

THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN BILLBOARD ADVERTISEMENTS INSTALLED IN BAHAWALPUR, PUNJAB, PAKISTAN

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Abstract

The importance of advertising in the modern society has been constantly on the rise whose brought about fast development of the society's civilization. It has made its presence, effects and Influence is being felt in every phase of the life of the people. Keeping the significance and scope of the field in mind, the researchers conducted research on the women portrayal in billboard advertisements installed in Bahawalpur, a city of Punjab, Pakistan. The study aimed at exploring the meaning of text and pictures and the purpose of portraying women in the advertisements. Only women-centered advertisements were singled out. The collected data were analyzed through Fairclough's 3 d Model (1995) and Van Leeuwen's (2006) Framework. The results revealed that Pakistani billboard advertisements portray women as performing three different roles; a domestic figure who is fulfilling her responsibilities as mother, wife or household lady, an icon of beauty and a confident, active or interactive agent in societal phenomenon. The findings also indicated towards a positive change occurring in the portrayal of women from a passive being to an active agent in Pakistani society.

Key words: Advertisements, Billboards, Portrayal of Women, Critical Discourse Analysis

Background of the study

Media is reckoned to be highly influential in shaping the role of gender in our society. It is actively involved in our routine life. The public is highly influenced to perceive the truth about society through media. It is a means to facilitate the dissemination of socially acceptable culture and traditions (Carter and Skinner 2004). Advertisement, an aspect of media, may be a means to communicate with the user of a product or services provided to him. By using media advertisements, a message about the quality or functioning of a product is communicated to the society. Gender representation through advertisements is very common in the present times. Depiction of girls in the modern times differently than before is much appreciated by the society. Now, women are not only depicted as holding household duties, but they are considered a vital participant alongside men in other domains too (Orth, 2004). Though it is an observed fact that role of girls has been modified over the last few years, but the majority of advertisements still depends on traditional, stereotypical roles of women in routine work. Mainly, in advertisements, women's character is displayed as performing typical roles like maid, cook, babysitter etcetera and are shown to be engaged in other household duties. Besides, women in advertisements are also shown to sell products of various brands. The sweet and model images of girls are employed in advertisements against the ladies' sense of beauty (Wolf, 1990). In the

recent times, we can easily find that whatever gadgets or programs we are using such as telephone, internet or television, the whole stuff is, in one way or another, pulled in from or has been depicted in advertisements. In streets, buses and trains or on roads, everywhere, we will have something at sight through advertisements. Through advertisements, the advertisers actually speak with the general public and amuse or encourage them to shop their products. Cook (1992) stated that advertisements not only serve to entertain and guide the audience about a certain product, but may also either mislead them or warn them against the competitive products. For its culture and value, Pakistan is a different country. Different kinds of people live here. Many sorts of cultures and traditions can be easily found in Pakistani society. Its language and stereotypical traditions have a unique value. This study is to point out the precise meaning and interpretation of women portrayed through advertisements. This work is an effort to understand how billboard advertisements play a role to market gender representation, what ideology about women do we commonly find in Pakistani advertisements and what role women are shown to be playing in them. This study also examines what social roles of women are produced by the advertisements. This study will analyze how women are represented in sign board advertisements, what is the aim behind this representation and in what ways do the people perceive such a portrayal of women. During this kind of representation through advertisements, upper and lower class of people are depicted as using the language which is typical of their class so much so that the power relations as per the society's pattern of dominance or suppression are maintained Akhter (2011). This sort of writings or language used in advertisements urges all sorts of people to shop for their products. The essential purpose behind is the entire process to sell out the products and also enhance the worth of the merchandise in the market. Critical Discourse Analysis has often been used to detect or unmask the implicit ideologies behind advertisements. After choosing billboards for analysis of the text and visuals in advertisements, Fairclough's (1995) three-dimension model and Kress and van Leeuwen's model of visual analysis (2006) were selected as framework for analysis. Using these models of analysis, the focus was based on the social practices, dominant ideologies or gender inequalities and roles portrayed in advertisements.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Here, we are going to present a comprehensive overview of historical and theoretical background of the critical discourse analysis of advertisements and its comparative study to other theories of advertisement analysis in terms of gender roles. Gender representation features a significant role in billboard advertisements. Many studies are done to spot, investigate, categorize and analyze depiction of girls in advertisements on different platforms and media such as electronic and print media. Several kinds and causes of making these representations are discussed in these studies. The researchers have tried to explore the ways which have facilitated to present women in advertisements and the way gender choice of a female character has often been effective in advertising a product. Hence, to explore gender role of a woman is the basic purpose of this study. This section also discusses the results of varied studies that analyzed the advertisement in which women are portrayed. In modern society, mass media plays a prominent role. Entertainment is provided to the audience through different sources such as internet, television, billboards, radio, films, recording, books, newspapers and magazines. The advertisements shown on these platforms present the cultural, financial, social, spiritual, religious and also political aspects of community (Walters, 2008). Folkert's & Lacy (2004, p. 275) stated that "Its main

objective is to share ideas across an outsized number of audiences either at given point or through an extended time-frame and typically involves knowledgeable communicator”.

Statement of the Problem

In Pakistan, advertisements are found to be influential in controlling the very facts about things and make the people shop for life. Advertisements are generally used to transform the people's behavior and thought about a certain thing. Women have been portrayed in advertisement like beautiful dummies, submissive daughters, wives, sisters and efficient housewives Akhter (2011). It is highly important to elaborate the legitimized and sophisticated way of language used in advertisements and to look at their semiotic meanings also. Men are dominant in society; still there is room for an improved role of girls also. This study focuses on the critical analysis of advertisements in terms of the social values and challenges encountered by women and to see what proportion of women characters is powerful in our societies. The study further examines how advertiser is using the fact of social and gender inequality and manipulating it for the purpose of selling the product. Keeping these issues in sight this study also concentrated to understand how the female characters are portrayed in patriarchal society with fixed, traditional gender role. Hence, this study performs a critical discourse analysis of girls' representation through billboard advertisements.

Research Objectives

This study was supposed to:

- I. seek out how women are portrayed in advertisements.
- II. interpret the meaning of text and pictures in advertisements.

1.6 Research Methodology

The nature of this research is qualitative. During this research, the researcher had to research the impact of billboard advertisement on the society. The target population of this study was all billboard advertisements installed or fixed in District Bahawalpur. The information was gathered by using the captured pictures of billboard ads. The analysis of language and visuals of these billboard advertisements was carried out by using Fairclough's (1995) three-dimension model of critical appraisal and Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Grammar of Visual design. Different sort of sources are used for data collection. Online sources and previously published research studies have been helpful in providing background knowledge on the subject of this study. Both sources, primary and secondary were used to collect data. The first step was to have a close observation. Secondary source includes internet, book, journals and other printed resources. The researcher collected advertisements from District Bahawalpur. Ten different billboards advertisements displayed in public places are selected from district Bahawalpur. The essential purpose was to research the female representation in billboard advertisements. Hence, a qualitative and descriptive design is employed to analyze data.

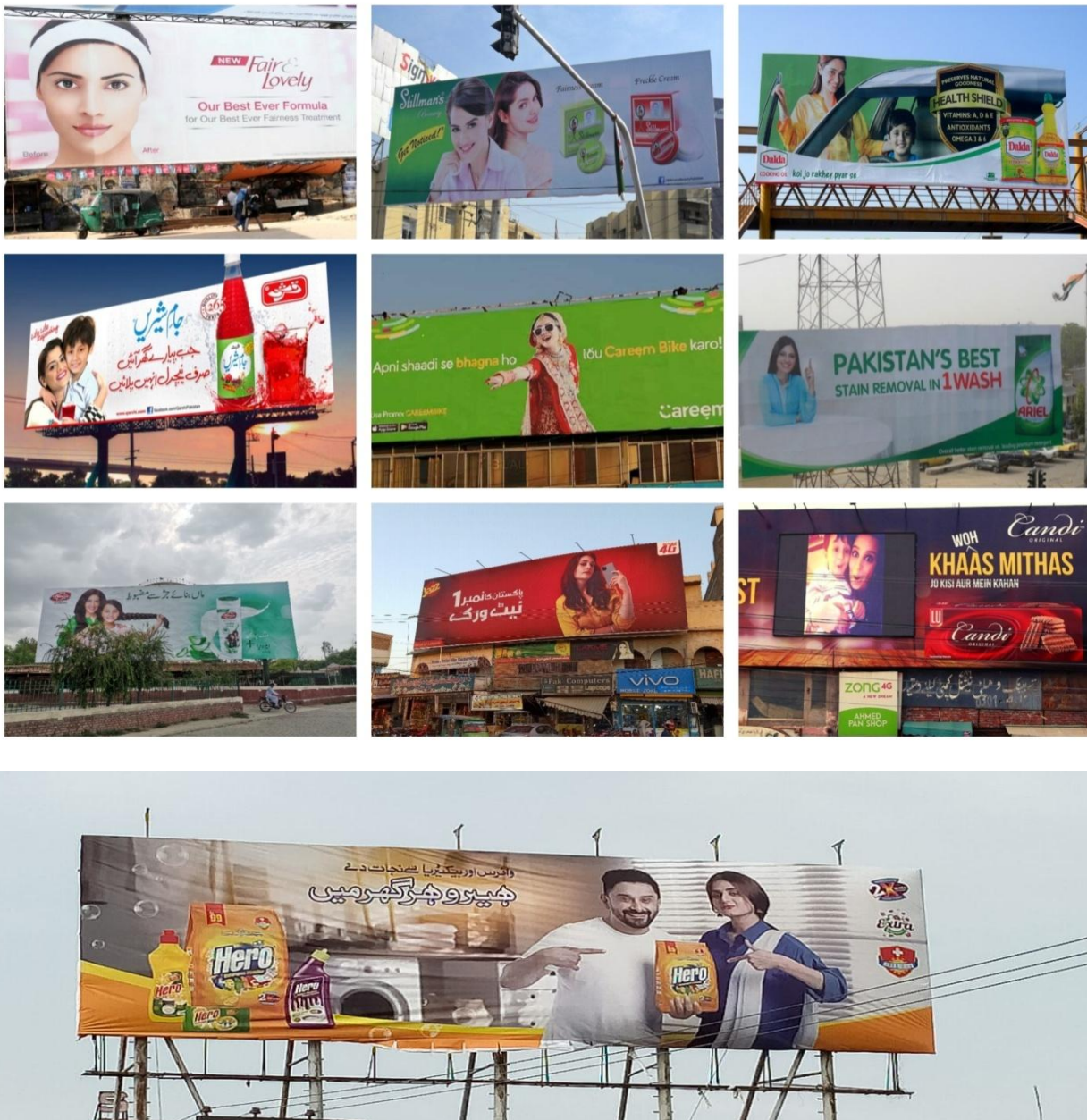
Significance of the Study

The significance of the study is predicated on the previous research to analyze the overall perception of the people seeing a billboard with women representation (Khraim 2012). This study briefly describes strategies that are utilized in billboard advertisements and the way they

are effective to regulate the public view through the advertiser and media. In previous literature, most of the research has been conducted on TV or magazine ads for analyzing of girls representation, so this study may be a bench mark by keeping in sight ads displayed through billboards. Billboards are really common now a days to advertise any products. “We take the view that language and therefore the communication both realize an equivalent more fundamental and far-reaching systems of meaning that constitute our culture, but that every does so by means of its own specific forms independently” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: 17). It broadens one’s vision towards life, enabling one to think. It also helps to change one’s behavior and way of living too. So, during this process, images and language of advertisements may shape, form and influence a culture (Fathima, 2010). This type of ads in several places have drawn multimodal messages. The findings of the study have enabled us to understand what proportion of important roles women are playing in society. In Pakistani culture women are most powerful pillar in building a civilized society.

4.1 Data Analysis

These advertisements are collected from the city area of district Bahawalpur. Two types of data analysis are used here: Fairclough’s 3D Model (1995) and Kress & Van Leeuwen’s (2006) Framework. In collected data, only women centred ads are collected. The details of the chosen advertisement billboards is as following: a. Fair & Lovely (beauty cream); b. Ariel (washing grease paint); c. Dalda (Cooking canvas); d. Careem (traveling service); e. Lifebouy (soap); f. Delicacy (biscuits); g. Stillman’s (beauty cream); h. Jaam e Sherin (drink); i. Jazz (mobile network). Both of the aforementioned models of analysis are applied one by one on the chosen advertisements.



4.1.1 Textual Analysis under Fairclough's 3D Model (1995)

In this section of analysis, the introductory effects that are really important to determine verbal features, more specifically, choosing of right text have been analysed. In advertisements, verbal descriptions, that is, the use of words, is really important because it describes the salient features of the advertised object to the public. Let us look at the eighth billboard advertisement given above.

This is a Jazz mobile network billboard advertisement. In this advertisement, comparatively little text is used. We can see text on the corners of right and left side of this advertisement. The main text of the advertisement is in center of this announcement. On the left side of the main text is written 'SUPER 4G'. It is given in

English language describing the speed of the product. In this advertisement, there are no other adjectives used. The main text of this advertisement is 'PAKISTAN'S NO 1 NETWORK'. This text tries to convince the general public that it will be their right choice to use this network. The left bottom of the advertisement says 'DUNIYA KO BTA DO' which means 'announce it to the world' or 'let the whole world know this'.

4.1.2 Process Analysis

In the process analysis, the main purpose of the advertisement is to get maximum attention of the public to Jazz network. It's a general message that has been communicated to everyone. It evokes to every age group member to choose the high quality super 4G network. Certain words in this announcement have been used that urge the people for illustration, 'DUNIYA KO BTA DO'. This kind of text shows the confidence people may have while using this quality network. This confidence will make them announce to the world that jazz is h no. 1 mobile network of Pakistan. and making people apprehensive to use their network and tell to the world is jazz network is Pakistan's no 1 mobile network.

4.1.3 Social Analysis

According to Furlough (1995), social analysis is to interpret the text according to social settings of any society. This is an advertisement of mobile network. A beautiful young model using cellphone is seen in this advertisement. In social environment, using a woman in this advertisement to simply to attract the consumers. They want to get maximum number of observers so they have put a woman shown to be using jazz mobile network. In our social environment, women are not only a symbol of beauty, it also has some further liabilities that aren't stressed here intimately. Women are socially active agents of society who partake a lot in communication through mobile phones. This advertisement shows woman as a respectable member of Pakistani society because the woman shown here is completely covered in dress, and she is shown to be smiling gracefully to the audience. Through the power of this advertisement, the attention of the common public from both, the same and contrary gender has been captured in order to sell their services.

4.2 Visual Analysis under Kress & Van Leeuwen's (2006) Framework

a. Actor

In all the above given advertisements, a woman is playing the leading role. In all of these advertisements, a sense of importance, honour and respect has been attached to the woman actors, somewhere as mother, somewhere as wife etc. They are all beautiful and well dressed. The woman actors in these advertisements are confident, happy, composed and satisfied which we can see through their facial expressions. This shows that women in Pakistani society have attained the status of honour, respect, dignity and value and they are considered an important part of society.

b. Gaze

In these advertisements the women are looking to the bystander directly with the eye contact showing some confidence. The women's gaze also shows their satisfaction on using the product which is being advertised. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), this direct address demands to the bystander to take some action and motivates them to use the same product. They have the power to communicate to the bystander. The confidence on the face of the women actors helps the bystander to take decision in favour of the product without any vacillation.

c. Frame

According to Kress and van Leuven (2006), the print of the model is taken from the close shot as we can see it. It shows a close relation between the represented and interactive actors. The end of the shot isto explore the connection between the advertiser and the bystander.

d. Angle

The photographer takes the shot from the frontal angle. By choosing the front angle for capturing the actors of the advertisements, the advertiser tries to maintain a bond of actors' attachment tothe observers or audience.

5. Findings

5.3 Construction of factors

In the light of above given analyses of gender representation in billboard advertisements, the two main factors have been developed for presentation of the findings:

- 1.The portrayalofwomen in advertisements.
2. Understanding the meaning of textand images in advertisements.

5.3.1 Factor 1 (Women portrays in announcement)

The women portrayed in advertisements are a social representation of society. The analysis of the Pakistani culture billboards announcement shows that substantially woman partake in both social and domestic fields of life. However, they are not usually shown as partaking in professional life. In our Pakistani culture and society, we can see women performing their duties frequently, working as a mother, managing a family, serving guests and behaving as a loving wife. In Pakistani society we can see that the main focus to portray a woman is to depict the morals of society. They are shown as respectable members of society. In most of the advertisements, women can be seen adhering to the traditions and artistic values. Women are shown as symbol of beauty.We can see them as beautiful and caring characters. The way they are portrayed in advertisements shows how important they are for society. In the perspective of the product possessors, they use a women character to attract the contrary gender also. It is a way for the advertisers to promote their product. Neither the men nor the woman are offended by the advertisements of a young, beautiful woman. Hence, it is a neutral way to advertise a product.

5.3.2 Factor 2 (Understanding the meaning of text and images in advertisements)

The basic purpose underthe second factor ofanalysis is understanding the text and images used in advertisements to communicate the worth and usefulness of the product being advertised. As mentioned before, Faicrlough's (1995) three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis and Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) alphabet of visual design for print advertisement billboards have been used for analyzing this factor in the aforementioned ten billboard advertisements. The findings show that the text and images of all of the selected advertisements imply that a sense of beauty, elegance, responsibility, honour, confidence and respect is attached to the female characters portrayed therein.

5.4:Conclusion

In the light of the above given findings and their proceeding discussion, the researchers conclude that Pakistani billboard advertisements portray women as performing three different types of roles: 1) a domestic figure who is fulfilling her responsibilities as a mother, wife or household lady; 2) an icon of beauty; 3) a confident, active and interactive agent in societal phenomena. The overall image of women drawn from all of the sample advertisements is that of a happy, satisfied, composed, responsible, confident and vigilant being who is given respect from home as

well as surroundings and is considered to be an important pillar in different domains, whether it is home or outside. The depiction of female characters in billboard advertisements shows that a great value is attached to this gender in Pakistani society. However, the advertisement billboards analyzed in this study do not show women's engagement in any professional activities. Still, on the whole, we may infer that a positive shift has occurred in the portrayal of women from a passive being to an active agent in Pakistani society.

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