

## Men-women Interaction in TV Advertisements: A Critical Discourse Analytical Exploration of Issues and Implications



Fajer Tanveer \*

Zunaira Mateen †

Muhammad Sabboor Hussain ‡

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**Abstract:** *Television advertisements are fundamental in our society and have been the subject of analysis by several analysts and researchers interested in studying gender roles and stereotypes. This research article aims to explore the nature of men-women interaction in Pakistani TV advertisements and examine what issues arise from it, using Fairclough's 3-dimensional discourse analysis model on a sample of 7 advertisements. Based on the findings, a questionnaire-type survey was conducted to understand further the effect of gender roles, their representation and relationships on the audience's perception. The research reveals that Pakistani TV advertisements promote and challenge gender stereotypes, moving towards gender neutrality. This research provides analysts with a new outlook to analyze advertisements that not just reveal dominant/submissive relationships but also a healthy, positive and cooperative relationship between husband and wife.*

**Key Words:** Gender Roles, Interaction, Men, Stereotypes, TV Advertisements, Women

### Introduction

Television advertisements are an essential part of our society that play a role in influencing, constructing and shaping our social and ideological perspectives. Advertisements, especially TV advertisements, are widespread in our modern society as they affect other people's attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. Advertisement is such a powerful medium that apart from shaping beliefs and ideas, it is a tool for presenting the culture, norms, traditions and ideologies of that society.

### Background of the Study

Advertisements have been subject to the research interest of different linguists and analysts. The area that has received much attention is the portrayal of men and women in TV advertisements due to the different gender roles and stereotypes presented and attached

to them. They have criticized the way such typical gender stereotypes and gender inequality are reinforced and perpetuated in our societies through television advertisements. Nevertheless, in recent years, the worldview has changed and is moving towards women's empowerment, where men and women are presented as equal; as a result, ending gender stereotypes.

### Scope and Significance

The study is vital in many ways. It examines how men and women are represented in Pakistani advertisements. It focuses on the analysis of language and discourse, how they are used to portray men and women in advertisements and to identify how gendered discourse is perpetuated or challenged. The study further focuses on the representation of men and women and the language used to describe and

\* Undergraduate student, Department of English, Government College Women University, Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan.

† Undergraduate student, Department of English, Government College Women University, Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan.

‡ Professor, Department of English, University of Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan.

depict them. The analysis seeks to understand hidden ideologies, power relations or any pattern used in portraying gender in advertisements that shape this discourse.

The study seeks to make a contribution to the broader field of media studies, significantly to advertisers, media professionals and policymakers. Critical analyses of TV advertisements can be quite helpful in the context of gender and representation. The study sheds light on how gendered discourse is perpetuated in Pakistani media and helps identify areas where awareness is needed. For advertisers, media professionals and policymakers, this study would help create more responsible advertising campaigns that can provide insight into how gendered discourse is perpetuated and help them form policies and regulations aimed at promoting gender equality and challenging gender stereotypes, respectively.

### Limitations and Delimitations

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There are certain limitations in our research. These include a limited size of the sample taken that results in affecting the generalizability of the findings. The contextual factor is another limitation as our study is limited to a specific context of analysis of TV advertisements; as a result, the findings may not be applied to other contexts. Subjectivity is another limitation, as it is limited by our subjective choice of selecting the advertisements for analysis and then interpreting the data. Also, the limitation of time and accessibility prevents us from analyzing a broader sample of TV advertisements.

The present study has been delimited in a logical way. Our research deals with the specific methodological framework as it involves using a single approach to critical discourse analysis. Another delimitation is that it focuses on men-women in TV advertisements and their interaction, leaving out other interactions for future research/researchers. The language analysis has also been delimited. Our analysis is delimited to the current advertisements being aired on Pakistani television, so the findings may not be applied to the advertisements of other countries and regions due to the change in their social and cultural values and norms.

### Statement of the Problem

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In TV advertisements, the representation of men and women is important to study in our present-day

society because of its impact on people's beliefs and values. However, the analysts are mainly concerned with the stereotypes and gender roles connected to men and women, neglecting the analysis of the portrayal of men and women and their impact on society. Therefore, there is a need to address the nature and representation of men and women's interaction from the viewpoint of social and ideological norms and customs practiced in that society in currently aired TV advertisements, along with analyzing the attitude of viewers on their portrayal and analyzing either they are according to the norms of society or not and how people view and perceive them.

### Aim, Objectives & Research Questions

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The study aims to explore how men and women interact in TV advertisements and examine what issues arise from this interaction. The aim has generated the following two objectives:

1. To analyze the linguistic and visual strategies used to depict the interaction between men and women in TV advertisements.
2. To evaluate different gender roles, relationships, and their representation that affect the audience perception.

In light of these objectives, the following research questions have been formulated to conduct research:

1. How linguistic and visual strategies are used to depict men and women and their interaction in TV advertisements?
2. How do different gender roles, their representation and relationships affect audience perception?

### Literature Review

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Advertisements have been a significant means for advertisers to communicate their messages to consumers. However, portraying men and women in advertisements has been an issue in marketing and media studies, attracting many scholars' attention. This literature review examines the use of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as an effective tool to analyze gender roles and the representation of men and women in TV advertisements.

CDA, a research methodology, focuses on the social and political dimensions of language and its usage (Fairclough, 2015). According to Fairclough, it aims to

unravel different power relations and social inequalities perpetuating in our society by analyzing language as a tool used to construct and maintain such practices and institutions on the societal level. In the domain of media discourse and TV advertisement, CDA provides researchers to understand how gender relations are constructed, perpetuated, reinforced and challenged through the use of language and visual representations.

From 1970 till today, researchers have been quite interested in the study of the portrayal of men and women in TV advertisements, mainly concerned with how gender roles and stereotypes are portrayed through men and women (Dominick & Rauch, 1972; Courtney & Whipple, 1974; Culley, 1976; O'Donnell & O'Donnell, 1978; Schneider & Schneider, 1979). A study conducted in Hong Kong and Indonesia on the portrayal of men and women in TV advertisements from an Asian perspective reported that the role of gender and its stereotypes is greater in East-Asian advertisements as compared to Western advertisements (Furnhem et al., 2000). Apart from their representation and portrayal in advertisements, there has been a study on the negative cross-gender effects on consumers, not only on women but also on men (Akestem et al., 2021, p. 83). A study conducted in India on how the role of women depicted in an advertisement has an impact on the minds of the consumers and the differences between men and women in their portrayal and consuming willingness indicates that although women now have a higher role in the advertisement, the stereotypes connected to them are still present (Sharma & Bumb, 2021).

Several studies have applied Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to the analysis of TV advertisements and have accepted that gender roles have readily been reinforced and perpetuated through advertising messages and platforms (Goffman, 1976; Kilbourne, 1999; Lull, 1990). For example, Goffman (1976) argues that advertisements often portray women as passive and dependent while men are depicted as active and dominant. Kilbourne (1999) similarly argues that women are shown as objects to be consumed and men as consumers in TV advertising. Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) argue that advertisements often exhibit gender roles as a binary force and reinforce the idea that femininity is related to weakness and masculinity to power.

The interaction between men and women in TV advertisements has received less attention in the literature as compared to the portrayal of gender roles as they are more focused on the study of advertisements that contain gender stereotypes (Dominick & Rauch, 1972; Courtney & Whipple, 1974; Culley, 1976; Schneider & Schneider, 1979).

## Recent Research

In recent studies, the focus has been shifted towards analyzing how men and women are presented in relation to each other and their importance in advertisements (Marvi Shaikh et al., 2015; Shahzad et al., 2011). Studies have shown that men are often portrayed as the ones in the position of power and dominance over women, while women are the ones portrayed as submissive and dependent (Berberick, 2010; Perucha, 2009 and Hoepfner, 2006)

The implications of portraying gender roles and relations in TV advertisements are widespread. Research has shown that exposure to gender-stereotyped advertising can reinforce traditional gender roles and a negative attitude towards women (Albers-Miller & Galb, 1996; Gerbner, 1998). Moreover, such negative attitudes affect real-world gender inequalities, including gender pay/salary gaps and gender-based violence (Glick & Fiske, 2001; Heilman & Okimoto, 2007).

Several studies have used CDA to examine TV advertisements in Pakistani media. For example, Iqbal et al. (2020) used Fairclough's Model to critically analyze the linguistic and visual discursive strategies that play a role in manipulating people. They analyzed 20 advertisements based on different kinds of everyday commodities. Similarly, researchers have used CDA to analyze the representation of men and women in Pakistani TV advertisements and found that women are often depicted as passive and submissive. In contrast, men are depicted as powerful and dominant (Ali & Shahwar, 2011).

However, a few studies have employed CDA to analyze gendered discourse in Pakistani TV advertisements. One study that investigated gendered discourse in Pakistani TV advertisements is the research article titled "The Representation of Men and Women in Advertisements: A Critical Discourse Analysis" by Marvi Shaikh et al. (2020). This study used CDA to analyze a sample of twelve TV advertisements from Pakistan and some Western advertisements aired

on the Internet. They found that men were consistently portrayed as dominant, powerful, and rational, while women were shown as submissive, emotional, and irrational.

### Research Gaps

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Much research has been conducted on how gender is represented and how both genders interact. Despite all the research, research is still needed in this field. Most research is focused on the representation of gender, ignoring other factors, i.e. race, ethnicity, social class and sexual orientation.

Most of the research has been conducted in Western environments, neglecting other cultures and countries where gender roles and their representation may contradict. So, to understand different cultures, there is a need to develop more cross-cultural research. The context of interaction and representation regarding men and women interaction is also a crucial factor that needs to be taken into account.

### Analytical Framework

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The analytical framework of the present study is a structured way of analyzing and looking at the issue or the problem stated. It involves using conceptual and analytical tools and techniques guided by CDA agenda and toolkits to gather, analyze and interpret data and draw conclusions based on it. In TV advertisements and media discourses, using the CDA analytical framework is one of the popular methodological approaches. Researchers have widely used this analytical framework in their research for analyzing advertisements and revealing hidden discourses found in those advertisements through the portrayal of men and women. Many have used Fairclough's 3D framework for the analysis (Marvi Shaikh et al., 2020; Iqbal et al., 2020).

### Research Methodology

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#### Research Design

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The research design of this study is sequential qualitative-quantitative. It starts with a qualitative approach to analyzing TV advertisements. It conducts a Critical Discourse Analysis based on Fairclough's 3D Model.

### Dimension 1: Text Analysis

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In this dimension, we analyze linguistic features available in TV advertisements, including the advertisement's tone and structure. We look at how adjectives are used to describe men and women in TV advertisements and how they relate to the advertised product to understand the role of men and women in that particular advertisement.

### Dimension 2: Discursive Practice

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This dimension involves the analysis of language to interpret the advertisement in a particular context and the social practices in which it is used. For this purpose, we look at the types of conversations between men and women in TV advertisements, the tone of those conversations, and the power dynamics that are at play throughout the advertisement.

### Dimension 3: Socio-cultural Practice

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This dimension deals with analyzing the broader social and cultural contexts that shape the use of language in TV advertisements. This includes examining the historical, political, and economic factors that influence the roles and relations between men and women and examining how broader cultural values and norms are reflected in advertisements.

In the second analytical phase, it uses the questionnaire as the quantitative tool. We administered the questionnaire to 102 people of age groups 15-20 and 25-35 to gather quantitative data on their attitudes towards men-women interaction in TV advertisements and used statistical analysis to identify the patterns and trends in the data.

### Sampling

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We have targeted the advertisements currently aired on Pakistani TV channels like ARY, Geo, HUM TV and Samaa TV. The sample includes the analysis of seven advertisements that involve an interaction between men and women depicted as husband and wife using a convenient sampling technique. The same sampling technique was used to collect quantitative data from 102 research participants of age groups 15-20 and 25-45 to give representation to Youth and Age.

## Data Analysis Advertisement 1

It is a Pakistani TV advertisement of Hico (ice cream brand), released on 19 March 2022.



**Husband:** For how long are you going to stay busy?

**Wife:** Just a few more days; it is not easy to become a doctor.

**Wife:** I am busy with exams, that is why it is difficult to manage at home.

**Husband:** I didn't marry you just to take care of home but to accomplish each others' dreams/goals.

The setting is a home featuring a husband and wife. The wife is depicted as a doctor, and her husband fully supports her in her education. This ad

challenges traditional gender roles. The wife can be seen as a student while the husband is working as well as managing the house. In this advertisement, the dialogue delivery is excellent; the husband is supportive, cooperative and understanding. He does not want her wife to confine herself to the house. He wants her to chase after her dreams. Their interaction is positive and healthy, and there is no gender stereotype.

## Advertisement 2

It is a Pakistani TV advertisement of Nestle Everyday (milk powder), released on 30 January 2023.



The tagline is translation: "There's something special in you".

Furthermore, the advertisement's message is "If you are present, then every moment is special".

The point of focus is the adjective word "special," which indicates the importance of a partner in your life. This word, on the surface, although it seems to be neutral, is quite masculine, indicating the need for a female partner in a man's life. Also, it shows how important a woman is in a man's life. So, it can be seen as a positive argument.

There is a tone shift from an argumentative one to a lighter and lively one. The setting of the advertisement is the kitchen and living room. Husband and wife are seen returning from a family gathering, and the wife straightaway goes into the kitchen while the husband sits on the sofa. The husband is depicted as a controlling and dominant man. The wife is a bit pissed about her husband's attitude at the gathering

even though the incident is not shown, but it is quite obvious through their facial expressions and tone as the wife is complaining that he did not even let her have a cup of tea. So, the husband tries to light up her mood by using persuasive language and saying she makes the best tea. Also, he starts singing to lighten up her mood, and she also starts singing along with him. By analyzing their dialogues and visual cues, it is apparent that the wife is depicted as a typical housewife who is easily persuaded, and the husband is seen as the dominant one in the relationship, making most of the decisions. However, on the other side, he is a caring husband who does not want her wife to stay angry for long and is seen trying to reconcile with her. This ad promotes the gender stereotype of women as housewives and men as working people. In society, it is a typical representation of every family in our culture, promoting men as independent in making decisions and women as dependent on their husbands.

### Advertisement 3

*It is a Pakistani TV advertisement for Lemon Max (a liquid dishwashing soap), released in 2022.*



The tone of this ad is comical and lively. The setting is a house, focusing on the kitchen and dining room.

The situation is that the husband's friends have just left after having lunch, and the wife complains about cleaning dishes, inquiring why she should be the one washing dishes when the friends are his. As a result,

her husband instantly takes the sponge from her hand and says, "I will do it".

By analyzing their interaction, it is evident that the relationship between husband and wife is joyful. The wife does not complain about the work rudely, and the husband is also depicted as caring and understanding. Although this ad challenges the

stereotyped role of the husband by suggesting how men should also help their wives in their domestic chores, on the other hand, it presents a stereotypical relationship of husband and wife where the female is

a housewife, and the husband is the breadwinner. Overall, the relationship is quite positive as the husband understands, and they have no dominant/submissive relationship.

#### Advertisement 4

It is a Pakistani TV advertisement for Tapal Danedar (tea brand), released on 3 September 2021.



This advertisement features a married couple. The tagline of this advertisement is translation: "You, me and a cup of tea". It depicts a couple having a cup of tea. It promotes the importance of spending time with each other as it is crucial in building a healthy and positive relationship between husband and wife and promoting understanding between them. The setting of this advertisement is a household, i.e., a kitchen and a living room.

The wife made *alo gosht* (meat-potato dish) for dinner, and the husband inquires, "You made *alo gosht* today?" the wife replies sharply, "You yourself asked me to make whatever I want". Husband innocently says, "Who likes to eat it?" Wife got angry and said, "I like it," she started complaining that she always wanted to spend some time with him, go on a walk and watch a movie together, but he was always busy. On this

onslaught, the husband instantly replied, "I love *Alo gosht*". Then, he makes a cup of tea for his wife and says, "You know what! Why do I always love to have tea at night?" His Wife replies, "Because you love tea". However, the husband said, "Because I like spending time with you". He calmly says, "This tea at night is both my thanks and sorry to you".

This ad challenges the traditional gender roles of male dominance and female submissiveness and emphasizes the importance of understanding and communication as it indicates love and care. This advertisement promotes a healthy relationship between a couple who is unable to spend time together due to busy schedules but still are able to give time and company by just having tea together, highlighting the importance of trivial things in life.

### Advertisement 5

It is a Pakistani TV advertisement for 7up (a soft drink brand), released on 30 January 2023.



The tagline is translation: "Let's eat and drink together and have some heart-to-heart talk".

This advertisement features a husband and wife, and there is no dialogue in the whole advertisement, just music being played in the background. The husband returned from work and saw that his wife was caring for the baby, and the dinner was not prepared yet. This advertisement challenges traditional gender roles. The husband is depicted as caring and supportive. The

relationship between husband and wife is supportive, as he understands that it is hectic for his wife to do chores and take care of the baby. So, unlike the typical man complaining about unprepared dinner, he started making it himself. On the societal level, it suggests that men should also help their wives in household chores and support their wives.

### Advertisement 6

It is a Pakistani TV advertisement of Brite (a detergent brand), released on 7 November 2022.





This advertisement features a married couple. The tagline is translation: "Brite will right everything". The tone of this advertisement is comical. The horror movie is being played in the background. The setting of this advertisement is in the TV lounge. The lights are dim to create an atmosphere of horror, but the colours are lively, indicating a cosy and comfy home. Husband and wife are watching a horror movie and having snacks. The wife was startled by her husband and threw some ketchup on his shirt, but the husband did not say anything.

After that, the wife tried to scare the husband, but he did not care and pretended to be scared by her face. By the analysis of this advertisement, it is indicated that there are no stereotypes in it. The relationship between husband and wife is naughty and joyful as they play tricks on each other. The husband is making fun of his wife's face by pretending that his wife is scarier than a horror movie. There is no promotion of dominant/submissive relationships. At the societal level, it emphasizes the importance of spending time together and suggests that a relationship between husband and wife should be playful and joyous.

### Advertisement 7

It is a Pakistani TV advertisement of Shan Masala (a spice brand), released on 3 January 2023.



The tagline of the ad is "the happiness maker". The main focus is on the adjective "happiness maker". It indicates that women are the ones who are responsible for their family's happiness. It is somewhat stereotypical because it suggests that women are solely responsible and men have no responsibility. The tone of the advertisement shifts from a humorous to an emotional one.

The setting of the advertisement includes a kitchen and TV lounge. The husband and his kids are watching old pictures, and the wife calls from the kitchen that they should be ready on time and then leaves the house to run some errands. While watching old pictures, the husband realizes that her wife is not present in any of those pictures and asks her daughter where her mother is. She says her mom would be busy in the kitchen or doing other work. At that moment, he realized something and went straight to the kitchen.

When the wife returned and saw her husband and children cooking, she was surprised and asked them if anything happened that day. The husband replied that pictures showed him something that reality could not. He adds, "In the process of creating happiness for us, you never get a chance to celebrate your own happiness". After hearing that, his wife starts to cry.

By analyzing, it is apparent that this advertisement depicts a typical housewife whose sole purpose is to serve her family without taking into account her own happiness. At the societal level, it promotes and challenges gender stereotypes at the same time by depicting a typical male who does not have any idea that all these years she was missing such happiness, but at the same time, his act of accepting his mistake and trying to be good from now on shows that men should also accept and ask forgiveness of their wrongdoings instead of ignoring it.

## Findings and Discussion

The results of the analysis show interesting findings. It is revealed that in most TV advertisements analyzed above, the portrayal of men and women as husband-wife promotes traditional gender roles, i.e. men are working husbands and women as housewives. However, the interaction promotes a healthy and positive relationship between them. A shift is observed in the advertisements analyzed above, and that is men are now portrayed as more cooperative, understanding and open-minded as husbands than typical, conservative, dominant and ignorant ones.

The same is the case with the portrayal of women; though not all advertisements but a few indicate a shift from a woman being a submissive and emotional housewife to a more competent, proficient and qualified one.

To analyze the audience's perceptions of men-women, their interaction and representation, we conducted a questionnaire based on our results by analyzing the abovementioned advertisements. We provided them with a Likert scale questionnaire with ten statements to know how much they agreed with it and in order to know their perceptions about gender roles and their interaction.

**Table I**

*Audience Perception on Men and Women Interaction in Pakistani TV Advertisements*

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Pakistani TV advertisements promote gender stereotypes.	18.6	49	22.5	8.8	1
Pakistani TV advertisements challenge gender stereotypes.	10.8	52.9	16.7	17.6	2
Men and women are rarely shown as equal in Pakistani TV advertisements.	17.6	47.1	11.8	19.6	3.9
Women in Pakistani TV advertisements are often portrayed as homemakers and caregivers, while men are portrayed as breadwinners.	23.5	49	10.8	15.7	1
Women are often depicted as submissive, while men are dominant in TV advertisements.	16.7	38.2	23.5	17.6	3.9
TV advertisements influence the societal norms related to gender.	19.6	53.9	10.8	13.7	2
TV advertisements portray real-life interactions and relationships.	8.8	38.2	30.4	15.7	6.9
Pakistani advertisements are shifting towards portraying men and women as equal.	7.8	61.8	22.5	5.9	2
Advertisers need to make more gender-neutral advertisements.	31.4	50	10.8	4.9	2.9
Interaction between men and women affects its audience.	36.3	49	10.8	2.9	1

Table I.1 shows the results of 102 participants, out of which 83 are females and 19 are men. The response rate shows a huge difference between the number of males and females because males were reluctant to fill it compared to females. They needed more knowledge and awareness about prevalent stereotypes in our society. Regarding the age group,

94 participants are from the age group of 15-20, and the rest are from the 25-35 age group. The former were more active and interested in revealing their perceptions of the interaction between men and women in TV advertisements.

The findings of the audience perceptions show that half of them support advertisements as a source

of promoting gender stereotypes, and half are against it and feel that they challenge such stereotypes. Many of the audience support the notion of making more gender-neutral advertisements and believe that such interactions and representations directly influence their audience.

### Implications of the Study

The study shows that the interaction between men and women promotes and challenges gender stereotypes. Our research fills the gap by analyzing the interaction between men and women based on stereotypical representations and analysis. It provides the researchers with a new outlook that studies such stereotypes and the positive and changing views of their representations in TV advertisements. Although our research may not apply to wider discourses and cultures and would eventually be outdated with the passage of time, as media trends change drastically, it is still helpful and effective for advertisers, media professionals and policymakers to understand the perceptions of the audience better and to move towards gender neutrality. At the societal level, it

allows the general audience to understand how men and women are presented and portrayed, raising awareness and promoting a respectful and equal relationship between husband and wife in real life.

### Recommendations and Conclusion

The study aimed to explore how men and women interact in TV advertisements and examine what issues arise from this interaction. The study reveals that many TV advertisements still promote gender stereotypes, presenting men as dominant and active, whereas women are submissive and emotional. It is suggested that the interaction must be based on equality, and there should be no concept of superiority or inferiority in the relationship of husband and wife. For that purpose, advertisers and media professionals must make gender-neutral advertisements, breaking the stereotypical representation of men as working husbands and women as housewives. Doing so will present a positive and healthy relationship to the general audience and encourage them to implement it in their lives, as TV advertisements affect their audience immensely.

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