# Promoting Consumer Culture: An Analysis of Pakistani Electronic Media Advertisements

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Discourse,
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**Abstract** *This study aims at analyzing Pakistani electronic media advertisements' discourse to investigate the linguistic techniques of consumer product companies to reach more customers and sell more products. The research study focuses on the characteristic features of the advertising discourse which are intended to inculcating desirability and fostering new needs in the viewers/consumers. The data for the research consists of 12 advertisements aired on Pakistani TV channels. Linguistic analysis of the research study reveals that advertisements serve the primary function of enabling the consumer products companies to win the largest market share. Creative and innovative use of linguistic and extra linguistic features make advertising discourse powerful, potent and persuasive enough to promote the consumer culture.*

## Introduction

The effectiveness of the contemporary market economy depends upon the creation and satisfaction of consumers' needs. Advertisements play an instrumental role to perform this dualistic role. Advertisements rely heavily on the psychology and consumption patterns of the society involved. In the contemporary consumer culture, the challenge is to produce and promote enough to inculcate and satisfy needs. This is achieved by creating and endorsing recognition and utilization value of the products being advertised.

Within the Pakistani context, television product advertising is all pervasive. In fact, advertisements have become one of our most popular discourses in the contemporary Pakistani society. Advertisements cause favourable psychological

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impact on the potential consumers and influence them through explicit and implicit linguistic and nonlinguistic techniques to participate in promoting consumer culture. Therefore, this research focuses primarily on the nature of linguistic and semiotic features of Pakistani television advertisements which are skillfully used to inculcate product desirability among the viewers to promote contemporary consumer culture to strengthen capitalistic economy.

Thus, consumer culture is closely linked to capitalism, because it is driven by the urge of generating more and more money and maximizing the profit ratio. A consumer culture can be viewed both positively and negatively. Proponents say that people are happier and more productive when their wants and needs are met, and that buying and owning things is a means to that end. The opposing viewpoint is that consumerism is wasteful and encourages consumption for its own sake.

## Literature Review

Leacock (1924) views advertising as a powerful discourse capable of gripping human intelligence to derive money from it. This very viewpoint highlights the persuasive power of advertising language and its promotional function in the contemporary consumer culture. The critical theorist, Williams (1980), views advertising as "the official art of modem capitalist society" (p. 184). Thus, advertising and capitalism thrive on each other. Various studies based on advertising and consumer culture indicate that styles of consumption and the identities of consumers are positively related to each other (Nava et al. 1997). Therefore, advertising discourse plays a critical role in the construction of these identities, for instance Dyer (1982) maintains:

Advertising helps us to make sense of things. It validates consumer commodities and a consumer life-style by associating goods with personal and social meanings and those aspirations and needs which are not fulfilled in real life. We come to think that consuming commodities will give us our identities. (1982:185)

Advertising discourse not only shapes consumers' identities but is, also, reflective of the identity of the brand being advertised as well. While commenting on the advertising discourse, Pillar (1997) maintains that different lexical choices and phrases are carefully selected to communicate the philosophy of a certain brand. Therefore, the language used in the slogans of an advertisement, very often, expresses authority and expertise and can be termed as 'master voice'. Cook (1992) refers to the same 'master voice' and points out, "There is in advertisements a reluctance to leave matters open, which results, even in the most heteroglossic advertisements, in the assertion of a single mono logic and authoritative voice at the end" (1992:190). That voice often communicates beauty as the most aspiring social capital.

The primary function of advertising language is to create desirability. This desire for consumption is inculcated, as Falk (1998) argues, that hidden message of a particular advertisement is communicated to customers as, "I am the one you need, I am the one you desire, I am all that you have been missing" (p. 210). Thus, advertisements, therefore, play an important role in shaping audience perceptions with the help of their persuasive discourse. This is often achieved through the element of bilingualism. The frequent use of English in bilingual advertising, often, helps to win audiences' favorable responses towards the product being advertised. For instance, Bhatia (2001) analyzes the use of English in Asian advertising. He argues that English is used, besides other crafty techniques, to produce a favorable psychological impact upon the targeted audiences. Jefkins (1994) also suggests that advertisements should communicate the intended message in as few words as possible to save consumers from the inconvenience of reading/ viewing extended texts. Carefully selected words and sentences help to clarify the message and make it easy to grasp. Thus, language plays a crucial role in making the discourse of advertising persuasive, potent and powerful.

**Data Collection**

The data for the present research study comprises of three categories of the beauty products advertisements i.e. shampoo, beauty crème and beauty soap of global Unilever brand. The rationale of selecting this particular brand for the present research study is that it is the most popular and successful international brand working in Pakistan which offers a wide range of products ranging from personal health and hygiene to domestic use.
- The criterion for selecting ads is the ones prepared by Pakistani advertising agencies, basically in Urdu language and broadcast on Pakistani television channels.
- Within the electronic media advertisements, the research study is delimited to beauty products 'advertisements.
-  Two different types of the beauty products of each category are selected, thus it makes the total number of beauty products six.
- Two ads for each of the six beauty products are down loaded from the You Tube, thus making the total number of ads twelve.
- Each of the advertisements is transcribed to prepare a machine readable file. It is ensured that there is no discrepancy between the original script of the advertisements and their machine readable file.

| S. | Category | Product | Types | Duration | Shots | Release | Brand | Model (s) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Shampoo | Sun Silk | Antidandruff | 45 Sec | 25 | 2008 | Unilever | Eman Ali |
| | | | Black Shine | 30 Sec | 20 | 2005 | Unilever | Unknown |

| | | | Soft | 39Sec | 30 | 2009 | Unilever | Amna |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Clear | Antidandruff | 31Sec | 20 | 2008 | Unilever | Amna Haq & Atif Aslam |
| 2 | Cream | Ponds | Age Miracle | 34Sec | 22 | 2008 | Unilever | Hadiqa Kiyani |
| | | | Face Wash | 47 Sec | 22 | 2009 | Unilever | Unknown |
| | | Fair & Lovely | Clear Skin | 25Sec | 18 | 2010 | Unilever | Unknown |
| | | | Fairness Gel | 45Sec | 31 | 2007 | Unilever | Ali Zafar & Tooba |
| 3 | Soap | Lux | Oily Skin | 29Sec | 21 | 2005 | Unilever | Me era |
| | | | Normal Skin | 36 Sec | 22 | 2005 | Unilever | Me era |
| | | Life Buoy | Body Protection | 3:30 Sec | 97 | 2009 | Unilever | Nouman Ejaz & Swera |
| | | | Anti-Germs | 15 | 17 | 2008 | Unilever | Unknown |

## Methodology

The research study involves linguistic analysis to investigate the characteristic features of the advertising language which are used to attract the potential consumers. Linguistic analysis is used to understand the nature and structure of the language used but since language is not the only tool in the hands of advertisers and in fact advertising discourse relies heavily on the use of pictures, logos and jingles etc., therefore, semiotic analysis is also included in the data analysis to substantiate the findings. However, the primary focus of the research study is linguistic analysis while semiotic analysis only deals with the general features of the advertising discourse found in overall data but the same are not discussed exclusively. While transcribing data, Urdu words, phrases and utterances are italicized, on the other hand, the English ones are presented in normal font style.

On the basis of evidence of different linguistic and semiotic techniques found in the data, an analytic framework is generated and classified into various categories which naturally emerged from the data. These categories are, then, discussed both quantitatively and qualitatively to draw inferences and conclusions.

## Results and Discussion

The advertisers utilize multiple techniques and strategies to sell their products i.e. from the soft sell techniques to hard sell techniques to attract the potential buyers and to draw their attention to the use value and sign value of the products being advertised. In order to achieve this purpose, it must capture consumers' intelligence with a message that is both captivating and memorable.

The advertisements selected for the purpose of present research study also employ multiple techniques, but only those techniques are included in the data

analysis where the researcher could find more than two examples of the same category. The data is presented, analyzed and interpreted under the following categories of linguistic and discursive techniques of beauty product advertisements.

1. Rhetorical Questions
2. Open Ended Comparisons
3. Personalization
4. Descriptive Words
5. Testimonials
6. Factual vs. Evaluative Statements
7. Knowledge Exchange vs. Activity Exchange
8. Mixing English Language
9. Presupposition
10. Stylistic Devices ( Hyperbole, Smile, Metaphor, Personification)
11. Vocabulary Choice and Sentence Structure

**Category 1: Rhetorical Questions**

These are the questions which seemingly do not expect to receive an answer. Advertisers use these questions mostly in the beginning of the advertisements to make the consumers to pay attention and reflect on the situation. These are intentionally added to engage potential buyers to seek the answer because of their natural instinct of curiosity and of course the only possible answer of every rhetorical question asked in an advertisement is the product being advertised which would promise greater success and achievement to its consumers. The data under analysis provides the following instances of such kind of questions.

- Who doesn't want to stay young forever? Ponds Cream
- *Janana chahain gay khoubsoorti ka raz?* Lux Soap
- *Tou kia in kay kyailat badal jain gay?* Ponds Cream Face Wash

The very first question is an excellent example of manipulating the human urge of staying young. It is also reflective of the idea that advertisements are highly contextualized since this particular advertisement is addressed to a society where it is generally believed that that a beautiful young face is a passport to success. The second statement also serves the same purpose without using a question word but even then the potential consumers would recognize it as a question since this is the way language is used in our context. The third example is also reflective of the same idea that it is used to make the consumers curious enough to buy the product being advertised.

**Category 2: Open Ended Comparisons**

A very common element of a promoting message is to make open ended comparisons in which something is grammatically compared to nothing but the

consumer is left with the expression that it is. The data provides following instances of open ended comparisons.

- *Clear deiy* four times softer hair. Clear Shampoo
- *Isi liye Lifebuoy deiy jarasim sey so feesad behtar hifazat.* Lifebuoy Soap
- *Dousray shampoo na tou pori tarah khushki door karain or baloon ko rokha be banain.* Sun Silk Shampoo

The basic objective of using this technique is again promotional, although the other product with which product being advertised is compared is not mentioned but the consumer would be left with the impression that product being advertised is better in performance as compared to the other products meant for the same purpose. A crafty advertiser uses this device very skillfully; on the one hand, it ensures him a larger market share while on the other hand he avoids any kind of judicial trial by the opponent brand on the basis of defaming their products. The third example is especially interesting where other shampoos are declared to be unsuccessful in terms of their performance without identifying them. This technique really works because on the basis of these vague comparisons, a consumer may prefer one product over another.

**Category 3: Personalization**

Since the primary aim of the consumer culture is to win the largest market share, therefore the advertisers face the problem of addressing large audience while struggling to make each person believe that the product is meant and attractive for him/her on a personal level. The data provides the following instances of personalization.

- *Khoubsorti ka raaz ab ap kay paas*. Lux Soap
- *Sirf ap kay leiy.* Sun Silk Shampoo
- *Ab* turn *hei ap ki.* Ponds Cream Face Wash

The above three examples suggest that it is a more potent strategy for the advertiser to create an illusion of personalized communication. It shows that advertiser has identified who you really are and what are your real needs and how they can be satisfied. Through this technique the advertiser tries to develop a personal relationship with the consumer in such a way that the consumer would like to purchase that product as an expression of brand loyalty and to develop a positive association with the brand.

**Category 4: Descriptive Words**

The advertisers rely heavily on the use of descriptive words to make the objects of their promotion standout and appear unique as compared to the other products of the same kind. The data shows many instances of descriptive words.

- Beautiful, soft, smooth, clear, oily, young, flawless, timeless, fair, natural etc. are mostly used in the advertisements under study.
- 'New' is the most readily used adjective which serves as one of the oldest of the market tricks i.e. the product relaunch. This adjective really serves as a motivational force to buy the product because consumers would interpret it positively to stand for improvement.
- *Saaf and narm o mulaim* are also used along with common English adjectives.

  This technique allows the advertisers to build multiple layers of description to promote their products. These descriptive words enhance the use value of the product and consumers are attracted to utilize it.

## Category 5: Testimonials

Testimonials are the statements made by famous people that why should we use a specific product. The data analysis reveals the same patterns as in eight out of twelve advertisements famous actors and singers are, often, viewed, perceived and acknowledged as lending prestige to the products they advertise in the form of brand ambassadors. Some of the instances are as under

- *Naya lux khubsoorti ka raaz*               Film Star Meera
- Meray liye clear men                        Singer Atif Aslam
- That's why now I use ponds age miracle cream   Singer Hadiqa Kiyani
- *Dekha jo lux ka jalwa tou dil tham lo gay*    Film Star Meera
- *Anday aur dahi ki double khoobian ek saath*   Actress Emaan Ali

   The discrepancy lies, of course, in the fact that success in one field does not necessarily qualify one as an expert in another and, further, that the figure very likely has never even used the product whose manufacturer pays him or her a huge amount to such an extent that some of the famous celebrities become their brand ambassadors, but the advertisers are never at loss, brand ambassadors in return bring them maximum profit because it is very much of their presence that consumers are convinced of the product's effectiveness. This is in fact a very successful technique of the advertisers which really helps them to win the largest market share because of the popularity and idealized beauty image of the advertising models.

## Category 6: Factual vs. Evaluative Statements

A promoting message blurs the distinction between factual and evaluative statements to attract investment from the potential consumers. Holbrook (1978) based his study on the semantic properties of advertising messages, making a distinction between factual vs. evaluative content i.e., "logical, objectively verifiable descriptions of tangible product features" vs. "emotional, subjective

impressions of intangible aspects of the product" (p. 547). He concluded that factual statements serve the purpose of evaluative statements in the advertising discourse.

The advertising discourse under study provides many instances of factual cum evaluative statements.

- *Andy or dehi ki double khobian aik saath.* Sun silk Shampoo
- *Is mein hei papeeta or tarbooz khas oily skin kay liy.* Fair and Lovely
- Young attitude, young sound, young looks *meri success hain.* Ponds Cream
- *Is mein hai clinically proven silk vitanol.* Clear Shampoo
- *Nai Fair and Lovely Fairness Gel jo bina chipchiphat kay nikaar jagaiy.* Fair and Lovely

On the surface level the purpose of all of the above statements seem to be simply stating facts about the characteristic features of the products being advertised, but it is not so simple, in fact this device serves the purpose of distinguishing the advertised product from the dozens of other similar products of the same kind available in the market. The potential consumers would make their purchasing decisions on the basis of the distinct qualities of one or another product; therefore, these factual statements serve the primary function of the evaluation of the product.

**Category 7: Knowledge Exchange vs. Activity Exchange**

The contemporary promotional or consumer culture utilizes the strategic technique of giving an activity exchange the appearance of mere knowledge exchange. All most all of the twelve advertisements selected for the sake of analysis clearly reveal the same phenomenon where the apparent focus is on the exchange of information, making claims and stating facts but in fact it leads to the activity exchange in terms of attracting and convincing the consumers to buy or at least try to buy the particular product being advertised. Some of the instances are as under

- Clear complete soft hair, intensive moisturizers Clear Shampoo
- Es may hai clinically proven silk vitanol Clear Shampoo
- *Ab dus mein Lux* Lux Soap
- *Dahi se dandruff ka khatma* Sunsilk Shampoo
- *Dunia wohi badalien gay jinhein apni hifazat ka koi dar nahi* Lifebuoy Soap

This in fact is the most subtle technique of the advertising art, this characteristic feature makes an advertisement soft sell because advertisers rarely use the word 'buy' in order to promote their product. Direct commands for purchasing products can have a very negative impact on the product's sale ratio; therefore, advertisers choose to communicate their messages indirectly while utilizing different techniques.

**Category 8: Mixing English Language**

Due to the direct impact of globalization, advertisers have adopted the strategy of code mixing and code switching to reach the wider public and to meet the needs of contemporary consumer culture. This technique is used in the data under analysis to attract the bilingual target audience primarily females and urban youth who code mix frequently. Many motivational factors can be cited in this regard, the prestige factor of English language, to create a favorable psychological impact on the customers and consumers, to give modern and Westernized look to these products and to make the products appealing and trendy. English is used to such an extent in the advertisements under study that it offers a unique scope for another research study from the perspective of bilingual practices. A few instances of English utterances are the following

- Clear complete soft hair, intensive moisturizers
- Clear complete soft care, No dandruff
- Four times softer hair
- After shining on the ponds red carpet Hadiqa reveals some secrets
- Who doesn't want to stay young forever?
- Young attitude, young sound, young looks *meri* success *hain*
- That's why now I use ponds age miracle cream
- Flawless skin is like a flawless performance
- Timeless, it really is
- A miracle in a jar
- Like a diamond without shine
- Get beautiful hair now
- Life can't wait

The number of single word mixed items is equally great. Thus, it can be seen that mixing of English, on one hand, is purely a promotional device while on the other hand, this linguistic device is used to create a new identity which transcends the geographical boundaries and creates a 3rd space for the consumers in a multilingual society. Mixing of codes from English in Pakistani Urdu advertising is, in fact, meant to serve merely as an "attention-getter" (Jung 2001) or simply to create positive "feelings" about modernity and internationalization and has little to do with actual understanding of a message.

**Category 9: Presupposition**

In advertising discourse, semantic implications are framed in such a way as to suggest that advertiser has some personal knowledge of the viewer and in this way a relationship of familiarity is implied between the producer and consumer. This technique finds little substantial proof in the data and a few instances are as under

- *Tou phir teh hua*        Clear Shampoo

- Experts' *ki* advice *kay liye* , Ponds skin centre call *karien*   Ponds Cream
- *Ab khatam hua intazaar*      Sunsilk Shampoo
- *Ab choro intazar*           Sunsilk Shampoo

    All of the above examples show that advertisers presuppose some information before making utterances. The very first example shows that something has been decided and it implies that the consumers were really in the process of taking a decision to choose which product and Clear shampoo has brought them to a point of agreement. The second example presupposes that consumer would make a phone call to Ponds skin centre, therefore the contact number is provided to time saving oriented modern consumer to make a phone call to them. Last two examples clearly presuppose that consumers were really waiting for hair product and Sunsilk shampoo has brought their waiting anxiety to an end. Obviously, this device further motivates the target audience to think and most importantly behave in a certain manner i.e. to purchase the product being advertised.

## Category 10: Stylistic Devices

Figurative language and stylistic devices are used to paint word pictures which often go well behind a simple description of the product or service offered. These devices are thus intended to give multiple layers of the meanings to the messages being communicated and to make language more vivid than literal forms allow. The data analysis shows the use of following stylistic devices.

## A: Hyperbole

Advertising discourse makes use of exaggerated and sweeping statements to promote consumer culture. Hyperbole has become an accepted technique of the advertising discourse and in fact advertisers along with the political leaders are expected to make use of hyperbole of any measure and intensity without being held accountable for the consequences.

- *Pakistan ka number one muhafiz*          Lifebuoy Soap
- *Baloon ko banaiy itna soft aur smooth kay nazar aye*     Sun Silk Shampoo
- *Dekha jo lux ka jalwa tou dil thaam lo gay*     Lux Soap
- *Roop hei, dunia deewani hei*               Lux Soap
- Timeless it really is                  Ponds  Cream
- A miracle in the jar                 Ponds Cream
- *Sirf saat dino mei* dark spots and fine lines just disappear        Ponds Cream
- *Her koi yehi kehta tha wah kia chehra tha*     Fair and Lovely
- *Yeh hai asli star*  Fair and Lovely

The large number of the examples coincide with the findings of other research studies that hyperbole is the most readily used stylistic device in the advertising

discourse and in fact this features aims at earning maximum number of potential consumers.

## B: Simile

Simile like other stylistic devices is frequently manipulated in the advertising discourse to suggest meaning far beyond the scope of the product or service being advertised. It is used to establish comparisons and associations between objects or concepts which might otherwise appear unconnected. Instances of simile from the data are as follows

- Clear *skin kay bina* fairness *jaisy naiy kaproon pay kharoonch*     Fair and Lovely Cream
- Clear *skin kay bina* fairness *jaisy dulhan bina mehndi kay*     Fair and Lovely Cream
-  Like a diamond without shine          Fair and Lovely Cream
- Flawless skin is like a flawless performance     Ponds Cream

   It is evident from the above mentioned examples that they are used to reinforce the meanings of the adverting messages in such a way that the probability of buying that product becomes comparatively greater.

Since the data offers only one instance of each of metaphor and personification, therefore, they are not included in the discussion.

## Category 11: Word Choice and Sentence Structure

Vocabulary choices, in the discourse of advertisements under study, are very simple, straightforward and easily understandable to make the product look familiar. Archaic or arcane terminology is not used. The organization and sequence of words and phrases is also characteristically simple. Words choice is motivated by a number of factors. They are chosen for their persuasive value and hyperbolic forms are frequently used. There is a heavy reliance on descriptive words specially adjectives and adverbs to add value to the products being advertised.

   The data analysis does not show any complex sentences or utterances but rather short and simple structures are used to facilitate fast and easy comprehension even for a lay man. On the basis of these qualities it is claimed that apart from poetry no other field utilizes such creative use of language as advertising discourse.

## Semiotic Analysis

Logos, pictures and visual displays are an integral part of almost all advertising. The advertisements under study reveal the same patterns that language is used in synchrony with many other forms of communications in conveying meaning of their messages. The advertisers hook the attention of the consumers through

various psychological devices and technical effects. Like the linguistic choices, these techniques are carefully tailored to emphasize and enhance specific meanings. The data analysis reflects the following semiotic features used to generate interest and desirability in the potential consumers.

- Music and jingles are used to trigger consumers' memory and to create positive association with the product being advertised.
- Camera angles, lights and close ups are used to enhance the meaning being conveyed.
- Timber of the voice of the characters is used to enhance the message been conveyed. The voices, in the data under study, are mostly friendly, cheerful, seductive and enthusiastic.
- Mostly bright back ground colours are used to be positively associated with the products.
- Brand's logo is used as a source of identification for the products. Thus, it is not mere advertising of a single product but of a brand image.
- Faces presented in the advertisements are that of everlasting youth, either in the form of mages of seductive feminity or male machismo. Such archetypes are widely used for the purposes of drawing or gripping the viewers' attention and by selling an illusion. Attractive people are better liked, and they are assumed to be more sociable, independent, and exciting so advertisers use them to develop a positive association with the brand (Brigham:1980)
- The advertisements utilize the technique of emotional transfer; it is the process of generating emotions in order to transfer them to a product. The point is to make the viewer feel good and to transfer that feeling to the brand or product. This is the number one and most important process of media manipulation.
- Symbols are easily identifiable elements from our culture that generate powerful feelings and emotions of positive sense of association with the community, such as flags and Wahga boarder in the advertisement of lifebuoy soap.
- The containers of the beauty products such as tubes, bottles and jars are repeated many times to make even a lay man to identify the product in the market.

In fact all of above mentioned semiotic features are utilized to enhance the power of advertising language and to make it more persuasive and powerful to captivate the consumers' attention and to make them buy the advertised products.

## Conclusion

On the basis of these findings, it can be concluded that Pakistani electronic media advertising discourse is oriented to promote consumer culture though the process

of fostering and inculcating consumption needs. The linguistic and extra linguistic strategies used in the advertising discourse are multifaceted and are employed skillfully to construct and communicate a message which is both captivating and memorable. Different stylistic devices and descriptive words are used to achieve that end. Thus, the discourse of advertising is powerful, potent and persuasive enough to generate desirability and attract the potential consumers. The consumer product companies very skillfully link their products to consumers' needs and interests to maximize their profit ratio. Language plays a key role to achieve this end.

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