

Pakistani Advertisement Discourse on Facebook: Reflections on Religio-Cultural Associations

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Abstract

Discourse does not exist in isolation, rather it is created within social contexts and reflects the norms of the society in which it is produced and circulated. As Pakistan is a multilingual, multi-cultural country, its socio-cultural norms are diverse in nature. In this context the present research aims at examining the religio-cultural norms, traditions, and belief systems deeply rooted in the Pakistani society, that find expression in the Pakistani discourse of advertising. For this purpose data is collected from the official Facebook profiles of nine brands belonging to three different domains: clothing, food and cosmetics. The data analysis focuses on examining the linguistic, semiotic and thematic elements present in the advertisement texts in order to explore the concepts of religion, nationalism, culture, gender, etc. as presented in the Pakistani advertising discourse. The textual and thematic features of the discourse used in these advertisements are analyzed and integrated into Fairclough's (1989) three dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model to examine discourse and its meanings in social context. The findings indicate that by highlighting the brand's associations with certain religious, social and cultural events and customs in the advertisement texts shared on the Facebook pages, the advertising discourse provides insights into the existing social realities in Pakistan and shows how such discourses reflect the values, ideals and social meanings in the society. In other words, this research explores Pakistani discourse of advertising in terms of linguistic and religio-cultural implications as they emerge in the advertising discourse and to provide further understandings into the discourse practices in Pakistan. The study also helps in understanding the ways in which language is used in the Pakistani advertising discourse in the backdrop of indigenous socio-cultural contexts.

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1. Introduction and Background to the Study

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Advertising discourse makes use of both the linguistic and extra-linguistic features of language to make the advertisements appealing. Advertisements, with their engaging textual features and generating of diverse texts in creating the desired image of the brand, are considered to be favorable for the identity construction of brands. The discourse of advertising being everywhere around us, must be examined from a sociolinguistic perspective to understand the use of language in order to gain insights into the socio-cultural implications involved in advertisement discourse practices.

1.2 Aim of the Research and Research Question:

The aim of the research is to examine the religio-cultural norms, social traditions, and belief systems deeply rooted in the Pakistani society reflected in the Pakistani discourse of advertising, by examining the textual and thematic elements used in the Pakistani advertising discourse of various brands on Facebook. In line with this aim the following research question is designed:

Q. What kind of religio-cultural norms, social traditions, and belief systems embedded deep within the Pakistani society find expression both in the primary and secondary discourse of advertising in Pakistan?

1.3 Delimitations

This paper is based on a wider research carried out in a PhD thesis titled 'Identity Construction of Brands on Internet: An Analysis of Pakistani Discourse of Advertising'. The PhD thesis focuses on examining various multi-faceted identities constructed and represented in the Pakistani discourse of advertising by various clothing, food and cosmetic brands on internet. The current paper however, has its focus mainly on studying the religio-cultural associations found in the Pakistani advertising discourse of various clothing, food and cosmetics brands on their respective Facebook pages.

2. Literature Review

This section reviews the literature about discourse and communication practices in the world of advertising. It also offers a comprehensive review of the brand advertising discourse on social media and its effectiveness with specific reference to reflecting socio-cultural norms of the society in which it is produced and viewed.

2.1 The Inescapable World of Advertising

Advertisements are everywhere around us. Advertising has grown to be a phenomenon that is pervasive and is exceedingly dominant in the modern world of consumerism. With the advent of internet in every household and the subsequent rise of social media platforms for communication purposes, the advertising producers have greatly started to use these online networking platforms to reach out to a much greater number of audiences. Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) believe that advertisement texts are hybrid texts owing to the fact that the language of advertising is an outcome of the incorporation of the language of public and political organization. According to Baaga, an advertisement is, “a public notice in any medium (television, radio, print, out-of-home)” (2006, p. 5). In the present world of numerous modes of media, it has become impossible to escape the pervasive nature of advertisement. The public is bound to view the advertisement texts and to be influenced to purchase the products or ideas being advertised. As advertising is everywhere around us and has the power to reflect as well as create social realities and because of its pervasive nature in the society, it must be studied as a form of a system of language use (El-daly, 2011). Jhally (1995) asserts about the inescapable world of advertising that it is, ‘...ubiquitous - it is the air we breathe as we live our daily lives’ (p. 79). Advertising has become a part of our lives, something from which we cannot escape, something of which we are a part, and which is a part of us (Cook, 2001).

2.2 Advertising Discourse and its Sociological Implications

Advertising discourse has sociological implications; most important of which is the way in which it affects our ideals and thought processes along with influencing our purchasing patterns. Himmelstein proclaims, “Ads are not selling us a product...they are selling us a life-style. And they have become the engines that drive our way of life” (1994, p. 50). Advertisement discourse is shaped by the social change and culture and reflects the culture and society in which it is created. Advertising is a

mirror that reflects cultural associations. Any changes experienced in a society affect the discourse of advertising and are reflected in the advertisement discourse. Advertising discourse is greatly influenced by the religio-cultural, social and economic milieus of the society in which it is produced. Hence, to analysis the advertising discourse, it must first be placed in the backdrop of the cultural understanding as the genre of advertising is pre-dominantly culture-based. Davidson (1992) defines advertising with reference to it being a reflector of social divisions. To him advertising is:

A social language, a genre of spectator/reader experience, a technique of persuasion... almost a world in its own right, with its own languages, customs and history, and one that sets the tone and pace for large parts of our lives. Advertising is a topic which both causes and reveals existing social divisions. (p. 3)

Besides promoting the products or brands owing to its nature of being an economic unit, the advertisement discourse also works to create and shape opinions, by influencing the values, attitudes and ideas that help in the shaping of a culture (Sinclair 1987). Advertising is a social practice which does not work in isolation. It is a product of interweaving of various aspects such as individual and object, symbolism, communication, agreement and control (Jhally, 1987). In other words, the cultural and societal meanings cannot be separated from the content of an advertisement.

2.3 Language and Communication in Discourse of Advertising

O'Shaughnessy and Stadler (2002) assert that discourse is a social process of constructing meanings. It exists in a social context and hence has a purpose and is meaningful. It is designed to win hearts and minds of the reader/listener and to be persuasive (Potter & Wetherell, 2001). What constitutes discourse is an interwoven assemblage of vocabularies, texts, and expressions that constitute a thought pattern about a specific subject (Watson, 1994). Similarly, in the advertising discourse the advertising text producers make use of various linguistic and semiotic techniques to grab the attention of the audience and to ascribe certain attributes to their products which may appear quite appealing to the text viewer. Using words having certain positive or strong connotations attached to them the advertisers aim to persuade the audience in inferring meanings which serve the purpose of the producers. These meanings may be inferred

depending upon their own understanding of the world in their particular social contexts. Durant and Lambrou (2009) proclaim,

As regards the verbal discourse of advertising, three topics stand out: the register (or language 'style') of advertising; the suggestiveness or connotations created by advertising language; and specific claims about products and services that adverts convey. (p. 94)

Advertising is mass mediated and is a form of discourse that besides affecting the language structures also influences everyday communication practices (El-daly, 2011). The plethoras of advertisement texts that are experienced on daily basis tend to affect our perceptions about the existing socio-cultural norms and belief systems. The basic tenet of advertising style is rhetoric. The images and messages depicted in the advertisements have the power to penetrate into our minds and to modify our understandings concerning the way we perceive the values, customs, norms and belief systems regarding our society, culture, religion etc. As discourse and identity are closely related to each other, similarly the advertising discourse is a tool of identity construction for the brands. Mills (1997) believes, "Discourses structure both our sense of reality and our notion of our own identity" (p.15). Our discourses include references to our social identities, social affiliations and patterns of understanding and belief systems. Just as our discourses contain a lot of information about ourselves, so does the advertising discourse which offers an insight into the religio-cultural and social norms and ideals of the society in which it is produced and viewed.

3. Research Methodology

This section provides the research design, time frame for data collection and research methodology used in the present study.

3.1 Research Design

For this research data is collected from the content available on the official Facebook pages of the selected brands. A total of nine brands belonging to three different domains, such as clothing, food and cosmetics are selected. The data analysis focuses on examining the linguistic, semiotic and thematic elements present in the advertisement texts in order to explore the concepts of religion, nationalism, culture, gender, linguistic identity, etc. as presented in the Pakistani advertising discourse, which further provides insights into the existing social realities in Pakistan and shows

how such discourses work ideologically, reflecting the values, ideals and social meanings in the society. As the present work looks into phenomenon and processes, mainly a qualitative research paradigm is used which deals with the detailed analysis and interpretation of data. In other words, this research explores Pakistani discourse of advertising in terms of linguistic and religio-cultural implications as they emerge in the advertising discourse of Pakistan and to provide further understandings into the discourse practices in Pakistan.

3. 2 Collection of Data

Data is collected from the official Facebook pages of various brands in Pakistan to look into the ways in which these brands use various linguistic, semiotic and thematic elements in their advertisement discourse in order to explore the concepts of religion, nationalism, culture, gender, linguistic identity, etc. as presented in the Pakistani advertising discourse.

Three different domains namely, *Clothing*, *Food*, and *Cosmetics* are selected for data collection on the basis of purposive sampling. The three brands belonging to the domain of Clothing are *J.*, *Nishat Linen* and *Khaadi*. The brands belonging to the domain of Food are *National Foods Limited*, *Sufi* and *Qarshi*. The brands selected from the domain of Cosmetics are *Lux*, *Sunsilk* and *Olivia*.

3. 3 Time Frame of Data Collection

The data on the Facebook pages includes the linguistic and semiotic features including textual inscriptions, images etc. in the advertising content shared on these Facebook pages over a period of 6 months (i.e. 1st July, 2014 – 31st December, 2014).

3. 4 Research Framework for the Current Research

Paltridge (2006) asserts that the concept of ideology is interconnected with the concept of identity which can be studied in a text by examining its stylistic structures, leading to an explanation and interpretation of the text with reference to its socio-cultural associations.

The present study includes a discourse analysis of the textual features of the advertisement texts to study the prominent themes present in the data. The themes are explored by examining the linguistic and the semiotic features present in the text in order to describe, analyze and explain the

ways in which various brands in Pakistan use discourse in highlighting and promoting their socio-cultural and religio-cultural associations.

Fairclough's model for CDA (1989, 1995) which examines discourse and its meaning in social context has been used as a framework for analysis. The framework offers three dimensions for analysis namely, description, interpretation, and explanation. These dimensions show how the textual and semiotic form of discourse creates meaning in social contexts.

The model in Figure 3.1 (adapted from Fairclough 1989, p.25; 1995, p. 98) shows the incorporation of textual features with socio-cultural practice through the intermediating aspect of discourse practice:

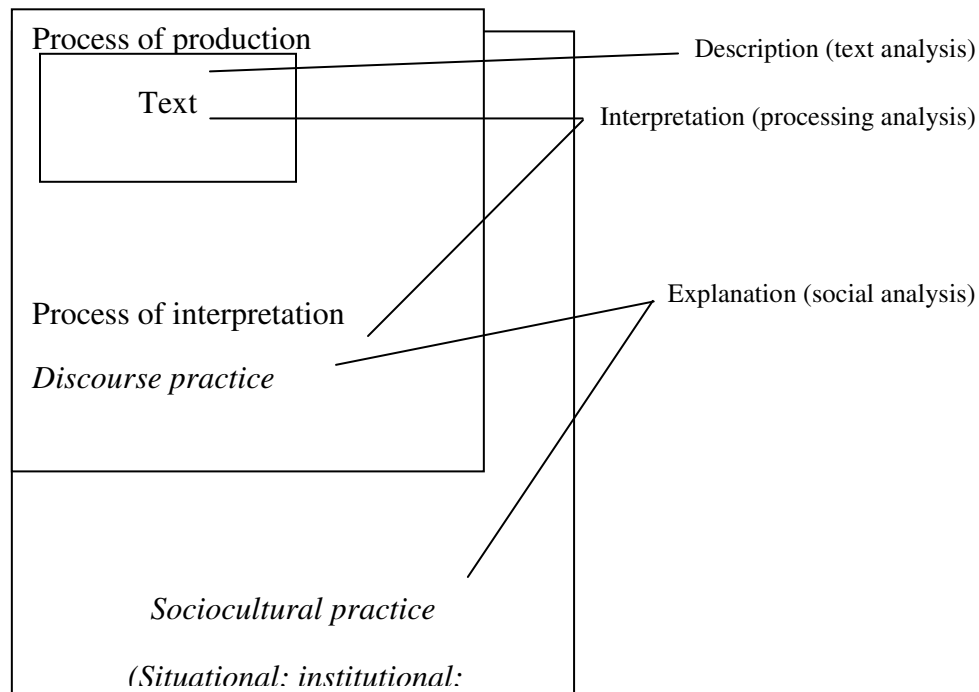


Figure 3.1: CDA framework of Fairclough (adapted from 1989, p.25; 1995, p. 98)

The analysis includes the description and interpretation of the linguistic and semiotic features of the advertising discourse of these brands showing the social and religio-cultural affiliations of the brand as projected by the advertising text producers. Further the explanation of the social

perspectives of the text production reveals the thematic aspects in the data relating the brand to the socio-cultural contexts.

3.5 System of Data Presentation

A huge amount of data was collected during the said period of data collection. Hence keeping in view the limited scope of a research paper, including all the data for the analysis was not possible. For this reason, only representative data is included for analysis in the analysis sections. As the focus of the study was on exploring the concepts of religion, nationalism, culture, gender etc. as found in the Pakistani advertising discourse, it was decided to examine the textual and thematic elements present in the advertisement texts of the brands of each domain by including only representative data to support the findings of analysis about the religio-cultural identity associations. Not only is the data too extensive to be explored entirely, it is also impossible to include the complete data in appendix of this paper. Therefore, only representative data is presented in the sections dealing with data analysis.

4. Findings and Analysis

The data is analyzed with reference to the themes of religion, nationalism, culture, gender, identity, etc., present in the advertising discourse of the selected brands. The data analysis focuses on analyzing the advertising discourse in order to highlight the themes present in the advertisements of these brands. The dominant themes present in the discourse are the themes of nationalism, professionalism, individualism, gender, youth, modernism, traditionalism etc. To provide a comprehensive and holistic picture of the evaluations of the data, the analysis section brings together the strands of interpretations for a comprehensive understanding of the findings. The qualitative findings focusing on the qualitative aspects of the analysis are presented as under.

4.1 Findings and Analysis: Reflections into Social and Religio-Cultural Traditions in Pakistan

Discourse is created and understood within social contexts and is a reflection of the society in which it is produced and viewed. Advertising discourse also reflects the norms of the society in which it is created and circulated. Similarly, certain socio-cultural norms and traditions find expression in the data collected. The advertising discourse of the selected brands reveals certain inherent belief systems in the Pakistani society and the present study focuses on studying these social and religio-cultural

norms. Though the producers aim at creating certain desired identities for their brands through the advertisement discourse, the data however provides insights in to the socio-cultural norms of the Pakistani society which are discussed in the sections of analysis.

A broad interpretation of data provides understandings into the discourse practices in Pakistan as regards the concepts of fashion, nationalism, modernism, traditions, culture, religion, gender, identity etc. as perceived in the country. The findings related to the major themes are presented as under:

4.1.1 Addressing Nationalism

In the Pakistani discourse of advertising a special reference to national days is observed. This is one way of connecting with the readers/viewers on occasions having nationalistic concerns. A few examples from the data are celebrations regarding the Independence Day of Pakistan, Iqbal Day, Defence Day, birth anniversary of the founder of Pakistan Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah etc. Not only are the festive occasions remembered and celebrated by the brands in their advertisement discourse, events of grave national concern are also remembered to evoke the feelings of nationalism in the readers and to establish the brand's trademark as being nationalistic and patriotic. Representative examples of the argument have been presented keeping in view the space constraints and limited scope of a research paper. Consider an example presented in Fig. 4.1 for instance.



Fig. 4.1: Reflections in nationalism (Independence Day Celebrations)

The picture shown in Fig. 4.1 is shared by the clothing brand 'J.' on the occasion of the Independence Day of Pakistan celebrated on 14th of August. The green background and the white colored inscription on the picture also refer to the flag of Pakistan which is green and white in color. The inscription on the picture states, '*Dil Pakistan*' (translated as 'My heart is Pakistan' in English), also highlights the feelings of patriotism

projected by the brand. Sharing of such content on the brand's Facebook page establishes the importance of this day for the common people of Pakistan as the brands are very careful in selecting and sharing the content which has a positive and persuasive effect on the viewer. Another remarkable example is the insistence by the text producers of the brand J. on feeling proud to be celebrating the national day of independence by asserting '*Celebrate Independence Day with pride!*'. Ever since the independence of Pakistan in 1947, the Pakistanis have expressed their love for their motherland on nationalistic fronts with pride. Similarly, in the advertising discourse of brands the producers exhibit nationalism through their respective advertisement texts and shed light on the significance of nationalism for the people of Pakistan.

It is worth mentioning here that all the brands selected in this research across all selected domains celebrated this day by updating advertisement texts portraying their nationalistic overtones. Not only is Independence Day celebrated with passion and enthusiasm, other issues of national concern also find expression in the advertising discourse of the brands. Remembering events and sharing advertisement texts in relation to the days celebrated at the birth or death anniversaries of important national heroes, days celebrated in memory of the historic wars fought and won by Pakistan, remembering tragedies faced by Pakistan to honor those who sacrificed their lives and loved ones, etc. likewise reveal the patriotic implications of the brands, thus also exhibiting the significance of nationalism in the country. Consider Fig. 2 in this regard.

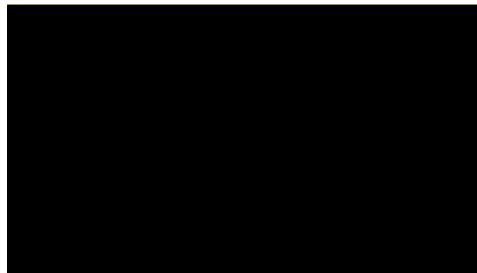


Fig. 4.2: Reflections into nationalism (Display of grief)

The picture shown in Fig. 2 is a display picture updated by the brand Nishat Linen (NL). The picture shows a completely blacked out image which is a reference to the Black Day witnessed on 16th of December in Pakistan. The day was undeniably a black day for Pakistan and also for the

whole of humankind, as more than one hundred and forty students were mercilessly massacred in a terrorist attack on a school in Peshawar, Pakistan. References to this tragic incident, having serious national concerns, have been made on the Facebook pages of all the brands across all the domains selected for this study. To express grief over the loss of the innocent lives almost all the brands blackened their Facebook display photos to highlight the grief-stricken emotional state prevailing in Pakistan at that time.

Other noteworthy national events/days celebrated by the brands are Quaid-e-Azam Day, celebrated on 25th of December, to rejoice at the birth anniversary of the great leader; and Defence Day, celebrated on 6th September to honor the victory of Pakistan in an Indo-Pak war imposed on Pakistan on September 6th, 1965. The Facebook pages of the selected brands were replete with texts remembering the war and paying tributes to the national heroes of the war. One such example is shared in Fig. 4.3 and Fig. 4.4 to illustrate the examples of both the events respectively.

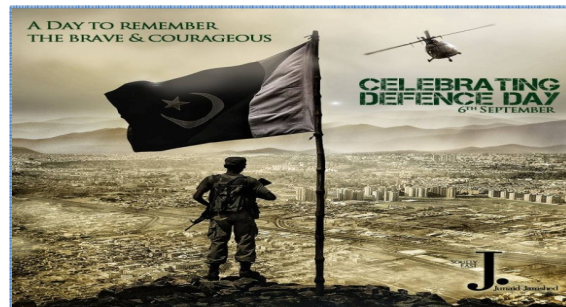


Fig. 4. 3: Reflections in tonationalism (Defence Day Celebrations)



Fig. 4.4: Reflections in tonationalism (Quaid Day celebrations)

Images and texts related to the national days are shared by the brand's advertisement text producers on Facebook hence recalling the real spirits of the respective national occasions. Nationalism offers a sense of belonging, devotion and loyalty for the people of a nation and is associated with a nation's language, religion, culture, traditions and ethnicities. Due to the colonial background and a hard won independence from the British and the Hindus of the Sub-continent, Pakistanis feel a great pride in their motherland. National events are remembered and celebrated by the people in Pakistan with utmost fervor. Pakistanis have always expressed their love for their nation and have always valued and taken pride in their nationality. The advertising text producers in Pakistan make use of this patriotic disposition of the general public of Pakistan and thus recurrently project the theme of nationalism in their advertisement texts.

4.1.2 Addressing Religio-Cultural Norms

The advertisement discourse of the brands adheres to present a nationalistic side of the respective brands to be able to be more appealing to the Pakistani audience. In doing so, the text producers make use of linguistic and semiotic elements in the advertisement discourse in such a way that alongside establishing the national identity of the brands, it also provides a glimpse into the Pakistani culture, its social norms, and the religious overtones prevalent in the country.

Explanation of the social contexts governing the text production progression shows that the advertising discourse of the selected brands mirrors the prevailing socio-cultural norms in Pakistan. Although the selected brands are from the domains of clothing, food, and cosmetics, and the advertising content primarily caters to promote the quality and demand of the respective brands and their products, the advertising discourse reflects social realities of the milieu in which it is fashioned, thus reflecting the social and religio-cultural norms of the society in which the advertising discourse is produced and viewed.

An analysis of the latent themes in the advertisement texts shows the life style of Pakistani people, their religious affiliations, social customs and cultural values. A deeper analysis of the textual features containing the linguistic elements such as vocabulary items, and semiotic elements such as pictures, colors, themes in the pictures etc. provide insights into the Pakistani society as regards religious, social and cultural overtones.

The data shows that religion is greatly valued in Pakistan. Pakistan is a Muslim country and the religion basically followed by the majority in Pakistan is Islam. The way all the brands have shared advertisement content on their Facebook pages on religious occasions such as the holy month of Ramadan, Eid-ul-Fitr, Eid-ul-Adha, and Hajj, exhibits the religious inclinations of the common people in Pakistan. The brands regularly update their advertisement content, announce various sale offers, and never skip wishing the audience on special religious occasions. Consider Fig. 5 and Fig. 6 for instance.



Fig.4.5:Display of religious sentiments (Hajj)



Fig.4.6:Display of religious sentiments (Ramadan)

Remembering Islamic events and posting updates about them occasionally on the Facebook page also helps in establishing religious identity of the brand. The image in Fig.4.5 refers to the occasion of Hajj (pilgrimage of Muslims) performed by the Muslims from all over the world gathered in Makkah. Whereas, the image in Fig. 4.6 is shared on Facebook by the clothing brand J. on the arrival of the holy month of Ramadan which is observed once a year by the Muslims in which they fast and perform other mandatory religious obligations. As the advertising texts producers cater to the preferences and likings of the general public and try to relate to the sentiments of the viewers in their advertisements, such kinds of posts on

Facebook reflect the religious fervor present in the society. Consider some other examples as presented in Fig. 4.7 and Fig. 4.8.



Fig. 4.7: Display of religious sentiments (on Friday)

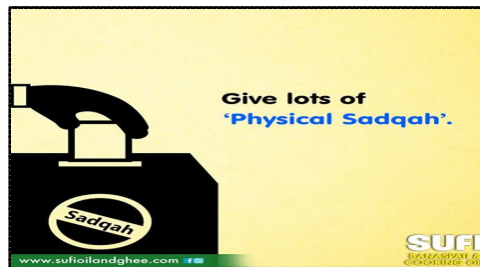


Fig. 4.8: Display of religious sentiments (about charity)

Fig. 4.7 shows an image of a mosque shared on Facebook by the brand Sufi on a Friday which is considered to be a holy and blessed day in the week. The inscription on the picture reads, '**Jumma Mubarak**', a Friday greeting, translated as *Happy Friday* in English. The text producers send a holy greeting to the viewers every week to express their religious sentiments.

Similarly, in Fig. 4.8 the Islamic custom of giving charity is proposed. The inscription on the image states, '**Give lots of Physical Sadqah**', aimed at propelling the audience to be involved in offering *Sadqah* (charity) to the needy. The inclusion of such a message in the advertising discourse relates the brand with the text viewers in terms of the shared religious affiliations. Hence, it can be observed that religion is displayed as an essential fragment of the everyday lives of the Pakistani people. These examples show that making references to religious affairs is very common in the advertising discourse of Pakistan, which likewise reflects upon the religious fervor found in the Pakistani society.

As regards cultural reflections almost all the selected brands have concentrated on representing the cultural overtones of their identity, thus reflecting the socio-cultural norms of the Pakistani society. Placing the brand's products in the backdrop of Pakistani culture seems an effective advertising approach as Pakistani people value their culture just as they value their religion. The cultural ideals of Pakistan are generally deep rooted in the religious milieu and are highly valued by the common people of Pakistan. Catering to the affiliations of the viewers with their religio-cultural belief systems, the brand advertising text producers focus greatly on promoting their brands in religious milieus. Numerous references to cultural practices, habits, codes and customs are given in the advertising discourse in an effort to associate the brand with the Pakistani culture.

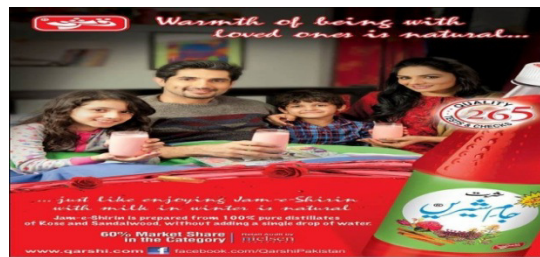


Fig. 4.9: Reflections into family values



Fig. 4.10: Reflections into family ideals

The images portrayed in the figures 4.9 and 4.10 collected from the data of cooking brands *Qarshi* and *NFL* respectively reflect the existing preferred family ideals in Pakistan which favor a family oriented living. Pakistani culture, tending to be closely associated with religious directives, has a tendency to favor a lifestyle where families live together and depend on one another to attain the levels of happiness required for a happy personal and social life. The inscriptions on the pictures in Fig. 9 and Fig. 10 state, *'Warmth of being with loved ones is natural'* and *'Humarey Khaney,*

Humarapyar' (translated as 'Our food, Our love' in English) respectively, reflect the family ideals predominantly existing in the Pakistani society. The image of a perfectly ideal family as reflected in the Pakistani discourse of advertising involves a happily married couple, living together with their parents and children bound with the sentimentalities of love and affection.

The primary discourse of these advertisement texts highlights the importance of healthy food whereas the secondary discourse signifies the gender implications in the Pakistani cultural contexts. The caption accompanying the picture given in Fig. 10 states, '**National Foods Limited products ... proved to be the preferred choice of women seeking healthy breakfast and light meal options for their families**'. The semantic level readings simply relate the respective food brand with the preference of women, however the latent meanings of the text reveal that cooking is principally a responsibility accredited mostly to women. In the Pakistani society kitchen related duties and other responsibilities related to internal household affairs are expected to be managed by women, whereas men are expected to work outside of the house and to earn for the family. Although many women in Pakistan also work outside of their houses to earn the livelihood of their families, they are nevertheless expected to be equally responsible for the household chores. Consider another example in this regard.

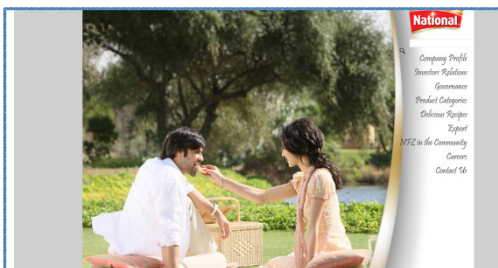


Fig. 4.11: Reflections into social customs

Fig.4.11 shared by the food brand NFL shows an image of a married couple at a picnic. The wife in the picture is feeding a morsel of food to the husband, exhibiting the image of happiness and blissful married life. The picture exhibits one of the cultural aspects of the Pakistani society which reinforces the idea of women as housewives, cooking for and feeding their families. Similarly, another piece of text by the same brand on its Facebook page states, '**National foods' initiatives were, to make food that**

is hygienic, reduce time spent in the kitchen by women, ... so that people who use our products would be able to experience a more rewarding life-style'. At the primary level of discourse the brand claims to be of high quality which aims to enable women to spend less time in kitchen, on the secondary level however, it is presupposed that women are the ones preparing meals for the family and spending most of their time in the kitchen, thus providing insights into gender roles perceptions and practices in the Pakistani society. Another representative example is provided in Fig. 4.12.



Fig. 4.12: Reflections into cultural customs

The inscription on the image in Fig. 4.12 states, '*The first time a bride enters the kitchen she is expected to cook a sweet dish for her in-laws!*'. The statement in an assertive tone establishes a very important role for the newly-wed bride informing about a ritual practiced in the Pakistani culture which requires the bride to prepare a sweet dish for her in-laws after her wedding. This statement provides a glimpse into the traditional Pakistani culture in which the bride who moves in with her husband at her in-laws' house is supposed to take over the kitchen related responsibilities after marriage, thus reflecting a very commonly practiced custom in the Pakistani society.

The images in the advertising discourse of the food brands represent the Pakistani women in the role of wives and mothers, tending to their children, preparing meals for the family, looking after the whole family etc. This depiction reflects the common practices in Pakistan where women are more family oriented and are expected to look after their children and homes even if they are working outside of the house.

References to other socio-cultural traditions and customs that find expression in the data are the extravagant dinners, traditional foods,

Pakistani weddings, food preferences in Pakistan etc. A few representative examples from the data are presented as follows.



Fig. 4.13: Reflections into cultural customs

The inscription on the picture shown in Fig. 4.13 states, '***SarsonkaSaag is the staple food of the rural people of Punjab. The saag topped with rich homemade butter fits the lifestyle of the village people who laboriously work in the fertile lands of the province***', while the picture shows an image of traditional food called *sarsonkasaag* and *makaiki roti* very commonly eaten in the province of Punjab in Pakistan. The caption besides stating a food fact related to the countryside of Punjab, also offers a glimpse into the life of a common villager in Pakistan who arduously toils in the agricultural fields and depends mostly on the simple and pure farm grown vegetables in the village for food. The image along with the inscribed text captures the essence of the Punjabi culture and sheds light on the simple ways of living in the rural areas of Punjab.

The socio-cultural and religious references present in the advertising discourse help in establishing a certain desired identity for the respective brands. These references reflect the social and religio-cultural norms and practices prevalent in Pakistan. The advertisement texts in Pakistan are created in the backdrop of socio-cultural milieus in order to appear more relatable to the viewers and to appeal to the viewers' sense of identity founded on collective socio-cultural tenets.

4.1.3 Addressing Fashion and Style

According to the images portrayed in the data, it can be stated that the fashion trends are mostly followed by the youth in Pakistan, predominantly by the women in the country. When it comes to the models used in the advertisements, it may be observed that most of the advertisements of the clothing, food and cosmetic brands feature female

models. The notion of fashion and style as examined in the advertisements of the selected brands mirrors the fashion and styling trends followed in Pakistan. The data shows that not only traditional Pakistani dressing style is common in Pakistan, but a lot of trends from the West are also common when it comes to the styling preferences of the people in Pakistan. The advertisements show the models to be endorsing a variety of styles including western wear, eastern, and contemporary wear, amalgamation of both eastern and western style of attire, assimilation of tradition and style, etc. A few examples from the data are presented as under.



Fig. 4.14: Display of fashion (Eastern Style)



Fig. 4.15: Display of fashion (Western style)



Fig. 4.16: Reflections about fashion (Amalgamation of East and West)

The images in Fig. 4.14 and Fig. 4.15 show eastern styled attire and a westernized style respectively. The eastern fashion style is depicted

through the eastern styled *kurta* wore by the model, the braided hair, bangles and other traditional eastern jewelry shown in the picture. The westernized style of fashion is depicted in Fig. 4.15 through the absolute western dress code including jeans pants and short length shirts. The high ponytail also adds to the western flavor in the overall styling. Fig. 4.16 on the other hand reflects an amalgamation of both the styles; merging of east with west. This incorporation is depicted through mixing of the *kurta*, head band and braided hair with tightly fitted pants and a modern minimalist clutch bag. Thus it can be observed that a wide ranging and diverse fashion trends are followed in Pakistan.

An interesting finding worth presenting here is the dynamic image of women depicted in the advertisements of the selected brands, most specifically by the clothing and cosmetic brands. The advertisement texts present an altogether different image of Pakistani women than the one being presented by the international media which shows Pakistani women as oppressed, submissive and 'burqa-clad' only. The Pakistani advertising discourse on the contrary shows Pakistani women as educated, who love to do shopping and to have fun with friends. Consider Fig. 4.17 for instance.



Fig. 4.17: Reflections into dynamic woman image

The images in Fig. 4.17 exhibit the young Pakistani women as fashionistas who are vibrant and fun loving. Most of the images in the collected data establish a very robust and modern image of Pakistani women who are trend setters in the world of fashion. As advertising discourse of a country is greatly entrenched in the socio-cultural milieu, such a depiction of women particularly with reference to their fashion sense, modernism and vivacious facade points to the ways women are generally perceived in Pakistan. Undeniably not all the Pakistani women enjoy individual and social liberties as there are still many districts in Pakistan where women are deprived of their basic personal rights, the conventional Pakistani

media however is more often inclined towards presenting a strong, educated and modern woman image. A detailed discussion on the predominant woman image exhibited in the advertising discourse of Pakistan is presented in Section 4.1.4.

4.1.4. Addressing Women Image at Semantic Levels

The woman image created in the advertising discourse of the selected brands presents quite a contemporary, confident and bold persona of women in Pakistan. Through the fashion style, dressing, fun activities shown by the models in the advertisements and through the life lessons targeted at women audience in particular, young women are depicted as bold, stylish and fashionable. The women presented in the advertisements of *cosmetic* and *clothing* brands are independent and fun loving. Representative examples from the data of the brands *Sunsilk* and *NL* are presented through Fig. 4.18 and Fig. 4.19 respectively.



Fig. 4.18: Display of woman image (shopping sprees)

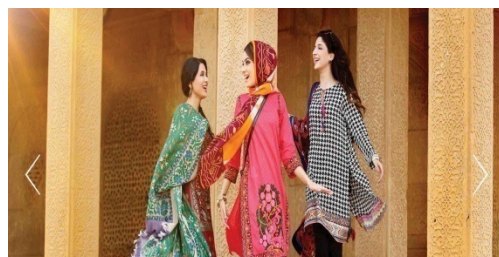


Fig. 4.19: Display of woman image (fun-loving)

Both the images as portrayed in Fig. 4.18 and Fig. 4.19 show young women dressed fashionably, in both western and eastern wear. They are shown to be having fun with friends on a shopping spree and spending some fun time together. Although such images are projected for the purpose of advertising the brands' products through appealing imageries, these images reflect a very significant social reality of the society in which the texts are created and in which these images are viewed and understood

by the audience. These are powerful images, powerful enough to negate the general perceptions about woman oppression and submission as projected by the western media.

The cosmetic brands, especially *Lux* and *Sunsilk*, have shared life lessons in the form of captions to the advertisement photos. These life lessons are particularly addressed to women in Pakistan and teach them to be confident and bold. Fig. 4.20 and Fig. 4.21 are examples collected from the data of the brands *Lux* and *Sunsilk* respectively.



Fig. 4.20: Life lesson on confidence



Fig. 4. 21: Life lesson on loving life

Fig. 4.20 shows a woman confidently gazing towards camera with a smile. The inscription on the image stating, '**CONFIDENCE- A slight, self-assured smile tells the world you believe in yourself**', aims to teach a life lesson to women which focuses on being 'confident' and 'self-assured'. The caption to this image as shared on the Facebook page of the brand asserting, '**Brace yourself, world. Our Lux girls are all about confidence!**', also reinforces the notion of assertive women. For the brand text producers an ideal woman is the one who is sure of herself and never hesitates to express herself, and such is the woman image the brand wishes to associate itself with. Fig. 4.21 shows an image of a woman who

is seen smiling and happy, standing in an open field, wearing a westernized style of clothing. The text inscribed on the picture states, *'Love life, Being outside, and Your beautiful hair!'*. The text here is a lesson on life which teaches the women to love life, enjoy being outside and to be more adventurous. Such portrayals in the data demonstrate a very strong and influential image of women in Pakistan where they are presented as daring, stylish, and high-spirited. By projecting such bold women images the advertising text producers of the brands not only create but also reveal the social realities existing in Pakistan.

However, while examining the advertisement texts on a secondary level, a latent theme very commonly observed is the stereotypical image of beauty endorsed in Pakistan. This stereotypical image promotes youth, fair complexion of skin tone, glow and straight hair as beauty benchmarks. Most of the principal models used in the advertisements are young women which exhibits the need of the brand producers to focus chiefly on woman portrayal in the advertising content. Although a very confident and positive woman image is constructed in the primary discourse of advertising, a closer analysis of the secondary discourse offers insights into the certain clichéd image projected in Pakistani advertisements. Consider Fig. 4.22 and Fig. 4.23 as representative examples in this regard.



Fig. 4.22: Reflections into beauty ideals (complexion)



Fig. 4.23: Reflections into beauty ideals (fairness)

Both the images as presented in Fig. 4.22 and Fig. 4.23 are from a cosmetic brand *Olivia*. The inscriptions in Fig. 4.22, '*Enhance the beauty of your complexion...*' and in Fig. 4.23, '*Flawless fairness in just 15 days*', are a testament to the Pakistani ideal of beauty which prefers fair skin tones over darker ones. Both the statements promote the respective products in the light of existing beauty ideals prevalent in the country by urging the viewers to enhance their beauty by purchasing the fairness products by the brand. This presupposes that beauty is all about fair or lighter skin complexion. An analysis of such texts in the backdrop of the Pakistani socio-cultural milieu conveys a lot regarding the ways in which beauty ideals are perceived in Pakistan. The ideal beauty image presented in advertising discourse is centered on lighter skin complexion, slender figure, sleek hair, and youthful persona. Such a beauty image founded on the preferred beauty standards in the Pakistani society, reveal how ideal beauty is perceived in Pakistan.

A study of the collected data at both the primary and secondary levels of discourse demonstrates that with regards to customs and ideals, Pakistan is theoretically at the crossroads between East and West. To be at the crossroads refers to the merging together of various ideals and values coming from both the East and West. It may be concluded that perhaps because of the inspirations from the West, a very independent, bold and progressive woman image has been observed in the Pakistani advertisement discourse. Nevertheless, the coinciding devotion to the deep-seated nationalism and conventionalism in Pakistani religio-cultural and social frameworks displays a state of equilibrium between a contemporary and conventional image of women. Although the Pakistani women are presented as bold and self-confident, trendy and passionate; they are simultaneously entrenched in the traditional eastern ideals that favor them to be home-makers who prepare meals for the family, look after the children and household chores, take responsibility of caring for the family and bind the relationships together, despite being career oriented.

4.2 Additional Insights: Linguistic Trends in the Pakistani Discourse of Advertising

Insights into the linguistic trends in Pakistan find expression through the Pakistani discourse of advertising. Pakistan is a multilingual country where many different languages are spoken. The national language of Pakistan is Urdu, whereas, the official language of Pakistan is English. Numerous regional languages are also spoken very commonly in the respective regions in Pakistan. English language is considered to be the language of the learned and enjoys a prestigious status owing to the

colonial history in the region of the subcontinent. As English is thought to be the language of the educated in Pakistan and enjoys a prestige factor attached to it, it is generally used as the primary language in the media of Pakistan. Similarly, the primary language used in the data collected for the present research, English is mainly used as a base language with frequent occurrences of the practices of code-mixing and code-switching. The linguistic patterns including the inscriptions on images and the captions of various advertisement texts demonstrate the use of English language as the principal language. Many instances of code-mixing and code-switching practices have also been observed in the data which are often purposely done. Using the English language in the advertisement discourse lends a prestige feel to the brand; whereas, the mixing of Urdu words, phrases or even sentences in an otherwise English text, often helps in creating a nationalistic identity of the brand. Using Urdu words and phrases having specific nationalistic connotations such as '*azadi*' and '*Meripehchaan Pakistan*', in otherwise English language structures proves to be a substantial way of constructing a national identity and relating the brand to its national roots. Code-mixing practices are also common when the brand desires to establish its affiliations with the native culture and values. Use of words and phrases such as, '*shaadi*', '*humareykhaney*', and '*Rasm o Rivaj*' instead of '*wedding*', '*our meals*', and '*customs and traditions*' respectively, show how certain Urdu words and phrases have strong cultural connotations and to capture the true spirit of the affair, use of words from the native language becomes essential to achieve the desired result of associating the brand with the audience.

Such practices of code mixing and code switching in the advertising discourse greatly affect the linguistic practices of the general public as media discourse tends to affect the linguistic patterns of its viewers/readers. The media and specifically the advertising discourse have the power to affect the language and speaking skills of people. Similarly, the mixing of codes in the advertisement discourse in Pakistan has greatly influenced the linguistic practices of a common Pakistani, who is generally observed as speaking a hybrid language having constituents both from the English and Urdu languages.

5. Conclusions: Key Findings

The present research studies how advertising discourses work ideologically, reflecting the values, ideals and social meanings in the society with a specific reference to the discourse practices in Pakistan. The findings provide insights into the linguistic, social and religio-cultural implications of the Pakistani society as projected in the advertising

discourse of Pakistan both explicitly and implicitly. The study has focused on examining the socio-cultural contexts in which the texts are produced and viewed and the language used in the Pakistani discourse of advertising in the backdrop of indigenous socio-cultural contexts. This study aims to find glimpses into the religio-cultural and social norms as presented in the advertisement texts of various food, clothing and cosmetic brands in Pakistan both at the primary level and secondary level of discourse.

Promoting nationalistic affiliations is common in the advertising discourse of Pakistan as it is believed to be a significant way of making the brands more distinguishable and relatable to the audience. National affiliations are mostly celebrated by the clothing and food brands; the focus of the cosmetic brands however, is more on western associations. Religious overtones such as references to sacred events, holy days and Islamic teachings are predominantly present in the discourse of all the three food brands and in one clothing brand only. The cosmetic brands on the other hand, have not used any religious references in their advertising discourse. Many socio-cultural norms and customs find expression in the advertisement discourse of food and clothing brands. The linguistic identity has proudly been reflected by the food and clothing brands; whereas, the focus of the cosmetic brands remained more on Western affiliations, thus a predominant use of English language is observed in the advertising discourse of cosmetic brands.

The clothing and food brands are observed to be fusing together both tradition and modernism, whereas, the cosmetic brands favor a more westernized style, though still holding on to the beauty ideals long been prevalent in the subcontinent that focus mainly on fair skin tones and youthful exuberance. The primary discourse of the advertisement texts from the advertising discourse of all the brands of all the respective domains, present a modern and confident woman image. However, on examining the secondary discourse it may be observed that over-sized and average looking female models and women with darker skin tones have been excluded from the advertisements, referring to the general conceptions of beauty ideals prevalent in Pakistan that focus greatly on the youthful aspects of beauty, light skin tones and slimness.

As a final note it can be concluded that at present Pakistan is theoretically at the crossroads between East and West where a fusion of various eastern and western ideals and values may be observed.

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