

Patriarchal Consumerism: Critical Discourse Analysis of Pakistani Gendered TVCs

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Abstract

TV Commercials (TVCs), a popular part of invasive advertisement culture, where play an important role in the promotion of consumerist ideology embedded in the language and visuals, the advertisers use innovative techniques to promote popular gender-specific ideology to persuade the targeted consumers and maximize the sale and profit of the product. The present study selects sample of 6 Pakistani TVCs and applies Fairclough's three dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyze how the T.V ads encourage stereotypical images of men and women. At the end, it is suggested that TVCs should promote gender equality by deconstructing and revising the patriarchal assumptions about women.

Key words: CDA, TVCs, Gender, Fairclough, Consumerism

Introduction

With the advent of technology and promotion of consumerist culture, TV Commercials (TVCs) have become crucial in informing our buying habits, and influence our choice and decisions. TVCs play an important role in the construction and propagation of a particular ideology. The use of catchy phrases, scientific evidence, real and fictitious images, the advertisers play with the mind of the consumers and, thus, have transfigured the industrial world. They strive to multiply their consumers by their appealing advertisements. The researchers have analyzed the visual representation of the ideal figure, studied the textual features, understood the social background behind the visual, examined the textual modes, and investigated the discursive features of the selected TVCs in the present study to reveal that the advertising agencies film gender-based TVCs which promote patriarchal version of consumerism and stereotypical roles of men and women.

Literature Review

Gender gives a social identity to human beings and constructs a 'reality' for them. Men are considered as bread winners, strong, intellectuals, and superior in every walk of life. On the contrary, women are defined as weak, unassertive, commodity-like, and house-wifely. Men and women are bound in a society by the set social structures. They are supposed to perform their roles according to the given societal norms. Their lives are governed and lived under the hegemonic power of resultant philosophy. If one struggles to violate the rules, one has to face worst consequences ordained by the power structures. Advertisers use the patriarchal clichés to make their advertisement tempting and convincing. Instead of ejecting the oppressive power relations between the genders, they inject them in a society by using stereotypical images in TVCs.

Lupton (1992) defines "discourse" as a way of social thinking patterns reflected in "textual and verbal communications" (p.145). According to Mirzae and Hamidi (2012) discourse is "language use in social practice" (p.184). It deals with that how people communicate in a social group and what set of structures they follow for a specific conversation. Wodak and Meyer (2001) gives other senses of the term like meaning-making in social context, language usage in a specific social practice and constructing social reality (p.163). Gee (1999) distinguishes between d/Discourse. Discourse with small "d" is about the study of language usage and linguistic features while with "capital D" it means a person's beliefs (p.7). Powers (2007) associates discourse with the analysis of "systematic bodies of knowledge" (p.18).

Every discourse is linked with the power relations and ideologies so Critical Discourse Analysis aims to expose those ideologies and power relations. Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) find relations between CDA and social life, identities, institutions, and ideologies (p.78). Wei Wang (2006) discusses that CDA uncovers "opaqueness and power relationships" (p. 62). According to Fairclough (1989), power is the structuring agency in "some domain or other" (p.13). Through power structures, one (powerful) party becomes oppressor and controls the other one, the oppressed (Dijk, 1993, p. 254). These power structures are interlinked with ideologies in a society. Althusser (1971) defines ideology as the representational aspect of individuals' imaginary relationship with their "real conditions of existence" (p. 162). Stoddart (2007) approaches ideology from the Marxist perspective and reflects that the prevalent social ideas safeguard the "interests of a ruling economic class" (p.191). Dijk (1995) finds

a linkage between ideologies, discourse and “non-verbal semiotic messages” (p.17). Sri Ranjan et. al. acknowledges the importance of “consumer or marketing semiotics” (p.6).

TVCs have revolutionized the world of industrialization. There is a huge competition among different enterprises in market, so they adopt various techniques to make their business profitable and lucrative. Advertising agencies use multiple strategies to beguile the consumers. Iqbal (2014) et al. states that the use of language in “specific brand establish hidden discourse in the society to increase the numbers of users” (p.128). TVCs play an important role in the society to construct product oriented ideology and increase consumer base. According to Ikaria-Maina (2012), “today most of our information, intellectual stimulation, and lifestyle models come from, or are related to, advertising images” (p.1562). Mostly, advertisers use cultural constructs to make advertisement appealing. In most cases, advertisers make gender-based TVCs. Such Gender-based TVCs promote gender-roles in the society. As Jonathan E. Schroeder & Detlev Zwick (2004) state “Advertising plays a strong role in promulgating dualistic gender roles and prescribing sexual identities” (p.21). For making a convincing advertisement, the advertisers play with the psyche of human beings and regulate the given gendered and sexual identities through social and cultural constructs. They always keep in mind the cultural assumptions and realities of a society so that the advertisement could have best effect on the consumers’ mind.

In gender-based TVCs, an advertiser constructs an image of ideal men and women. After watching the advertisement, the consumers envision themselves the projected ideal image. According to Kaur, Arumugam and Norimah (2013) the ideal image of a woman is “stereotyped through visual and textual aspects of the advertisements” (p. 62). Ideal images play an important role in the promotion of stereotypical images of men and women since they try to act the role advertisers propagate in the advertisement. Media plays an important role in the promotion or demotion of an idea. Instead of making neutral TVCs, the advertisers make mediated and gender-specific stereotypes TVCs. The advertisers portray women as weak, submissive, slim, and beautiful. On the other hand, they show men as powerful, muscular, superior, and protective. According to Nowosenetz (2007), “generally women want to look beautiful and men want to be smart, sophisticated and muscular” (p.3). The advertising agencies do not use culture inappropriate elements which can decommercialize the product instead of commercializing it. According to Sheikh et al. (2015), the stereotypical images

“affect our ideas, choices, and the expectations” (p.110). When gender-based TVCs are played, they leave desired effect on consumer’s mind. The people do not get rid of cultural based gender stereotypes. Instead, those stereotypes are exploited and commercialized. Hazir Ullah and Hifsa (2014) state that “television advertisements have been identified as important contributors to the formation of stereotypical gender identities and reinforcement of sexist culture of a society” (p. 26). Image of women in most of the TVCs is “inferior” and “weak”. Generally, her job is confined to kitchen. She always tries to ornament herself for men. It is portrayed that women always needs men’s support because they are weak. Goffman (1979) notices that in the advertisements that “women are portrayed as standing lower than men indicating their lower status, conducting child-like gestures, doing housework, becoming an object of male sexual pleasure and spending time in settings such as the kitchen and the bathroom” (p.43). Jennifer and Uhlenbrock (2010) observe that in TVCs, the “women are prostrated in such a way that they are physically lower than men are” (p.4). Hence, women are portrayed as emotionally and physically weak, submissive housewives in the advertisements.

Methodology

Six gendered TVCs aired repeatedly on T.V. in the Pakistani media in the past few years (2012-2015) have been selected, and their language has been transcribed and analyzed by the application of Fairclough’s three dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) based on the textual, discursive and social analyses. CDA is a technique to investigate the power relations, ideology, and hegemony in a society. Overtly, the advertisers exploit specific social and cultural circumstances and make advertisement appealing but covertly they promote and reinforce patriarchal ideology. Rodgers et al. (2005) believe that “Fairclough’s analytic framework is constituted by three levels of analysis: the text, the discursive practice, and the socio-cultural practice” (p. 371). This model uncovers the hidden meanings of discourse, and presents the critical views on it. The choice of vocabulary that advertisers make is based on the discursive and social practices. The advertisers use such words and phrases which are persuasive for the consumers.

The following 6 gendered TVCs with their catchwords have been selected for the analysis:

1. Tapal family mixture 2012: Mukamal chaye, mukamal ghar (Tapal family mixture: Perfect tea, perfect home)

2. Telenor Talkshawk Muhafiz Beema 2013. (life insurance): ghr walon ka muhafiz bany ga (Will safeguard the family)
3. Servis tyre chase TV Commercial 2014: Servis tyres: Grip Servis jesi, to fiker kesi (If the (road) grip is like that of a Servis (tyre), no worries)
4. Warid - Amir Khan Lightning Tez Internet 2015: lightening tez speed, lightening tez internet (Warid: Lightening speed, lightening internet)
5. Pepsi Sting energy drink TV Commercial 2012: taste ka jhatzzzka (Sting: jolt of taste)
6. FaceFresh beauty cream 2015: jo face fresh, wohi beautiful (Face fresh beauty cream: The fresh face is the beautiful)

Analysis and Interpretation

Here is the brief introduction of the selected TVCs. In the TVC “Tapal family mixture,” the used thematic words try to convince the consumers that for having a perfect family, a perfect tea is essential. The underlying concept is that a woman can get love of her family by making perfect tea. Tapa tea works like a magic for women to bring unity and love in the disgruntled family. Then women can win the hearts of husband, and in-laws by making tea perfectly. A family can never become happy unless they are served with a perfect tea. “Telenor Talkshawk Muhafiz Beema” furthers the role of men as the sole bread winner of family. It is suggested if a man uses Telenor insurance service, he can secure his nuclear family (wife and children) even after his death. In the Servis tyres advertisement, the stereotypical role of men is shown. The advertiser uses such phrase to convey the idea that a man is tension free if he uses Servis tyres. “Grip” is supportive to men’s physical strength and their stunts. The underlying concept is that a man in pillion riding with a woman feels confident only when he has physically strong and dependable vehicle tyres. In the Warid mobile internet TVC, the use of word “lightening” shows the spectrum of speed. The advertiser wants to attract consumer by saying that internet speed is as fast as is of light. These wordings are catchy for a consumer because s/he wants to get internet of fastest speed. The advertiser wants to attract the consumers to buy Warid and use the fastest internet. In the Sting energy drink TVC, the word “jhatzzzka (jolt)” is related with the awe, and shock. The phrase conveys the idea if a man drinks sting, he becomes extraordinary and feels himself powerful and energetic. The Facefresh beauty product TVC, the words “face-fresh” and “beautiful” are stressed and have been alternately used. This advertisement conveys the message, the women need to have fair skin in order to pass as beautiful. If they have fair and fresh complexion, only then they would qualify to be called beautiful. It is also stressed here

that the dark and dull skin is generally disliked by everyone in society. The whitening cream can get her the required confidence and appreciation.

The discursive practices, strategies and the linguistics devices in the TVCs have been analyzed to show how texts are used, and how these text present patriarchal power structures. They use those celebrities who correlate with the results of the product usage for the promotion of their product. In the above mentioned TVCs, different actors and actresses are introduced to promote the products. In Tapal Family Mixture advertisement Mahira Khan, in Telenor Talkshawk commercial Ahsan Khan and Noor, in Servis tyres Shan, in Warid ad Amir Khan, and in Face Fresh beauty cream Ayeza Khan attract the Pakistani consumers to purchase the particular product. Even scientific evidence and knowledge has been used to support the efficacy and reliability of a specific product. In Servis tyres ad the terms “imported polymers” and in Face Fresh Cream ad, “Vitamins, aloe Vera, herbal extracts, pearl” are used as scientific evidence to prove the suitability of a merchandise. “Jo face fresh wohi beautiful,” “taste ka jhatzzka,” “grip service jesi to fikar kesi,” “lightening tez speed lightening tez internet” are the slogans in which code switching between Urdu and English languages has been done in order to appeal to the bilingual potential customers. Advertisers use cultural specific roles for men and women to regulate and establish power relations. Women are shown in submissive roles, working in their homes and ornamenting themselves. On the other hand, men are shown as powerful, strong, agile, protective and heroic bread winners.

It is also pertinent here to reveal and discuss the prevalent social practices and assumptions behind the images used in the TVCs. In all above TVCs, women and men are shown to perform their roles. It is assumed that a woman feels happy to remain and work within the four walls of her home, always wants to look beautiful and dependent. In the Servis tyres TVC, a girl is caught by gangsters while secretly clicking camera and taking their pictures. The hero comes on a heavy bike having Servis tyres, and does dangerous tricks and stunts on the road in order to rescue her. The ideology behind this image is that, a woman always needs a man who is protective and strong. Similar is the case with Sting energy drink advertisement. In this ad, a girl carries many shopping bags and boxes and rides an escalator that suddenly comes to a halt because of power outage. She spots a boy and looks at him with imploring eyes to help her out of the situation. The boy drinks Sting, does some

dancing moves, and jerks and stamps his feet to electrify the lift that resumes functioning. The Warid advertisement features the top international boxer Amir Khan. The implicit ideology is that Amir Khan is as good in boxing as Warid is in internet speed. Since the punches in boxing require speed and power so does internet. Again, a man is shown in aggressive and powerful role. In Telenor Bema ad, a man is introduced with the concept of death by visualizing him a roadside accident. Being the sole earning hand of his home, he gets worried for his wife and child. Then “Telenor Man” comes and advises him to use bema service of Telenor and secure his family’s life even after his own death. Here man and woman are playing their stereotypical roles. Woman is dependent while the man is futuristic and the only wage earner.

In the Tapal Family Mixture, a girl gets happy after knowing that she has passed her exams. In home, she finds some guests with marriage proposal for her and serves tea to them. After getting married, she is shown as caring for her family. She gives a try with cups of tea to her sister-in-law. This all shows the structure of society as in underdeveloped country, a woman get married immediately after her final result. And after that, she engages herself in working in her home. Serving tea to sister-in-law shows how much traditions are important in society.

Conclusion

It is concluded that the advertisers play with the minds of consumers by using their cultural knowledge, social relations and power structures. They not only promote their brand and product in TVCs but also further, verify and validate the patriarchal stereotypes. In the gender-based TVCs, women are shown as physically and emotional weak, submissive, and docile housewives. On the other hand, the men are shown as strong, bread winner, and dominant counterparts. It is suggested that the advertisement should be unbiased and the advertisers should be sensitized for the eradication of gender inequality from the society, minimization of gender gap and promotion of a prosperous and just society.

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 16:8 August 2016

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- Marya Khalid and Dr. Mirza Muhammad Zubair Baig
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