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Article:	Gender Portrayal in Outdoor Advertising in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) Provinces of Pakistan
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Abstract

Gender portrayal and the representations of males and females in advertising remains the core interest of researchers from gender studies and communication research. In advertising scholarship, it is often found that there are differences in gender portrayal specifically due to the cultural contexts. In the present study, we explore the gender portrayal in outdoor billboard advertising of two provinces of Pakistan; Punjab and KPK. Theoretically and conceptually, the study takes roots from cultural studies on advertising and social semiotics studies on gender and advertising. We collect data of 360 billboard advertisements from two cities of Punjab and two cities of KPK. We coded 654 units in these 360 billboards according to the conceptual categories of social semiotics. In the present study we found that female models are portrayed more as compare to the male models in outdoor advertising of both provinces; Punjab and KPK. Although, the dominant pattern of gender portrayal in advertisements of KPK is similar to Punjab, however, it is slightly different from Punjab. In KPK, males are also portrayed as submissive. Females are more associated with nurturing roles as compared to Punjab. Hence, it is concluded that in outdoor advertising of Pakistan, females are objectified and they are mostly used for their glamour and beauty. On the contrary, males are portrayed as dominant and in power.

Keywords: *Gender portrayal, outdoor advertising, Punjab, KPK, Social Semiotics, Cultural Studies*

Introduction

The term gender portrayal refers to ideal looking body images of models like men and women and often used with advertising messages by advertisers. As a cultural term Blackstone, Miller, Lerner, and Schiamberg (2003) explained gender, “Gender, refers to the meanings, values, and characteristics that people ascribe to different sexes”. It is obvious that the term “gender” most probably gives the meanings of characteristics that people attribute to both males and females. “Gender” is for as someone is doing and thinking about something with, it involves a collection of “social practices” and a “system of cultural meanings”, gender is culturally assigned attributes by others or the society. Several scholars have elaborated on gender as a culturally assigned attribute (Chisholm, 2014; Rakow, 1986; Shields, 1994; West & Zimmerman, 1987). The present study also aims to study the gender portrayal in advertising in the context of Pakistani culture.

Historical perspective of advertising is trace back to Romans’, Pompeii and paintings of caves that were used to promulgate the messages; Indian rock art is a clue for out of home media (O’Toole, 2016; Schaafsma, 1986; Tungate, 2007; Van der Waldt & Roux, 2014). According to Lichtenthal, Yadav, and Donthu (2006) the outdoor advertising (billboards) has received much attention as a mass medium and provides the exposure of pictures, written and spoken and a more prevalent form. Taylor, Franke, and Bang (2006) identified billboards as an important promotional tool. Billboards have their impact on the audience whether they keep attention or not (K. Khan, Hussainy, Khan, & Khan, 2016). Size, location, color, celebrity images on billboards are the tools for getting the attention of the audience (Bell & Milic, 2002). The present study aims to explore the gender portrayal in outdoor billboard advertising in Pakistan.

The manifestation of culture can be classified in different ranges: global, national, and subcultural. Cultural boundaries are such vast; we cannot able to encompass them. When, we

argue about Pakistani culture, especially, we would have to undermine, that the Pakistani society contained multi-nation ethnicity. Some recognized the culture equal to “arts”, significantly, the “high arts”. According to this explanation, popular culture has been assigned to that endures below the inflated “high culture”. Therefore, the popular culture might be understood as the synergic between the “commonly mediated texts and the everyday meaning-making and the practices of the common people” (Barker, 2004; Berger, 2017; Hakala, 2014; Lewis, 2002). Due to utmost diversity province of Punjab is deemed to be popular culture whereas there is no modern culture, One way of looking at the Pathans (the very name of Pakhtun) of Pakistan is as eighteenth-century Scots without the alcohol (Ihsan & Aziz, 2019; Liaquat, Qaisrani, & Khokhar, 2016; Lieven, 2012; Mahn, 2017; Qadeer, 2006; Rammah, 2006; Shah & Amjad, 2011). Therefore, the present study aims to study and compare the gender portrayal in the cultural context of two provinces. The study aims to compare the gender portrayal in outdoor billboard advertising of two provinces of Pakistan; Punjab and KPK.

In communication studies, the semiotic is the “study of signs” the existing signs have definite meanings and manifesto, the existence of signs is understood within semiotic systems i.e., the green lite of the signal gives the meaning “to go” in a traffic control system likewise the words exist in language system so the whole practices in society exist through the semiotic system (Harrison, 2003). Harrison (2003) explained the three categories of the visual semiotics of an image, which is most relevant with the study in hand, *the icon, the index, and the symbol*. The icon can be an image, or object, bears resemblance or similarity, we can already know. The index contains an understandable relation between the object and the concept. Symbol, a word is a symbol because it has no resemblance to what it stands for nor it has indexical relation *to what it signifies*. We also use the semiotics analysis to study the gender portrayal in outdoor advertising of Punjab and KPK.

Review of Literature

Shields (1994) reported the early serious studies on gender portrayal were conducted in the 1970 decade, after that an abundance of studies on gender portrayal can be seen. Later on, Goffman (1979a) presented his work on *gender-advertisements*, the coming scholars steady their work on the bases laid down by him and began their research in their respective fields, over time, they executed the apparent role in the research arena. Bell and Milic (2002) wrote about the significance of these procedures with the semiotic analysis method by explaining that In particular, we tend to look for to demonstrate however the scale known in Erving Goffman's "Gender Advertisements (1979)" and connected content analysis may be designed onto the image philosophical theory classes developed by (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). Goffman's work was unique at the time for employing the technique now being categorized as semiotic content analysis. His work affords the bottom for textual evaluation with the tenets of semiotic content evaluation and symbolic interactionism. Several scholars in their respective fields have been conducted their studies on the defined categories of Goffman for example, (Belknap & Leonard, 1991; Bell & Milic, 2002; Kang, 1997).

The purpose of the current study is to digging-out the underlying matter deeply, hence the technique of semiotics analysis is under consideration in the current study. But, the studies conducted under the other analysis have significance too, for our purpose these studies will guide the directions, and will help to find out the studies' gaps. See (Carpenter; Gilly, 1988; Hakala, 2014; Martin, 1998; O'Toole, 2016; Stankiewicz & Rosselli, 2008; Vela, Romero, & Giner, 2006; Zotos & Tsihla, 2014).

The current study has its roots in the cultural perspectives of Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa the provinces of Pakistan so it's necessary to understand the cultural bases into media and advertising perspective. Though, the research in advertising puts its focus generally on internal matters, observation through its design, what it claims for, and what are

its benefits for the consumers. Yet there can be issues of more importance than are also work as representative of meanings out-side the sphere of advertised goods. Furthermore, the production or construction of meanings comes into being through social and cultural forces. The representation of various processes of objects or ideas forms meanings (Borgerson & Schroeder, 2002). According to Hall (1997) representation comes with the various structures of the stuff, by using these ways, research is categorized into two categories namely semiotics and discursive. Further, semiotic research is about, how meanings are produced by the representation and discursive research is about power and culture. Both said types are certain to examine for producing the meanings (as quoted by Borgerson & Schroeder, 2002). The significance of the cultural-based studies in advertising can be seen in the following researchers' work (Barker, 2003; Danna, 1992; Du Gay et al., 2013; Hakala, 2014; Hall, 1997; Jhally, 1989; Yong Zhang & Neelankavil, 1997).

Here it will be viewed how semiotics analysis employs the cultural artifacts because the current study has aimed to study the general portrayal through semiotics analysis. Cullum-Swan and Manning (1994), contended that the semiotics (the science of signs) caters in the directions to establish premises and notions that let the symbolic systems to be analyzed. Though the foundation of semiotics is the language it comes under several "sign systems" of diver's grade of agreement, *applicability, and complexity*.

The semiotics approach is even righteous practice for the translator's views (Mehawesh, 2014). Harrison (2003) argued, "the important fact for professional communicators is that readers/ users no longer rely solely on written text for comprehension; they absorb and process all that they see within a document to create meaning for themselves". Semiotics predominantly enquires into the approaches via which the meaning is created instead of truly investigating what it is (Parsa, 2004). Semiotics gives to apprehend in one of a kind way, with the aid of language and framework, the link between the picture and

society. Advertisements are examples par excellence of the connection of cultural values and visible semiotics; they are also a rich source for the look at of visual communication and are wide to be had and comparable across Japanese and British Semiotics is the observation of signs and symptoms and symbols (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001; Njirić & Miloslavić, 2016).

Semiotics is a science of signs (Harrison, 2003; Van Leeuwen, 2005; J. J. Zeman, 1977). Why this method is useful for the current study. Firstly, it is the study of signs and the signs give their true meanings in the context of the cultures. Secondly, three categories of the semiotics analysis make the result more reliable. Berger (2004b) explained, the “sign” is a combination of two terms, the concept and the sound- image, which cannot be separated, all types of advertising use the icon and symbols to recognize the organization i.e., the restaurants use special symbols, the corporations use signs and symbols for their special identification. For further studies under the umbrella of semiotics see (Barthes, 1972; Bezemer & Kress, 2008; Curtin, 2006; Daymon & Holloway, 2010; Derboven, De Roeck, & Verstraete, 2012; Kaberi & Emamifar, 2016; Lovelace, 2010; Mendelson & Smith, 2006; Nelson & Shiff, 2010; Van Leeuwen, 2005; Yuping Zhang, 2019).

Conceptual Framework

The quotation of semiotics’ founding forefather De Saussure:

Language is a system of signs that express ideas and is therefore comparable to a system of writing, the alphabet of deaf-mutes, symbolic rites, polite formulas, military signals, etc.

For this study, it looks appropriate to understand the science of ‘signs’. “Signs” has been recognized as “a key term in social semiotics”. It’s derived from Halliday’s work, who disagreed with the grammar of the language as considered to be code “a set of rules for producing correct sentences” but he recognized it as a resource for making meaning. Van Leeuwen extended this ideology and defined semiotics as the “action and artifacts”. These are

used to communicate for both purposes either “they are produced psychologically (with our vocal apparatus; with the muscles we use to create facial expressions and gestures, etc.)” or by the “means of technologies (with a pen, ink, and paper; with computer hardware and software; with fabrics, scissors and sewing machines, etc.)”. Generally, all were recognized as “signs”.

On the other hand, Pierce’s school of semiotics believes in different kinds of signs i.e., “Icon, Index, and Symbol”. How these signs signify, the Icon by resemblance, the Index by cause and effects, and the Symbol by conventions (quoted in Zeman, 1977). Three different types of signs have different linkages to their signifiers and “signifieds”. In symbol mode, the relationship between “signifiers and signified” is arbitrary (conventional). In the case of an icon, the relation is thinking of as a partial resemblance. In the index, the causal relation between signifier and signified is examined, for example, “if a footprint signifies the recent presence of a person, it does so because it was made by that person.

According to Barthes the “signified” is a subjective representation of stuff and “signifiers are only worked as mediators. In his views, “semiology” contains “structural and semantic aspects” (quoted by Berger). For Barthes (distinguished French semioticians) many aspects of cultural connotations were discussed before, for example, “steak and Frites, detergents, Citroen automobiles, and wrestling” whereas, the denotation is used for “literal” or explicit meanings” of the words. Denotation means the recognition of photos or images and connotation probably means the invitation to interpret the image, “give meanings” even the beyond intentions of the author (Curtin, 2006).

For carrying-out the ordained objectives, the study will take the understandings of social-semiotics as a conceptual framework for the study. Its’ broader sense is to understand the comparative differences of gender portrayal in outdoor advertising, thus the study will

focus on “difference of gender portrayal” across both provinces, in association with outdoor advertising contents and other social views related to outdoor advertising contents.

Objectives of the Research

The objectives of this study were:

- 1) To analyze the portrayal of gender in outdoor billboard advertising across two provinces of Pakistan.
- 2) To compare gender signs in outdoor billboard advertising of Punjab & KPK.
- 3) To study the influence of culture on gender portrayal in outdoor billboard advertising of Punjab and KPK.

Research Questions

RQ1: Which gender roles are being primed in outdoor advertising across two provinces?

RQ2: What differences are embedded in both provinces regarding gender portrayal in billboards?

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative as well as a quantitative research design. Social semiotics and visual semiotics analysis were used to collect and analyze the data.

Population & Sample of the Study

The sample of the study was three hundred and sixty billboards of selected brands, showing any gender model in the ads. The sample ads were selected from Lahore, Gujranwala, Peshawar, and Mardan cities. The technique of purposive sampling was applied to collect data.

Unit of Analysis

The billboards containing the ads of gender portrayal, for which the brands of dresses, the cell phone services providers, food supplements and beverage companies, and personal care products were taken.

Coding Unit

We coded each advertisement content in terms of gender. Our coding unit is gender icons; males and females in advertising.

Data Collection

Firstly, we classified the billboards according to the type of advertising; international/multinational company's ads, national ads, and local ads. Secondly, snapshots of billboards from four cities of two different provinces of Pakistan were taken periodically and six month's data was collected in the shape of photo shots for content analysis. We included the billboards erected on the main highways and crosses of the sample cities and having a size above 10 x 20 to 20 x 60 feet. We developed a coding sheet according to the conceptual roots of social semiotics and visual semiotic analysis (See Annexure – I and Figure 1). The thematic analysis and statistical analysis were performed on coding units.

Coding Sheet

We developed a coding sheet according to the conceptual roots of social semiotics. Ferdinand de Saussure saw signs as the basic unit of meaning and he defined two parts of signs.

Signifier — The form of a sign. The form might be a sound, a word, a photograph, a facial expression, a painting of a pipe, etc.

Signified — The concept or object that's represented. The concept or object might be an actual pipe, the command to stop, a warning of radioactivity.

Peirce added a third part, the interpreting or what the audience makes of the sign or the sense of what's communicated. Everything that follows here applies to the signifier or the form of a sign.

3 Types of Signifiers — The Categories of Signs

Rakow (1986) said the form a sign takes, its signifier, can be classified as one of three types: an icon, an index, or a symbol.

- 1) An **Icon** has a physical resemblance to the signified, the thing being represented. A photograph is a good example as it certainly resembles whatever it depicts.
- 2) An **Index** shows evidence of what's being represented. A good example is using an image of smoke to indicate a fire.
- 3) A **Symbol** has no resemblance between the signifier and the signified. The connection between them must be culturally learned. Numbers and alphabets are good examples. There's nothing inherent in the number 9 to indicate what it represents. It must be culturally learned.

Gender

More than a trait of individuals, gender is an institutionalized system of social practices. It was coded into male and female categories.

Products categories

The consuming goods. Due to time constraints, we coded data related to these products; food and beverage, dressing, automobiles, cell phone and electronics, cosmetics, others.

Data Analysis

The coding sheet was prepared for semiotics analysis according to predefined categories. Thematic analysis was performed on descriptive data of visual semiotics. Clusters, Diagrams, and charts were used for further analysis.

Inter-Coder Reliability

The services of two coders of the communication field were taken for the coding process and the preparation of the coding manual was carried out after the discussion and

agreed upon. For the result testing process, the Cohen Kappa reliability formula was applied to ensure inter-coder reliability.

Findings and Discussion

It is evident in previous studies that females are portrayed more in advertising as compared to the males (Berberick, 2010; Chan & Cheng, 2012; Fouts & Burggraf, 1999; Plakoyiannaki & Zotos, 2009; Zotos & Tsihla, 2014). In the present study, we analyzed 654 coding units of 360 outdoor advertisements. We also found that there are no significant differences in the use of male and female objects in advertising of Punjab and KPK. Female objects are more used in outdoor advertising of both provinces (Table 1). It reveals the females are more used to attract the audience in outdoor advertising of both provinces; Punjab and KPK (Table 1).

Table 1: Province Wise Differences in Mentions of Gender in Billboard Advertising of Punjab and KPK

				Gender of the Object		Total
				Male	Female	
Province	of	Ad	Punjab	129	222	351
Display			KPK	99	204	303
Total				228	426	654

$$X^2 = 1.191, df=1, p=.15$$

Further Table 2 indicates there are significant differences in the signifier attributes of male and female genders in outdoor advertising of Punjab. Females are highly associated with the elements of smile, beauty, nudity, and sex in outdoor advertising of Punjab. While males are associated with power, dominance, and entertainment. It reveals that there are significant differences in the attributes of male and female portrayal in outdoor advertising of Punjab.

Table 2: Gender Differences in Signifiers of Gender Portrayal in Billboard Advertising of Punjab

		Gender of the Object		Total
		Male	Female	
Multiple	Love & Care	3	5	8
Response	Smile and Beauty	2	33	35
Signifier ^b	Nudity and Sexy	0	17	17
	Household Duties	2	2	4
	Nurturing	0	2	2
	Power & Dominance	18	3	21
	Entertainment	11	7	18
	Descriptive	1	5	6
	Total		37	73

Table 3 indicates there are significant differences in the signifier attributes of male and female genders in outdoor advertising of KPK. Females are highly associated with the elements of love, care, smile, beauty, nudity, and sex in outdoor advertising of the KPK. While males are associated with power, and entertainment. It reveals that there are significant differences in the male and female portrayal in outdoor advertising of KPK.

Table 3: Gender Differences in Signifiers of Gender Portrayal in Billboard Advertising of KPK

		Gender of the Object		Total
		Male	Female	
Multiple	Love & Care	11	18	29
Response	Smile and Beauty	0	11	11
Signifier ^b	Nudity and Sexy	0	28	28
	Household Duties	2	7	9
	Nurturing	0	3	3
	Power & Dominance	7	0	7
	Entertainment	14	1	15
	Descriptive	1	2	3
	Total		30	62

Table 4 shows that there are also significant differences in the portrayal of male and female genders in outdoor advertising of Punjab. Females are portrayed as sex commodities, decorative pieces, and beautiful images in outdoor advertising of Punjab. While males are portrayed as dominant and authoritative. It reveals that there are significant differences in the male and female portrayal in outdoor advertising of Punjab. In this way, our findings support the previous studies that females are mostly used for their beauty and glamour in outdoor advertising (Berberick, 2010; Calogero, 2004; Chen, Teng, & Zhang, 2013; Civile, Rajagobal, & Obhi, 2016; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Jhally, 1989; Moradi, Dirks, & Matteson, 2005; Zimmerman & Dahlberg, 2008). Findings answer RQ1 that females are portrayed more and objectified more as compare to the men in outdoor advertising of Pakistan.

Table 4: Gender Differences in Signified of Gender Portrayal in Billboard Advertising of Punjab

		Gender of the Object		Total
		Male	Female	
Master themes of Signified	Descriptive	69	81	150
	Decorative	14	32	46
	Objectification	1	62	63
	Dominance	24	3	27
	Submissive	2	9	11
	Household	4	4	8
	Nurturing	0	9	9
	Professional	15	22	37
Total		129	222	351

$$X^2 = 79.090, df=7, p=.01$$

Table 5 presents that there are significant differences in the portrayal of male and female genders in outdoor advertising of KPK. Females are portrayed as sex commodities,

decorative pieces, and beautiful images in outdoor advertising of Punjab. While males are portrayed as dominant and authoritative. But on the contrary to Punjab, in KPK, females are more presented descriptively. Moreover, males are also presented as decorative and submissive in outdoor advertising of KPK. It reveals that there are significant differences in the male and female portrayal in outdoor advertising of KPK. Although, the dominant pattern of portrayal is similar to Punjab, however, it is slightly different from Punjab, in the theme of descriptive, decorative, and submissive. So, these findings support us to argue that cultural context also has an influence on gender portrayal in outdoor advertising as it was evident in previous studies (Berberick, 2010; Du Gay et al., 2013; M. u. H. Khan; Tsiantas & King, 2001; Waller & Shyan Fam, 2000; Yong Zhang & Neelankavil, 1997; Zimmerman & Dahlberg, 2008). Further, figure 1 and 2 support the argument that females are used for their beauty and glamour in outdoor advertising of Pakistan. On the other hand, male models are used to present in office dress code or dominate females (Figure 3 & 4). Hence, findings answer the RQ2 that in outdoor advertising of Pakistan, females are objectified and they are mostly used for their glamour and beauty. On the contrary, males are portrayed as dominant and in power.

Table 5: Gender Differences in Signified of Gender Portrayal in Billboard Advertising of KPK

		Gender of the Object		Total
		Male	Female	
Master themes of Signified	Descriptive	54	93	147
	Decorative	10	32	42
	Objectification	1	45	46
	Dominance	14	0	14
	Submissive	10	3	13
	Household	3	5	8
	Nurturing	2	24	26
	Professional	5	2	7
Total		99	204	303

$$X^2=74.714, df=7, p=.01$$

Conclusion and Recommendations

In the present study we found that female models are portrayed more as compare to the male models in outdoor advertising of both provinces; Punjab and KPK. Although, the dominant pattern of gender portrayal in advertisements of KPK is similar to Punjab, however, it is slightly different from Punjab, In KPK, males are also portrayed as submissive. Females are more associated with nurturing roles as compared to Punjab. Hence, it is concluded that in outdoor advertising of Pakistan, females are objectified and they are mostly used for their glamour and beauty. On the contrary, males are portrayed as dominant and in power. Therefore, the following recommendations are provided.

- 1) There is no government body to formulate and monitor the gender portrayal in outdoor advertising in Pakistan. The government should work for legislation and monitoring gender issues in outdoor advertising.
- 2) NGOs and gender rights activists should perform their role to create awareness about gender equality and equity among the advertisers and public.
- 3) Females' body images and glamour should be minimized in outdoor advertising.
- 4) There should be a code of conduct for advertisers about the gender policy. For this purpose, researchers and academicians should be engaged.

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