can be seen multitasking. She is a bride somewhere is a perfect wife who is an expert in every field of life.

Expectations from the female gender are kept high. Indirectly relates stereotypes with her, which reaches the masses every day without being critically analyzed.

The current study confirmed buyers' beliefs that ads are largely the result of societal traditions and conform to prevalent society behaviours. If the aims are met, the study aims to contribute to a basic understanding of intellectual, cultural, and societal transformation on a worldwide scale. Moreover, the

current research would introduce Pakistani products, cultural norms, the impact of advertisers' linguistic features globally. This paper suggests how advertisers' depictions of gender are skewed in order to develop marketing. This essay can assist the audience in not feeling flawed as a result of witnessing gender equality in advertisements rather than maintaining confidence in oneself. It can further support the students of CDA, mass media and students working on print media in their research.

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