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SELLING EMPOWERMENT OR REINFORCING STEREOTYPES? A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF WOMEN'S PORTRAYAL IN PAKISTANI ELECTRONIC ADVERTISEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

The problem of characterizing women stereotypically in advertisements is well researched, especially in the previous literature from the South Asia context. Traditionally, Pakistani advertisements have propagated the narrow gender roles, viewing women as caretakers, homemakers or beauty icons. Nonetheless, contemporary tendencies in the advertising sphere demonstrate a certain change in the direction of more empowered female images, which can be explained by the changes in the socio-cultural and market contexts. This paper examines the process by which current advertisements in the Pakistani electronic media depict that conception and steps beyond stereotypes to promote more positive and aspirational depictions of female empowerment. Using the qualitative research study design and grounded theory to analyse the data, a purposive sample of recently placed advertisements was analyzed to come up with emergent themes. The analysis was based on grounded data analysis. The analysis identifies a two-sided discourse: on the one hand, traditional female representations of women as domestic and decorative objects continue to prevail; however, more and more advertisements increasingly position women as empowered professionals, independent decision makers, and social change agents. Such enabled roles model women as educators, business owners, and managers, a noticeable shift toward the re-ordering of gender roles in the Pakistani media discourse. By noting this paradigm shift in the way that stereotypes are being transformed to empowerment, the study serves to make a critical contribution to the literature on gender and media representation in the Global South. It highlights how advertising is not only a commercial undertaking but also plays the role of a cultural agent to modify the attitude of people towards the position of women in society.

Keywords: *Female empowerment, gender stereotypes, Pakistani media, Advertising, Grounded theory, Qualitative research*

Introduction

In today's world, nobody can avoid the influence of technological media (television, social media, movies, advertisements, videos and internet) etc. Advertising has become the popular genre of print and electronic media. It plays dominant role in shaping our values, culture and perceptions towards society. Advertising media uses different advertising appeals or approaches to persuade public opinion. They use visuals, text and semiotic to convey their messages. The basic task of advertisers is to inform, persuade and form public opinion. Advertisement help the

consumer to decide what is acceptable or desirable. From other marketing tools, advertising has distinguish position to influence consumer's mind. Now a days advertising is much popular for promoting business around the globe.

The advertisers try to communicate their message in such a way that should influence target audience. For this reason, they use different strategies, tools and approaches. They also consider values, culture and trends of the society while projecting any product. Therefore, gender representation is one of the important aspect of advertisement which communicate certain meaning. The representation can be defined as an image of a person or phenomenon through language and visuals. Media representations have strong impacts on the minds of the viewers. It was noticed that gender representation is popular phenomenon among advertisers and media researchers. The basic purpose of the present research is to analyze the gender representation in advertisement of Pakistani media. It will focus on social values, ideologies, and associated roles of males and females in the advertisements.

Particularly, from the perspective of Pakistan, after 2000, media got immense growth. There were number of electronic channels started. After 2015, there was significant growth in the use of social media also. Therefore, business men used different strategies to gain interest of the consumers. The present study will deeply explore the content of advertisements and will study what different appeals used by the advertisers. How female characters are portrayed and what is power relations, ideologies and linguistic patters are employed.

Advertising depicts modern trends in culture and society. Moreover, it provides information to the public about different brands, services and ideas (Pollay 1986). That's why it is pertinent to explore how females are presented in advertisements because it indicates the associated roles of females in their respective society.

The analysis of Pakistani advertisements, the study will explore what roles are mostly associated to females in electronic advertisements of both countries. Linder (2004) noted that females are mostly presented in stereotypical roles such as house wives or personal assistants. But Tolentino (2015) contradicts that with the passage of time, women assumed powerful roles in the society. Females participated in powerful roles such as lawyers, police offices, politicians and business women. But the question is that does media give them powerful representation in its content. However, certain studies endorsed that the portrayal of females in media did not change immensely over the previous decades (Knoll, Eisend, & Steinhagen 2011; Taylor, Miyazaki, & Mogensen 2013). This study will provide practical knowledge about Pakistani advertisement industry. It will enhance researcher knowledge regarding gender and media

In today's world advertising has become the popular genre of print and electronic media. It plays dominant role in shaping our values, culture and perceptions towards society. The advertisers try to communicate their message in such a way that should influence target audience. For this reason, they use different strategies, tools and approaches. The basic purpose of the present research is to analyze the female representation in advertisement of Pakistani media but it will also focus on the representation of females from the perspective of femvertising and stereotyping. It will focus on social values, ideologies, and associated roles of males and females in the advertisements. In the previous literature, it was noted that there was lack of studies in the field of gender and media through a qualitative approach. The present study will fill this gap and will compare the representation of gender in Pakistani electronic media advertisements.

Representation of females in advertisements

In Western countries, the researchers mostly focused on advertisements, electronic media and gender roles. Since 25 years, women representation have been immensely discussed by researchers (Meyers, 1992). The researchers

noted that men and women were stereotypically presented in electronic media. Ashmore & Boca (1979) defined gender stereotypes as "a structured set of beliefs about personality attributes of women and men" (P. 226). Stereotypical representation of gender have impact on purchase intentions of consumers. It is important to notice that favoring one gender to another may affect both genders and leads to social inequality that affects the society badly (Chavez, 1988). During 1970's the research on the portrayal of gender roles started in American which later on followed by Europe in 1980's and in Asia 1990's. There were limited studies observed from Pakistani media perspective.

Previously, the researchers mostly studied the representation of females in advertisements in stereotypical perspective. As Grau and Zotos (2016) suggested that in advertisements females are mostly shown in stereotypical roles like wives, mothers, girl friends, family member and decorative commodities. Additionally, they are depicted as incompetent, indecisive or insecure. Khandeparkar and Motiani (2015) argued that the portrayal of women in advertising industry was mostly unequal and derogatory that did not represented modern woman. Advertisements frequently provided unfair representation to the both genders. When women were depicted in domestic setting, sex symbol, dependent on man's protection and striving hard to achieve "ideal beauty" however men shown as assertive and in leading positions.

Cortese (2015) stressed that women were disregarded in advertisements when they were shown weak and subordinate to men. These advertisements convinced the women that they were flawed and could not get male's attention unless they become beautiful or attractive. Eisend (2010) commented that television advertisements mostly represented male and female characters in stereotypical manner. The previous researchers focused on different variables such as gender, age of primary character, associated setting, gender voice over, culture and values. Quantitative content analysis was the most popular tool to explore gender representation in previous researches (Fields et al, 2010).

Another factor was noted by Tehseem an Kalsoom (2015) that advertisements mostly project unattainable beauty which was difficult to achieve in reality. The models were presented as attractive, having long shiny hair, smooth skin, beautiful eyes, full lips and toned body shape. Hall and Crum (1994) noticed that women body parts were more highlighted in advertisements than men. According to Hall and Crum (1994) women's body parts appear more often in advertisements than male characters. Men's faces are photographed more often rather than their bodies. The costumes for male and female characters were also quite different. Women appeared in leisurewear or swimmer whereas male were in formal dressing. It indicated that female were stereotyped as sex object however, men were independent and decisive.

Rosewarne (2009) claims that the majority of the photos used in corporate ads are "touched up" and altered; as a result, the women's appearance in the media images is artificially altered and conforms to unrealistic beauty standards. In addition to the pervasiveness of false portrayals of women, ads aimed at heterosexual male consumers frequently sexualize women heavily.

Azam, Baig and Fraz (2021) conducted a study from feminist perspective when examining TV commercials. The study demonstrates how language portrays the female body and how sexist language is employed in marketing. The results showed that women were portrayed in advertising using a variety of social and cultural backgrounds. The ads showcased a stunning feminine physique. This study also showed that language shaped the idea of beauty, and advertising contributed to the creation of certain body stereotypes associated with women.

According to Guizzo, Cadinu, Galdi, Maass, and Latrofa (2017), women are portrayed differently in today's advertisements. The study points out that women are frequently represented in the media as sexual accessories and props used to attract the attention of men. In other words, women are increasingly portrayed as highly

sexualized objects, which objectifies them. The act of sexually objectifying women reduces their humanity to their body parts in order to lure males.

Baudrillard (2005) asserts that women are under pressure to retain their attractiveness through beauty product marketing, and this pressure might even turn beauty into a religious requirement. These commercials present a refined stereotype of women, and to achieve this, lovely imagery and alluring language are employed. Johead and Hossain (2023) examined how advertisements and TV commercials in India have increasingly objectified and victimized women, particularly after globalization. It argues that the advertising industry exploits women as objects, often using near-pornographic elements to promote sales. This trend has intensified in recent years, especially since India's liberalization and globalization, leading to ethically and morally questionable advertising practices. The paper highlights the significant societal impact of these portrayals, particularly on the youth, and explores the alarming rise in rapes and violence against women linked to their depiction as sex objects and victims in media.

From Pakistani perspective, it was observed that Pakistan has patriarchal society and similarly female projection in media was underreported. Women were mostly presented in media as dependent, oppressed and confined to homes (Javed, 2005). But at the same time, media objectified them and presented them as attractive and appealing (Ullah & Khan, 2014). Ali and Batool (2015) analyzed the content from Pakistani media. It was noted that women were presented in submissive roles and stereotypically patriarchal positions. They were shown as weak, in equal, passive and vulnerable. Similarly, Rahman (2012) endorsed that female were projected as oppressive segment of the society in Pakistani media. In the previous studies it was noted that mostly studies conducted through quantitative approach. There were limited studies which adopted qualitative technique. However, the present study fills the gap and will study representation of gender in Pakistani electronic media advertisement through qualitative approach. It will study the language power structure and ideology hidden in the content.

Representation of females from the perspective of Empowerment

Recent studies show that modern advertisement industry focus on the display of women's talents and present pro-women messages (Varghese & Kumar, 2020). Windels et al., (2020) narrates that media ads also include women empowerment messages. Tsai, Shata, and Tian (2021) reported that female empowerment is depicted through agentic power of female models. Females are shown independent, self-sufficient and self-controlled. The women empowerment advertisements are considered as positive change in advertising industry. Grau and Zotos (2016) commented that many advertising agencies are focused on femvertising rather advocating the slogans of gender equality. Champlin et al.'s (2019) pointed that many female related brands promoted femvertisements and encouraged women to enhance their self-esteem and to resolve the issues of women empowerment by themselves. However, there is need to explore female power demonstration in various electronic media advertisements.

There are various dimensions of female power are displayed in advertisement industry. Social power is one of the dimension. Brinol (2017) defined social power as the ability of the individual to persuade other's existing opinion through logical arguments. For example if female doctor is shown in an advertisement and she advice certain healthy life styles, the audience will follow her suggestion due to her experience and knowledge in the field.

Female empowerment has been fundamental ideology in the field of media that advocates gender equality and independence of females. Alcoff (1988) noted that feminist empowerment ensures that females are confident and can take responsibility of their identity and choices. The concept of femvertising was originated from feminists which stress to enhance women

empowerment against stereotypical portrayals in advertising (Teng et al., 2020). The definition "advertising that employs pro-female talent, messages, and imagery to empower women and girls" (Gillespie, 2016) was projected by American digital company "SHE Media". According to Varghese and Kumar (2020) femvertising is "female empowerment advertising". Femvertising has been successful advertising appeal which helps the advertisers to target female customers (Åkestam, Rosengren, and Dahlen 2017). Female empowerment based advertising content increase positive attitude of females regarding particular products and strengthen emotional connection of the consumers with the brand (Drake 2017). Champlin et al.'s (2019) found that female related brands use femvertisements to encourage females to boost up their self-esteem, empowerment and gender equality.

Yoder and Kahan (1992) discussed the concept of "power over" and "power to" from feministic perspective. Power over mean that one has control over other people, environment and group of people. For example, one has ability to dominate other through one's status, authority, knowledge, physical and sexual aptitude. However, power to means one is capable of control her own behavior, feelings and thoughts. Power-to is referred as self-control, will power and personal empowerment.

Feminist Media Theory

Feminist media theory is a critical framework that provides a feminist perspective on media depiction, production, and consumption. The theory criticizes the way females are portrayed in the media. It demands fair depiction of females and argues that female identities are marginalized. It advocated the concept of gender equality. The theory emphasized that the media generally promote gender inequalities and patriarchal values. Feminist media theory was introduced in 1970 with the second wave of feminism; afterward, it underwent substantial development. From the perspective of post-structuralist, psychoanalytic, and critical cultural studies, it evaluates how the concept of gender is discussed concerning racial, class, sexual, and other identity frameworks (Gill, 2007).

Basically, stereotypical and underrepresentation of women promoted the concept of feminist media theory. Friedan (1963) coined the term "the feminine mystique"; according to this media did not favor gender equality but confined women's roles to the home and submission to males. The basic idea of "the feminine mystique" emphasized that women were depicted as invisible and inaccurate.

Feminist media theory is a feminist perspective on analyzing media presentation, production, and consumption. It explores how gender is depicted in media and advocates for respectful representation of women and other marginalized groups. The theory highlights inequality and male-dominated systems in society. The theory was initiated in the 1970s during the rise of second-wave feminism. It often employs ideas from different theories to study how gender relates to race, class, sexuality, and other areas of a person's identity (Gill, 2007).

One of the important perspectives of feminist theory is viewer perception. The way women interact with media, how they watch content, and read text have been the interest of scholars. Early studies on audience reception models from the 1970s and 1980s considered women as passive consumers of media who were readily affected by male-dominated representations. Radway (1984) thought that women had the power to challenge their portrayal in the media. It can be suggested that viewers have the power to challenge these portrayals. This approach supports the notion of women's agency even in the face of media attempts to enforce norms.

The objectification of women is a much-debated issue in the field of media, as Mulvey stressed that it accommodates the voyeuristic requirements of heterosexual men, reducing women to mere objects. Likewise, Gill (2016) argued that females' physical attributes are commoditized or exploited to attract the audience in digital media. The expansion of social media and online platforms further intensified the issue and promoted sexist

stereotypes, and reinforced patriarchal norms. The previous indicated that there was a need to critically examine the portrayal of women in media and its linkage with the power dynamics behind it. It would further elaborate on the issue of women objectification of women in media.

The current research from the perspective of feminist media indicated that sometimes celebrities and influencers promote stereotypes on social media for gaining popularity by self-objectification. Such type of empowerment is more focused on consumption and individualism rather than collective feminist goals for real change in the society (McRobbie, 2009). McRobbie (2020) argued that females were commercialized ideals, where feminism becomes a profitable issue rather than a serious problem that needs collective action.

In recent times media landscape has witnessed a broader cultural shift, and feminist media theory has posed response to it. Basically, it critiqued the depiction of females on traditional media and expanded its scope to intersectionality, post-feminism, and the effects of digital media. The researchers were of the opinion that the theory must include the discussion relating to media and society's perspective on gender, racism, class, and sexuality. This theory is quite useful it exposes media narratives towards females and advocates for more comprehensive and impartial gender representations in all forms of media.

To sum up the limited literature on female empowerment, it is noted that there is limited literature which explores female representation in advertisements from the comparative perspectives of traditional gender roles, empowerment, and objectification. The study will dig out various themes from Pakistani data about femvertising and stereotypical portrayals of females. On the basis of previous literature the following research questions are formulated.

Research questions for the study

RQ: 1 What are the dominant themes of female empowerment and stereotyping depicted in Pakistani electronic media advertisements?

Method

The advertisements were chosen from various Pakistani channels, such as ARY Digital, Geo Entertainment, Hum TV, Express Entertainment, A-Plus Entertainment, Bol Entertainment and PTV Home. The time period of the population was from 2020 to 2024.

For this study qualitative research design had been employed and thematic analysis technique was used for the analysis of data. Thematic analysis was chosen for this study because it aimed to explore the various themes related to females from the perspective of stereotyping and fermverting.

The analysis of the advertisements was based on inductive themes emerged from data. For this study, three types of coding is employed such as open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Based on the following method data from Pakistan advertisements relating to female representation were analyzed. For this purpose the researcher used NVIVO 10.

Findings

The themes relating to female empowerment and stereotyping emerged from the data are given below.

Dominant themes of female empowerment and stereotyping depicted in Pakistani electronic media advertisements

a. Caregivers role of women

In Pakistani advertisements, females were mostly shown as caregiving character such as mothers, sisters, daughter in law or daughters who are mostly busy in house chores and looking after their family members. The advertisements such as Dalda oli, Olper milk, Biscuits, and detergents. By showing women, as care givers, it was emphasized that females main role was to run household. But another aspect was noted that they were not shown the position of authority and decision makers. For example, in Surf Excel advertisement, depicted female as caregiver. She was concerned that her family

should look well groomed and presentable. Another example was from Dalda Cooking Oil, woman was shown in cooking meal for family that highlighted her nurturing role.

Mostly, cooking oil advertisements, link mother's thoughtful cooking choices to the concept of good health. Likewise, another example was from Lifebuoy Soap, mother was very much concerned about her children health and emphasis the use of Lifebuoy soap because it killed germs and kept her children healthy. The advertisements relating food items such as cooking oils, drinks, milk, surf, shampoos or tooth paste etc. depicted women as caregiver roles while little portrayal was given to alternative roles. It indicated the stereotypical portrayal of females in Pakistani advertisements. It was an indication of the stereotypical portrayal of females in Pakistani advertisements.

b. Women's objectification in Fashion and beauty products

It was noted in various advertisement were based on beauty products or garments such as soaps, facial creams, perfumes, jewelry or garments, the main focus of advertiser was model's looks. It was emphasized that women must have particular beauty standards such as slim, fair complexion, attractive features and long hair. The supporting models praise them for these characteristics. It was stressed that beauty was main source of confidence and success. However, some advertisement portrayd women beauty as means of empowerment such as in some of LUX commercials, mostly models depicted attractive, powerful and confident. But mostly it was observed that advertisements overemphasized on physical looks and link empowerment with beauty standards.

Some advertisements related female value with appearance which reaffirms the idea of women empowerment. Such portrayals pressurize the females to achieve limited beauty standards. For instance, some advertisements depicts females taking pride of their looks and communicate that their beauty is the source of their empowerment. Advertisements of beauty creams such as Glow and Lovely and other skin lightening creams promote fair skin and specific beauty standards. For instance, (Glow & Lovely), advertisement, lighter skin is linked with women accomplishment and value. It was emphasized that by having lighter skin you could achieve success in your career and social life. Another example was from Veet Hair Removal Cream, advertisement, the females were framed as self-confident by having hairless and smooth skin. Their physical appearance was depicted as important for their success and empowerment. However, it was the objectification of females. Another example from Sunsilk Shampoo (2022), which objectify females by showing their outward beauty such as showcasing women long and glossy hair.

The advertisement related to products such as soaps, face creams, shampoos, hair removal creams and perfumes particularly objectify female attributes by showcasing their attractive features, fair complexion, long hair and provocative expressions.

c. Women as Financial Contributors

However, another theme was noted from data that females were projected as financial contributors which indicated their portrayal as powerful women. These advertisements show women balancing their career challenges and family responsibilities. Females were depicted as financial independent, working as entrepreneurs or working in different organizations. For instance, in a bank advertisements, woman were shown operating profitable home based business. Sometimes, females were depicted working as teachers, doctors, lawyers which depicted them as economically independent, confident, and supporting their family. Such portrayals break conventional gender norms.

Some of the Pakistani advertisements portray females as financially strong and helping their families nowadays. Although we have a patriarchal society in which males dominated the family and society but contrary to this, some advertisements gave the message that females had capacity to financially support their families, take independent decisions, and manage their house hold.

For instance, an advertisement by UBL bank, women were shown in different professions such as police, scientist, singer, on line chef and teacher. They were shown as independent and self-stuffiest who are managing their finances confidently and UBL supports them for their financial transactions. Another advertisement, Telenor Easy paisa, women were using mobile phones to deal with financial transactions. Such type of advertisement encouraged females to financially contribute financially for their family and society. One of the HBL Microfinance banking advertisement showed a young girl who became independent and empowered by availing the offer of HBL bank. The message of financial independence and female empowerment was strongly disseminated through such portrayals. These depictions challenged conventional norms of our society.

d. Education as a Tool for Empowerment

Another theme that observed from the data was education. Education was promoted as a source of female empowerment. Girls were represented as future leader if they were educated. These depictions challenged their conventional role to only perform house hold duties and made society realize that females had much potential if they were educated. The advertisement also discussed the idea of women's education about their rights as well.

Such as in Mobilink Jazz advertisement, it was educated that females have due right in inheritance. Female were shown from different walk of life whose rights was denied by their male members of society. It was portrayed how the Moblink app helps female to fight for their right in the inheritance.

Likewise, advertisements relating to telecommunications emphasized on girls education. One of the example is from Zong 4G advertisement. The advertisement showcased that 4G helps a girl to get good marks in school and afterwards, she was able to secure her admission in a renowned university.

There were certain advertisements observed that stressed on academic achievements of females and characterized them as female empowerment. Specifically, advertisements of Mobilink, Telenor and U-fone. Such advertisements emphasized that through education women could excel in every field and combat every challenge. Another example was from the "Always" brand in the year 2018, girls were shown empowered to believe in their abilities and excel in school education.

In Shan foods advertisement, a girl was shown who was educated and independent. In which her father cooks food for her, and message was given (khana pakan kisi aik ka kam nahi). The message of women's rights and equality was given. Another Shan food advertisement, an educated and doctor daughter-in-law was shown, in which her family was shown to support her career and profession. The message of these advertisements was that education is essential for women's empowerment.

e. The Modern, Empowered Woman

Another aspect was observed from data that modern Pakistani women was shown as independent, confident and self-sufficient. These females were very independent in their lives, made their own decisions and balanced their professional and personal responsibilities. Such portrayals challenged conventional role of women in patriarchal society in which females were always dependent on males. For example, the advertisements of mobile phones, technology products and beauty products, females were presented as independent, self-assured and confident. Many of advertisements of LUX soap, in which mostly super models were presented as modern, active, confident, and stylish. Modern women was linked with empowerment. Such depictions project progressive woman which challenged conventional stereotypes. It was noted in many of advertisements that they promoted the message of freedom and self-realization in the context of empowerment. It was emphasized that modern Pakistani woman were progressive, educated, strong and independent in their life decisions. For instance, in Honda Civic Commercial, a female was depicted who was driving her car. Such portrayal indicates women

independence, individual mobility and self-confidence. Likewise, Q Mobile advertisement, urban woman was shown using technology for managing her personal and professional life. It represented that Pakistani woman was well educated, technological literate and independent in her life.

Another advertisement of Nestlé Milk-Pak, working mother is shown who was confidently managing her home and professional duties. She was depicted as capable of performing her domestic and professional duties. Such description points out that modern women were successful in their domestic and professional life and inspirational for others. Such portrayals challenge traditional stereotypes. These females were projected as self-sufficient and capable of balancing their domestic and professional lives. It gave the message that modern Pakistani woman was educated, confident and not dependent on others. It rejected the old stereotypes which always confined females to domestic roles. This shift in portrayal projected the idea of gender equality. By promoting the concept of empowerment, these advertisements contributed to a cultural landscape of the society that values women's independence and contribution.

f . **Motherhood as Empowerment**

Another aspect is observed from data that women are showcased as caring mothers but with empowering experience. It is suggested that women role as mother is powerful who controls family's health well-being and future. A mother is very strong who independently takes decisions about her family. For instance, advertisements of baby products, milk, detergents, tea, cooking oils, Shan and National masala often showcase women as devoted mothers who always priorities their family's wellbeing, children happiness and in-laws respect. For example, in an advertisement of baby formula milk, mother is depicted as key decision-maker. However, Pakistani advertisement focus on traditional maternal roles of females but at the same times, they are highlighted as empowered woman who has ability to make informed choices for her family.

For instance, in Olpers' Milk advertisement, a mother is shown who chooses Olpers milk for her children because she knows that it is good for health and children growth. It is stressed that mother has good information about family wellbeing and health issues. She is independent to take decisions about her family. Such as in Pampers Diapers Advertisement mother's role as nurturer and decision maker are highlighted. In National Foods Advertisement (2022) female is portrayed who is cooking healthy food with National Foods products for her children. The concept of empowerment is depicted through nurturing and healthy choices.

In Pakistani advertisements, females are shown to be powerful and independent individuals, especially as mothers. Although they are busy with household chores and taking care of their children, they are also shown to be confident decision-makers who know what is best for their families. These advertisements frequently portray women as the sole caregivers and decision-makers at home, especially in terms of choosing products under the categories of food, cooking oil, baby care, among others. Such depictions, which port ray women as authoritative decision-makers in those spheres, also support the theme of empowerment in those domestic roles.

g. Professional and Career-Oriented Women

In Pakistani advertisement females are shown in many professions such as doctors, lawyers, teachers, nurses, athletes, fashion designers, chefs, singers, models, artists, social workers, business women and corporate professionals. By depicting females in theses professions, the idea of empowerment is emphasized and motivate Pakistani girls to play active and strong role in the society. Mostly advertisements, highlight career oriented women, they are shown as leading positions who managing their jobs, professions and competing with men in every fields. Parents are giving priorities to girl's education and supporting their professional

careers. For instance, Surf Excel's "Dirt is Good" Campaign: a woman is shown who is balancing her domestic and professional duties which challenges stereotype that woman responsibilities only lie within the household. In another advertisement of U-fone, woman is depicted as leading entrepreneur who is successfully running her own business. In a Q-Mobile, a girls struggle is shown to become sports woman. Initially, she is not supported by her family but when she achieves success in her career, she is appreciated by her family. And becomes, role model for others.

h. Women as Independent Decision-Makers

In some advertisements, women are portrayed as independent decision-makers. They appear to be independent in their choices regarding their family, career, and personal lives. It is a positive development in the representation of women in that they are no longer seen as dependent on men. For example, in Kenwood's "Khush Raho" Campaign, it is depicted that woman is shown as independent in household making decisions. Her family supports her opinion and she plays active role in matters relating to family. This message is given that female is empowered within domestic space. Another advertisement of Jazz Super 4G shows that woman is independent to choose network services. She says that network helps in her professional life.

i. Breaking Stereotypes and Traditional Gender Roles

Data shows that women are challenging traditional gender roles, which frame them as career-oriented, financially independent, and strong women in different roles. This is quite different from older portrayals, which confine women to the home and feminine professions. For example, in Sunsilk's "Strong Women" Campaign, females are depicted as pilots, sportswomen, and mountaineering who are performing their roles fearlessly and bravely. This display challenges the stereotypical role of women in society and allows them to empower who are pursuing their careers successfully. Another example is from Telenor advertisement, where a women are shown to do a road trip across Pakistan. It is a very bold portrayal in a society where women are not allowed to move independently. It is noted that the producers of Pakistani advertisements are focused on the concept of empowered women. Where women are handling their home chores and their professional careers successfully, and society is also giving them acceptance. Another advertisement of Olpers milk's "Mother's Day"' campaign, highlights the multitasking of mothers. Where she performs domestic roles with strength and resilience. She is framed as a powerful individual who performs her duties in the home and is positioned her empowered in domestic settings. Similarly, another example is Habib Oil's "Khaana Pakana Shart Nahi" advertisement, it is depicted that she chooses to cook in her home. It is not her duty but it's a choice that she enjoys cooking at home. It shows her independence, empowerment, and contribution to her family.

Discussion

This research reveals a comprehensive picture of female representation in Pakistani electronic media advertisements, wavering between stereotypes and emerging narratives of empowerment. This duality reflects both the persistence of patriarchal values and the gradual cultural transformations within Pakistani society.

Findings show that caregiving and domesticity continue to dominate portrayals of women, particularly in advertisements for food, hygiene, and household products. This reinforces long-established gender roles identified in prior scholarship, where women were confined to private, domestic spaces (Linder, 2004; Grau & Zotos, 2016). The depiction of women primarily as caregivers underscores the deep-rooted association between femininity and household responsibilities. Such representations, while resonating with cultural expectations, limit the visibility of women in positions of authority or

public life, thereby sustaining gender hierarchies in media narratives.

Another dominant theme aligns with earlier critiques of media objectification (Cortese, 2015; Rosewarne, 2009). Advertisements for beauty and fashion products continue to commodify women's bodies, emphasizing fairness, slimness, and physical attractiveness as prerequisites for success. Even when empowerment is invoked, it is frequently tied to consumerist ideals of beauty—an approach consistent with femvertising's paradox, where pro-women messages are simultaneously entangled with commercial motives (Champlin et al., 2019). Thus, empowerment is often aestheticized, reducing women's agency to their adherence to prescriptive beauty norms.

Despite these persistent stereotypes, the analysis highlights a significant cultural shift: advertisements increasingly portray women as professionals, entrepreneurs, decision-makers, and social contributors. These narratives resonate with global advertising trends that incorporate empowerment discourses (Varghese & Kumar, 2020; Windels et al., 2020). In the Pakistani context, such portrayals are particularly significant because they challenge patriarchal norms and provide aspirational models for female audiences. Women as financial contributors, professionals, and leaders embody a symbolic reordering of gender roles, positioning them as agents of social progress rather than passive subjects of care.

The role of education as a recurring theme underscores its centrality in transforming gender relations. Advertisements that highlight girls' education, inheritance rights, and professional training align with feminist media theory's emphasis on structural empowerment (Gill, 2007). By representing education as a pathway to autonomy and leadership, advertisements transcend traditional narratives of women as dependent figures. Similarly, depictions of career-oriented women across diverse professions serve as counter-discourses to entrenched stereotypes, broadening the spectrum of acceptable female roles in Pakistani society.

An important observation is the nuanced negotiation between traditional and modern portrayals. For instance, the empowered mother figure reflects continuity with cultural expectations of nurturing but reframes maternal roles as sites of authority and decision-making. This hybrid representation demonstrates how empowerment in Pakistani advertisements often emerges not through outright rejection of tradition but through its redefinition. In this sense, empowerment is culturally embedded, reflecting localized forms of feminism rather than wholesale adoption of Western ideals.

The findings support feminist media theory's assertion that media both reproduces and contests gendered power structures. Advertisements remain a contested cultural space where women are simultaneously objectified and celebrated as empowered individuals. This ambivalence highlights the commodification of feminism within advertising—where empowerment is often deployed as a branding strategy rather than a commitment to gender equality (McRobbie, 2009, 2020). However, even within this commodified framework, the increased visibility of empowered women carries transformative potential by normalizing alternative gender roles in public consciousness.

Overall, the study demonstrates that Pakistani advertisements are undergoing a gradual but noticeable transition from stereotypical portrayals to more empowered depictions of women. While consumerist imperatives often dilute authentic empowerment, the presence of women as professionals, decision-makers, and educators marks a shift in cultural discourse. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how media in patriarchal contexts negotiates global feminist ideals with local cultural norms. The implications extend beyond advertising, as such representations play a critical role in reshaping public attitudes and challenging entrenched gender expectations in Pakistan.

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