

Representation of Stereotypical Role Reversal in Pakistani Television Advertisements

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Abstract

The current study aims to shed light on the traditional gender stereotypes prevalent in Pakistani television advertisements, particularly the shift towards role reversal favoring males. It examines the evolving social dynamics regarding the distribution of tasks between genders in daily life, previously associated predominantly with females. The analysis focuses on various local brand advertisements aired on television, such as Pampers, Max-Bar, Shan Masala, and Mechico shampoo, which depict men engaging in tasks traditionally assigned to women. These brands often emphasize household chores, traditionally perceived as women's responsibilities. Employing a multimodal discourse analysis approach inspired by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) and grounded in Systemic Functional Linguistics by Halliday, the study delves into three metafunctions: representational meaning, interactive meaning, and compositional meaning. The findings reveal a notable social shift towards role reversal and gender equity, a departure from conventional norms prevalent in previous decades.

Keywords: Gender Stereotypical Shift, multimodal discourse analysis, Metafunctions, Pakistani Advertisements

1. Introduction

In contemporary research, social media and advertisements serve as prominent generators of consumer-based content, creating an appeal for the products and services they promote. Beyond their role in marketization, these advertisements play a crucial role in shaping and reshaping social ideologies and norms. Individuals, regardless of gender, are influenced by the ideologies constructed through these media channels. Television advertisements, known for their strong visual appeal, are particularly influential in shaping societal perceptions and behaviors, alongside other forms of social media discourse.

Among the various sensitive issues addressed by social media advertisements, gender stereotyping stands out as a significant concern. This study aims to investigate the

traditional gender stereotypical shift, specifically focusing on the trend towards role reversal favoring males in Pakistani television advertisements. It seeks to explore the changing social dynamics regarding the distribution of tasks between genders in daily life, tasks that were previously considered to be exclusively feminine. The study aims to challenge masculine stereotypes perpetuated by patriarchal and chauvinistic ideologies.

To accomplish this, the study is to analyze visual segments from a variety of brand advertisements aired on television, which exclusively depict men performing tasks traditionally associated with females. This phenomenon of role reversal is particularly noteworthy in patriarchal societies like Pakistan, where males are often considered empowered or superior to females (Chauhan, 2014).

Similar trends are observed in American television advertisements, where men and women are consistently portrayed according to traditional gender roles. Women are typically depicted in domestic settings as consumers of household products, while men are portrayed as authoritative figures who present arguments in favor of advertised products. Each advertisement will be analyzed based on various criteria such as sex, mode of presentation (voice-over or visual), relationship to the product (authority or user), role, location, argument, reward, and product type.

In British advertisements, women are predominantly portrayed as product users in dependent roles compared to men. They are often depicted in domestic settings without presenting arguments for the product. Conversely, men are portrayed as autonomous authority figures, frequently depicted in occupational settings, presenting arguments and advertising various types of products (Manstead & McCulloch, 1981).

2. Previous Studies on Gender Portrayals in Advertising

Gender portrayals in advertising have been a subject of extensive scrutiny over the past five decades. The evolving roles within families and the labor force have brought about significant changes in both male and female roles, which are often reflected in advertising. However, there remains a cultural lag, with traditional gender roles persisting in many advertisements. Historically, women were often depicted in inferior roles, emphasizing their physical appearance or domestic responsibilities, while men were portrayed in more authoritative and independent roles (Grau & Zotos, 2016).

Stereotypes play a significant role in shaping perceptions of gender roles in advertising. Early portrayals often confined women to decorative or family-oriented roles, while men were portrayed as professionals or authority figures (Uray & Burnaz, 2003). However, with the advent of feminism in the 1960s and subsequent social changes, there has been a gradual shift towards more non-stereotypical gender

representations. This shift has seen men depicted in traditionally feminine roles and vice versa, challenging conventional gender stereotypes (Kim, 2009; Son, 2013).

These non-stereotypical gender role representations have become increasingly prevalent over time, reflecting broader social changes and evolving perspectives on gender roles (Paek, Nelson & Viela, 2011). Advertisers often tailor their messaging to target specific genders, using stereotypes as a means of communicating with their target market (Lindner, 2004). However, advertising also plays a role in shaping societal attitudes and perceptions, with its effects extending beyond individual consumers to impact societal worldviews (Sheehan, 2013).

Studies analyzing advertisements have consistently found that portrayals of men and women often conform to traditional gender roles, with women typically depicted in domestic settings and men portrayed as authority figures (Manstead & McCulloch, 1981). Despite advancements in societal norms, these stereotypes persist, perpetuating traditional gender norms (Verhellen, Dens & Pelsmacker, 2016).

Advancements in television technology, particularly programmatic advertising, have revolutionized the advertising landscape, allowing for more targeted and personalized messaging (Malthouse, Maslowska & Franks, 2018). These changes have significant implications for advertising strategies and audience targeting.

Kress and Leeuwen (2001) proposed a conceptual framework for analyzing multimodal discourses such as advertisements, which incorporate various communicative modes utilized by social actors in face-to-face communication. They illustrated how each mode within a document communicates both separately and in conjunction with others, emphasizing their interplay. Different actors employ different modes to perform social actions, with some modes being more prominent during focused interaction while others are present during less focused interaction. Meaning is constructed from these multimodal documents through four phases: discourse, design, production, and distribution. Discourse involves the socially constructed knowledge of reality within specific contexts and actors, design refers to the semiotic mode of content and expressions, production involves organizing expression on material, and distribution entails executing the material formed. The document is then articulated and interpreted according to experiential meanings.

Advertising serves as a powerful tool for disseminating stereotypical ideas, shaping perceptions, and constructing social realities, thus influencing the meaning in consumers' lives. As society evolves, advertisements reflect changes in societal norms, including shifts in gender roles, which are increasingly reflected in non-stereotypical gender role (NSGR) representations in advertising (McCracken, 1988). These NSGR

representations challenge previous schemas and have the potential to alter perceptions of gender roles (Chu, Lee & Kim, 2016). Advertising reflects not only how people think and relate to each other but also how they live, eat, relax, and enjoy themselves, thereby contributing to changes in societal perceptions of gender roles (de Mooij, 1998; Frith & Mueller, 2003). Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) provides empirical evidence on the impact of media portrayals on individuals' consciousness and societal thought patterns.

3. Methodology

This study utilized a multimodal discourse analysis framework developed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), grounded in the systemic functional linguistics of Halliday. The data for analysis comprised clips from various Pakistani television advertisements, purposively selected from the internet based on the depiction of male characters in traditionally feminine roles. The advertisements selected included Pampers, Max bar, Shan Masala, and Mechico shampoo. The analysis is structured around three metafunctions:

- Representational meaning
- Interactive meaning
- Compositional meaning

4. Data Analysis

This section presents the analysis of chosen advertisements.

4.1 Pampers Ad-2018



Description: the advertisement shows three characters; one male (father), one female (mother) and a child; probably a baby boy. Besides this, the picture has a pack of pampers pants and a text exclaiming ‘pampers pants is so easy, # DadsCanChange’

4.1.1 Representational Meaning

The advertisement depicts a transactional action narrative involving actors and a goal: the father and mother (actors) and the child (goal). The father and mother establish an eyeline, also known as reactors, with the child serving as the phenomenon. In the conceptual framework, the classification process involves three taxonomic relationships between the participants: father, mother, and child. Analytically, a carrier (the child wearing Pampers pants) lies vertically with the Pampers pack, symbolizing the ease for fathers to change diapers with the convenient Pampers pants.

4.1.2 Interactive Meaning

The advertisement lacks interactive contact between the participants and the viewer due to the absence of gaze exchange. Consequently, it is an offer picture rather than a demand picture. The medium shot size of the picture frame suggests a social relationship between participants and the viewer. The oblique perspective of the picture implies the exclusion of viewers from the represented world, while the eye-level angle suggests an equal relationship between participants and viewers.

4.1.3 Compositional Meaning

The arrangement of visual elements conveys informational value through the distribution of characters in different zones. In the given structure, the placement of the Pampers pack on the left side along the horizontal axis and the child wearing the diaper in a centered composition establish the notion of 'given,' representing familiarity. The parent characters placed on the right side of the frame establish a 'new' relationship with the viewer, representing the unknown or surprising. In the ideal real structure, the parents are positioned above, symbolizing power and happiness, while the child is placed below, indicating lack of power and deprivation. According to the third center-margin structure, the child wearing Pampers is the main focus of the advertisement, with parents at the periphery serving as supportive figures. The framing distribution distinguishes the three participants (father, mother, and child) and the Pampers pants pack from the rest of the picture through different color tones, emphasizing the father's major contribution to childcare. Additionally, the difference in font color and size of the text "#DadsCanChange" highlights the main message of the advertisement.

4.2 Max Bar Ad-2018



Description: The advertisement shows two participants, one male and female. The male participant is washing the plate and the second, female, participant is watching him. The setting of the Ad is kitchen.

4.2.1 Representational Meaning

The narrative discourse of the advertisement revolves around a transactional action involving a male actor engaged in dishwashing, which is depicted as the goal. The reaction process involves both male and female actors, with the male primarily acting as the hero and the main carrier of traditionally female attributes. This symbolic attributive process portrays the male as the helping hand for the wife in household chores, establishing a link through action and gaze towards the symbolic attribute of washing.

4.2.2 Interactive Meaning

The picture lacks direct contact with the viewer due to the absence of gaze, rendering it an Offer picture. The medium shot size of the frame suggests a social relationship between the participants and the viewer, while the frontal, horizontal perspective indicates viewer involvement with the represented world. Shot from eye level, the angle suggests equality between the participants and the viewers.

4.2.3 Compositional Meaning

Both participants are foregrounded and horizontally placed in the layout to convey different informational values. In the new-given structure, the female participant on the left side represents the already known and familiar existence to the viewer, while

the male participant on the right side establishes a surprising discourse needing special attention. According to the center-margin structure, the male participant is the central element and the salient feature of the advertisement due to his action, height, and tonal and color differences. He shares close proximity with the sink and utensils, holding and washing the plate, contrasting with the female participant, who maintains a distance from the utensils with her hands resting on her waist, merely witnessing the activity. Both participants are depicted in darker shades and tones compared to the background to highlight their presence in the frame.

4.3 Shan Masala Ad-2018



Description: the advertisement involves one male participant present in the setting of a kitchen. First clip shows cooking by the participant and second clip shows his garnishing on the food prepared.

4.3.1 Representational Meaning

The advertisement constructs a narrative discourse through a non-transactional process involving a single participant, the Actor, who is visually linked with cooking and food. In the Reaction process, the Reactor establishes eye contact with the pot (the phenomenon) and gazes downward towards food garnishing. The conceptual process highlights the male participant as the sole performer of the cooking action, with his cooking activity serving as his possessive attribute. This symbolic suggestive process introduces a new social practice, emphasized by the sharp contrast of the participant and his actions against a lighter background.

4.3.2 Interactive Meaning

The first clip of the advertisement functions as an Offer picture, lacking direct viewer contact, while the second clip serves as a Demand picture, featuring smiles and

direct stares towards the viewer, inviting them to enter the depicted world. Both clips utilize a medium shot, suggesting a social relation with the viewers. The horizontal and frontal perspective of both pictures indicates inclusion of the viewer with the participant. Moreover, both the subject and the branded product are captured from eye level, suggesting equality between the participants and the viewers.

4.3.3 Compositional Meaning

The advertisement showcases a single male participant in a kitchen setting, involved in cooking and garnishing food. In the new-given structure of the layout, kitchen items and Shan Masala are displayed along the left side, indicating familiarity to the viewer. Meanwhile, the male participant positioned on the right side in the first clip and extreme right in the second clip presents a sense of novelty or surprise to the viewer. According to the center-margin structure, the male participant serves as the center of information and is the most prominent aspect of the advertisement, evident through his placement, sharpness, and tonal contrast from the background. His actions are continuous and closely linked with the pot, rice tray, and other kitchen accessories, framing him effectively within the composition.

4.4 Mechico Shampoo-2019



Description: the advertisement shows two characters, one is the male character (Father) and the other is the child- the boy. It is the baby shampoo brand which explicitly shows father being engaged in bathing his child.

4.4.1 Representational Meaning

The advertisement conveys a narrative discourse through a transactional process involving two participants. The male character, portrayed as the father, serves as the Actor, while the child is depicted as the Goal towards which the action is directed. The father also acts as the Reactor, establishing eye contact with the child and the Mechico

shampoo to depict the activity of bathing, the central theme of the advertisement. Both participants are categorized into a taxonomic relation of father and child. The analysis reveals that the father is the carrier of the action, symbolized by his depiction of bathing the child, which serves as his possessive and symbolic attribute, emphasizing his involvement in this nurturing activity.

4.4.2 Interactive Meaning

The clips appear to have limited interaction with the viewer, portraying an Offer picture due to the absence of direct viewer contact. The frame size suggests a close shot, implying an intimate relationship between the depicted participants and the viewers. While both clips feature a frontal horizontal camera angle, in the first clip, the male character faces the camera, whereas in the next, he has his back turned, indicating his involvement in the activity. Both clips are captured from eye level, implying equality between the participants and the viewers.

4.4.3 Compositional Meaning

In accordance with the new-given structure, the Mechico brand logo and its shampoo bottles are positioned along the left margins, representing the given structure already known to the viewer. Meanwhile, the male character and the child are centrally or centered-right positioned within the frame, attracting viewer attention and forming the new structure of the frame. Both the child and his father occupy the central structure, with the meaning of the surrounding setting dependent on the central characters. The male character, being centrally placed, draws viewer attention due to tonal differences and distinctive shape. His depiction of holding the child in the washroom setting establishes a connection with both the child and the washroom accessories, emphasizing his role in the nurturing act of bathing the child.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of the advertisements reveals a clear portrayal of a stereotypical shift, wherein traditional gender roles are reversed, with men taking on tasks traditionally associated with women, particularly household chores. This shift challenges societal norms and promotes a healthier cultural landscape in Pakistan by advocating for gender equality in domestic responsibilities alongside professional obligations. These advertisements serve to challenge the patriarchal system and social constructs that confine men to solely professional and financial roles. Moreover, in today's modern era, technological advancements and readily available products facilitate equal and easy utilization by both genders. Therefore, these advertisements serve as a catalyst for

introducing new cultural norms and promoting gender partnership in all tasks, fostering a more equitable society.

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