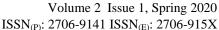
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Semiotic Analysis of the Objectification of Women in Selected Pakistani Advertisements

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Abstract

This study explored the objectification of women in Pakistani advertisements of print and electronic media. The objectification and presentation of women in the advertisements of the western world has been extensively studied but this area lacks research in Pakistan. Semiotic analysis was used as the research tool in order to explore how multiple meanings and beliefs are built in a society by advertising sex. In this research, five advertisements from different Pakistani TV channels and newspapers were selected as sample. These commercials were selected because they presented women in a specific way. For analysis, Barthian semiotic analysis on two levels of significance, that is, the denotative and connotative levels, was employed. The findings of this paper revealed that advertisements in Pakistan focus on the physical appearance and depiction of women body.

Keywords: advertisement, connotative, denotative, semiotics, women objectification

Introduction

Mass media controls the lives of people in the current era. Mass media is an umbrella term that covers newspapers, TV, internet, radio and books. Internet has gained popularity but TV is still popular because of its audio and visual appeal (Azin & Tabrizi, 2015). Women and men are presented in different ways in advertisements broadcasted on TV; women are specifically objectified in these advertisements and their objectification has a long history (Berberick, 2010). The bodies of women are used for selling products on TV (Barber, 2011). They are used to sell a variety of products. It is a common observation that women are presented as the object of desire. They are not shown as human beings but as desirable objects with sensual appeal.

Women shown in TV advertisements are young, slim, sexy and attractive (Davis, 1990). The purpose of this study is to show that women appearing in advertisements, either in Pakistani newspapers or in TV commercials, are presented as attractive and sexy. Barber (2011) stated

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that women are presented as sex objects. Television commercials and print advertisements present women from the perspective of their physical appearance.

Gender in Media

In recent years, the objectification of women has become a part of Pakistani commercials on media. People consider it as normal and accept it as a legitimate part of an advertisement. These days, not only women but men are also objectified for the purpose of persuasion and for creating attraction. Martin Dabney stated in this regard that the content of mass media objectifies both women and men. Surprisingly, today's most famous progxrams such as 50 Shades of Grey, Magic Mike XXL and others portray men rather than women. A number of studies have been carried out about the issue of objectification and presentation of women in advertisements in different countries of the world. However, such studies conducted in the Pakistani context are very few in number and the analysis of advertisements using Barthes' semiotic theory has not been conducted so far. This study used Barthes' semiotic analysis and selected advertisements were explained denotatively as well as connotatively.

Azin and Tabrizi (2015) found that women are presented in a traditional stereotypical way in Iranian TV commercials and specific gender roles are assigned to them. For the current study, TV ads broadcasted in 2014 were selected and Barthian semiological analysis was used for the denotative and connotative analysis of the selected advertisements. The advertisements used in this research were of washing powder, kitchenware, dishwashing liquid and rice; all of them presented women in a stereotypical way. For example, in Agrin Kitchenware advertisement, a woman is shown working alone in the kitchen and men keep sitting and waiting for the food to be served to them by that particular woman. Stereotypical roles of gender are used by the advertiser for persuasion.

In another research paper, outdoor advertisement and the role of women in modern society was investigated. The study focused on the social life of women (Didem, 2018). In the past, women had a very limited social life. They were considered just household women. With the passage of time, women became more socially active and ventured into new professions. They began to receive higher education and qualification needed for professional life. These days, women are running businesses and are establishing their identity in the business world. The main focus of this research paper is on outdoor advertisement and the role of women in the current society. Both growth and development of ads run parallel. Modern women are happy to see themselves admired and glorified in the

commercial world. The advertisements have been attractive by the use of women's images. These images attract the people. In this research, the images of women in outdoor advertisement are analyzed by using semiotic analysis. On the basis of this methodology, the results are collected through the analysis of women role and on the basis of gender in different types of advertisements. The power of women has been cashed through beauty which increases the production and also raises the number of consumers. From the aesthetic point of view, the presence of a woman makes the product more captivating for the customers. It gains more attraction in a very short time as men in the society hold more purchasing power.

During the analysis of the selected advertisements, different ways of women objectification were considered and discussed. Some advertisements employed the use of women directly and some indirectly. There can be a comparison made of how women are portrayed in the contemporary era in contrast to how they were portrayed before. Different portray of women are analyzed. In recent advertisements, women are playing their role as beautiful, charming, captivating and strong personalities. Females are presented as social women. It can be deduced from these advertisements that women are not only capable of managing the household but also the outside affairs. The results show that a woman is a mother and a wife inside the household and a working lady outside in the business world.

There is no doubt that women are objectified in print as well as in electronic media. A study was conducted by Ullah in 2014. The main purpose of this study is to comprehend people's thinking about the explicit sexuality of female models in commercials. If more analysis is carried out regarding the success of such kind of advertisements, it will create massive tumult, anger and negative effect towards the brands. The main objective of this paper is to analyze the role of women in such sexually appealing advertisements and their impact on consumer perception. It also aims to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the woman's image in commercials since 1990s. Tekvar (2008) investigated the misrepresentation of women in advertisements in an article. A qualitative analysis was done of the selected advertisements. Four advertisements were selected for qualitative analysis; these ads depict women in a sexual appeal. The first advertisement shows the attractive look of the women the advertisement focuses on beauty of the woman rather than soap. In the second advertisement the laying pasture of the woman catches the eyes of the viewers. In the third advertisement the shoulder less dress enhances the more attraction for woman as compared to the O mobile. The fourth advertisement is about a juice; the dress of the model reveals fascination in this advertisement. The last commercial is that of Lipton green tea. In this add the slim body of the model captures the attention of the people. The researchers are

concerned about the overt objectification and presentation of women in advertisements. The results of this study revealed that such kind of seductive advertisements target the male audience.

Semiotics

Ferdinand De Saussure is the originator of Sebeok (1974). According to him, semiotics is 'the science of signs.' He divided linguistic signs into two constituents or components, that is, the signifier (sound) and the signified (conceptual image). The signified is not just the object but it can be an idea about an object and/or a thought. The association between the signifier and the signified is influenced by the society and culture and this association is arbitrary. In the context of mass media, an image is a signifier that is shown to the audience.

Semiotics is also used to analyze the presentation of women in advertisements. The main purpose of any advertiser is to entice the attention of the audience by using colorful icons and slogans. For this purpose, women are used as the medium of representation or for creating attraction in order to increase the profit of the company. The focus of this study is the icons and slogans used in commercial advertisement and the symbolic representation shows attractive representation of women in the product. For this purpose, four commercial advertisements were selected of soap, mobilink jazz, Q mobile noir and slice mango juice respectively. All four advertisements used women as icon. The soap advertisement showed a picture-perfect woman with her beautiful fair skin. Secondly, the mobilink jazz advertisement showed the smart figure of the woman which is fit for the frame of this advertisement. In the third advertisement the woman's black dress on her fair white skin showed the perfect image that is attractive. In the last advertisement the seductive look of the woman showed the exact match to the ad. Icons indicating image of the product and the language used in the slogans remains in the mind of the audience for a long time. The role of women in the advertisement represents at the societal, economic and commercial level in the real world.

Pierce (1955) presented theories to show how signs convey ideas, beliefs and attitudes. Like Saussure, Pierce's model is also structural. Their model of sign presented by Pierce and Saussure is linguistic in nature. In his sign system, Roland Barthes incorporated the image. He showed that signs in a society normalize the bourgeois point of view and this normalization was called 'myth' by Barthes. Myths make things appear normal, eternal, innocent and natural (Barthes, 1973).

Within the field of mass media, semiotics helps to show how signs are used and understood in media. Media uses different signs to show gender roles and the

objectification of women. In this study, Barthes' visual semiotics was employed to analyze the representation and depiction of women in the Pakistani advertisements.

Research Questions

RQ1: How advertisements objectify women by focusing the attention of viewers on the portrayal of the model(s) instead of the product?

RQ2: How stereotypical roles of gender are used as a method of persuasion by electronic and print media?

Methodology

Barthes' Semiotics Approach

Barthes' semiotic approach was used in the current study. There are two levels of images in the Barthian approach: (1) Denotation, that is, 'who is shown or depicted?' and (2) Connotation, that is, 'what ideas are shown through the presentation?' (Jewitt, 2001). Through the use of semiotic analysis, the hidden and cultural meanings of advertisements can be found. The current study also utilized Barthes' semiotic approach to explain the advertisements both denotatively and connotatively. The mixed methods approach was applied to analyze the data. NVIVO software was used to draw the tables of word frequency in the current research.

Analysis of Advertisements on the Basis of Barthes' Semiological Approach

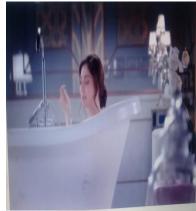
Advertisement No. 1: LUX Soap

Denotative Level

LUX is a very old soap brand. This brand is a product of Unilever. It is the first mass marketed toilet soap in the world. The advertisement is divided into three shots. In the first shot, the advertisement starts with the description of soap that is infused with the smell of jasmine flower. The hair style of Mahira Khan also shows the softness of her face. The hair lock at the side of her face captivates the audience. In the second shot, a female model is shown bathing in a bathtub and she smells her own hand during the bath. The prominent color in this frame is white, as that of the white bathtub and white lamp, which depicts peace. Then she walks while wearing a silky and sensual dress towards a man who is reading something. She ties a cloth on his eyes and runs. In the third shot, the man approaches the female model due to the fragrance of the soap and takes off his blindfold. A song is played in the background.

Figure 1. *LUX Soap*







Connotative Level

In this advertisement, a woman is presented in an objectified way. It is said that advertisements shape and build the notions and perceptions of the audience. This advertisement emphasizes more the body and looks of the model rather than the specifications of the soap. In the first frame, the model's face expresses a peaceful and calm smile. Her calmness, beauty and relax expression satisfy the aesthetic scene. She enjoys the fragrance of the soap. Her hairstyle also supports the scene. The background is blurred in the first frame and the camera focuses only on the woman. In the second frame, she is in the bathtub, her hands and face are visible and she has the same facial expression that conveys the same message of calmness. The background is rich with a beautiful setup and violet color is used along with marvelous lampshades, although the focus of the camera is still the girl in the

picture. She is wearing a dress that attracts the attention of the audience. Her facial expression and posture while holding the soap are more seductive. The bathtub scene signifies a tempting attraction for the viewers. In the third frame, a man is blindfolded with a pink color band which connotes that the purpose of making the advertisement is to enhance the element of femininity. In this frame, a women is presented with flying hair and wearing a drop shoulder gown of peach color. The man is attracted towards the woman who has all the stereotypical conundrums. His attraction towards her is also due to the fragrance of the soap as he is blindfolded. History is full of such presentations where women tempt the male participants.

Table 1Word Frequency

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
Soap	4	9	3.72
Frame	5	6	2.48
Advertisement	13	4	1.65
Bathtub	7	4	1.65
Color	5	4	1.65
First	5	4	1.65
Man	3	4	1.65
Model	5	4	1.65
Also	4	3	1.24
Background	10	3	1.24

Advertisement No. 2: Mobilink Jazz

Denotative Level

This advertisement promotes a mobile communication brand called Mobilink Jazz. The image allures consumers with outstanding offers and deals. It shows us that if people use a Jazz connection, they are able to get more and more benefits. The offers and the different packages are seen in this image. A female model is shown holding a mobile phone and she looks sensual and attractive. We can also see the calendar for two months in this image. The color of Jazz, activation offer's number, months' name and the dress of the model is yellow. Yellow is the symbol of happiness and freshness and this is shown in this advertisement. White and red colors are also shown in these frames. This advertisement is divided into two shots. In the first shot, the model presents a curvy body posture and talks to someone on

her mobile phone. Both Urdu and English linguistic features are present in ad. In the other shot, the model is again in a curvy posture and shows her interest in the phone.

Figure 2. Mobilink





Connotative Level

The picture shows a woman in an offensive pose. The two pictures signify the model as a sexy figure. We can see the perfect body image of a woman. The model lies on something that is not visible in the image but we can see that instead of the phone, the eye-catching sight is the posture of the model and her seductive looks. Her facial expression and visible curves are erotically appealing. In the first frame, she wears a yellow dress and looks very attentively at the mobile phone, it creates attention for the model. Her right hand is in her hair. It shows that she wants something and in her other hand she has a mobile phone on which she is talking to someone. Urdu lines written on the upper right side corner are also related to her posture because there is written that 'apnay man pasand gannay aur ring tones muft download karain. 'Maybe she is singing some song or maybe she is playing some ringtones. However, her slim figure is in a seductive posture which is very attractive for the younger male audience. Linguistic features elaborate the characteristics of Jazz connection but in both the frames, the main attraction is the model herself. In the other picture, her perfect body posture is more alluring for the viewers than the deals and offers that come along with a Jazz connection. These two images are typical examples of stereotypical portrayals of a woman. She has been presented as a commodity. The brand has used a woman as a commodity or an object to allure the younger audience, specifically the male audience. In both frames, the female model is objectified in a way to grab the attention of the audience instead of selling

the product. Here, we can also assume that the company or brand is utilizing female model as the conventional way of alluring attention.

Table 2Word Frequency

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
Model	5	10	3.83
Image	5	5	1.92
Mobile	6	5	1.92
Phone	5	5	1.92
Posture	7	5	1.92
Woman	5	5	1.92
Also	4	4	1.53
Jazz	4	4	1.53
Showing	7	4	1.53
Two	3	4	1.53

Advertisement No. 3: Q Mobile Noir

Denotative Level

This advertisement is of Q mobile. Many phones of this brand are available in the market. This advertisement is divided into three frames. The advertisement starts with a man doing some work while a woman is shown lying on the bed, then she gets up and wears a shoulder less dress. She goes in a grand party, receives a call and says 'we have finally met.' The man's response is 'it was worth waiting for.' At the end, the female model holding the phone tells the name of the phone, that is, 'Noir by Q Mobile.' This brand has many models available in the market. So, people have the chance to buy a phone according to their purchasing power.

Connotative Level

Although, this advertisement is that of the mobile phone yet we can't learn more about the specifications of the phone. The main focus of this commercial is a woman rather than the mobile phone itself. We are not able to see the specifications of that mobile phone but the poses of the model constitute the stereotypical portrayal of a woman as an alluring figure. We are able to see her beautiful skin, stunning looks and her revealing dress. Such kind of portrayal depicts the physical charms of the woman involved instead of the commodity value. Even nudity and

sexual attraction are still opposed by the majority of the people and they also seem irrelevant in the context of Pakistan. Still, they play a vital role in advertisements. The model is ready to meet someone and she moves from her bedroom towards the party for this purpose. She wears a black dress on her white skin which is very captivating for the audience. In the second and third frames, her eyes focus on the mobile. However, in the third frame her nude body part is shown with the mobile phone in her hand which is very seductive for the viewers.

Figure 3. Noir Q Mobile



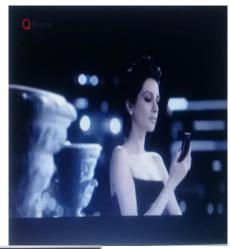




Table 3Word Frequency

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
Phone	5	9	5.23
Mobile	6	7	4.07
Advertisement	13	3	1.74
Dress	5	3	1.74
Model	5	3	1.74
See	3	3	1.74
Woman	5	3	1.74
Able	4	2	1.16
Available	9	2	1.16
Bed	3	2	1.16

Advertisement No. 4: Slice Mango Juice

Denotative Level

This advertisement is about mango juice. A beautiful model named Katrina Kaif appears on the screen wearing a beautiful yellow dress. Her look has a seductive effect. Mango is a special fruit of the summer season in Pakistan which is loved by everyone. Nature is also a part of this advertisement; in these frames the background of the model depicts an attractive scenery of nature. Different colors such as yellow, green, white and blue are used in this advertisement but the prominent color is yellow which the symbol of freshness is also. The purpose of this advertisement is to advertise fresh juice with a fresh face. This commercial was shot at a very beautiful place adorned with rivers and the beauty of the model appeals a lot. A woman is shown in a beautiful place wearing a revealing dress. She holds a mango in her hand and in the last scene the logo of Mango Slice Juice is shown.

Connotative Level

The advertisement comprises three frames and the main purpose of this advertisement is to advertise mango juice, although the way in which the model has been presented is questionable. In the first frame, the model wears a semi-nude dress which shows her body to grasp the attention of the audience. The color of her dress and the color of mango are the same. The first frame in which she sits in a captivating pose and looks towards the sunset is a typical example of the stereotypical objectification of women. In this scene, she sits with an unripe green

color mango under the sunlight and wants to suck it but can't. At the same time, sunlight and water fall on the mango and on her moving body which affects the unripe mango and changes it into a ripe one in her fingers. All this is very attractive for the viewers. The second frame also defines her dress rather than the product to be sold. Blue sky in the background and her flying dress both support the theme of objectification. In the third and final frame, she pinches the mango with her fingers and its juice touches her lips. Then, she licks it with her tongue which further has an erotic impact. The connotations of this advertisement are totally seductive, where the product is less visible than the model. The advertiser has used the sexually attractive body of a female model wearing a semi-nude dress which becomes the cause of the captivation of the audience.

Figure 4. *Mango Slice Juice*

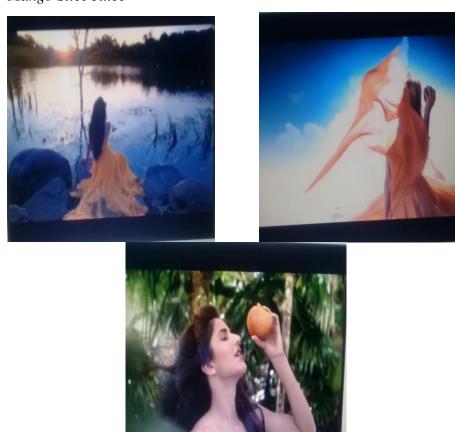


Table 4Word Frequency

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
Mango	5	11	5.12
Dress	5	7	3.26
Model	5	7	3.26
Juice	5	6	2.79
Advertisement	13	4	1.86
Beautiful	9	4	1.86
Color	5	4	1.86
Frame	5	4	1.86
Wearing	7	4	1.86
Attractive	10	3	1.40

Advertisement No. 5: Lipton Green Tea

Denotative Level

This advertisement is of the brand Lipton which has launched its green tea. Green tea is claimed to help one lose weight and reduce blood pressure. This advertisement comprises three frames. In the first frame, a rather healthy model is shown dancing at the stage. Her whole body is covered with a costume. She is even wearing gloves to cover her hand and only her fatty face is prominent. Then she takes off her costume. In the second frame, a slim girl appears wearing a sleeveless skirt and her slim body is also prominent in this dress. She drinks green tea and claims that it helps her in losing weight and staying fit. In the third frame, we can see the relief and freshness on the model's face. She is looking very much satisfied as it keeps her fresh. Two packs of Lipton are shown as well, the text, 'feel active, feel fresh' while this activeness and freshness is shown on the model's face. Lipton has introduced new flavor which is very effective for the weight loss.

Connotative Level

In the first frame, a fat woman is shown dancing among the audience and because of her fat and chubby figure she is not getting the required approval from them. She faces rejection and disappointment because of her bulky figure. She does not like being fat. So, in the second frame, she drinks green tea and becomes very thin and then she is able to show off her body by wearing short dresses. The dress

she wears is very short that is normally not worn by the Pakistani women and it is intended to show her body curves after drinking the tea. The focus of the advertisement is not the tea but the figure and appearance of the woman. In the Pakistani society, females are not allowed to wear such kind of dresses in daily life. Her body is represented here as a product and the effect of the tea is shown through her body's transformation. Rather than showing the acceptance of body flaws and promoting good health, the advertisement feeds on the insecurities of women and focuses on change in body shape. The hidden meaning of this advertisement depicts a very harsh face of the society where such figure of a woman is not at all acceptable, so they have to reduce their weight.

Figure 5. *Lipton Green Tea*







Table 5Word Frequency

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
Body	4	9	4.27
Tea	3	9	4.27
Face	4	5	2.37
Frame	5	5	2.37
Green	5	5	2.37
Shown	5	5	2.37
Advertisement	13	4	1.90
Lipton	6	4	1.90
Weight	6	4	1.90
Woman	5	4	1.90

Conclusion

The semiotic analysis of the advertisements proves that women are presented in an objectified way in print and electronic media advertisements in Pakistan. The main claim of this study is that advertisements present women body as a source of amusement and attraction for both male and female audience. The five selected advertisements expressed the body of a woman with fair skin, shiny hair, flawless skin and wearing skintight revealing clothes. Whether the advertisement was that of a soap or a mobile phone, the body of a woman was used in an appealing way. These commercials portrayed women as showpieces and more focus was placed on the looks of the respective model rather than the products.

Our main concern is that in advertisements, whether in print or electronic media, women are presented as showpieces and not as human beings who can think and have feelings. The current paper also suggests that only the outward beauty of a woman is shown in TV commercials. The media representation of female models develops the ideology of viewers to achieve those looks and outward beauty. Advertisers enhance the popularity of their products using the imagery of women's sexy looks and seductive voices. It is uneasy to say that females shown in advertisements are not real or natural; they use makeup and their looks are also enhanced through photography techniques. These explicitly objectifying advertisements present only the artificial beauty of skin, long shiny hair, slim and smart body. There is a need to present women in advertisements as they really are, not as they are shown in them. This study is an eye opener for the viewers as well

as for the people who advertise their products using female body as an object. This is the right time to make people aware of the exploitation of women in advertisements. Future researchers can study why women are presented as showpieces even in conservative countries like Pakistan.

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