

Islamic Values and Representation of Gender in Television Advertisements of Pakistan: A Semiotic Analysis during Holy Month of Ramadan

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Abstract

This study explores the representation of gender and Islamic values in Pakistani television advertisements during Holy month of Ramadan 2018 where eight advertisements on aired on Pakistani television channels Geo Entertainment, ARY Digital and HUM TV were selected randomly and examined to address hypotheses (H1) True Islamic values are not depicted through advertisements defining Pakistani and Islamic culture. (H2) The advertisements presented are no more Islamic values oriented and are representation of a capitalist class. Both the hypotheses were approved. Semiotic analysis method was employed to examine the advertisements which were selected in the month of May-June 2018 to analyse the gender role, Islamic values and the messages based on the Islamic teachings and values. Lemon Max Bar, Meezan Cooking Oil, Coca Cola bottle of change, Rafhan Custard, Pepsi and Lays, Safeguard, Tarang Tea Whitener, Tapal Danedar for analysis. The Islamic values and gender representation was examined which concluded that the females in the said advertisement are not true picture of an Islamic and traditional society and true family system is not clearly observed in the advertisements, sex role or gender discrimination is there, the advertisements are also not presenting Pakistani culture at all and Islamic values are not focused truly. More glamour is observed in the commercials. The messages are not true representation of the Islamic values based on the teachings of Islam in the light of Holy Quran and Sunnah.

Keywords: Television, Advertisements, Gender, Representation, Islamic Values

Introduction:

The media messages are having great importance and play a significant role when they are aimed to sell the product in the form of advertisement as they are having a role in shaping the life styles of the people across the world, the media messages particularly advertisement is a planned activity as the prime objective is to grab the attention of the people and sell the products. The recent century is the century of capitalism which helps to promote the economic system as well and a sound economic stem is linked with the strong media and advertisement as major focus is to sell more and more products and earn more profit.¹

This is creating lot of issues at both social and ethical levels as market economy is all to earn profit, the advertisements play a key tool to sell more and earn more but in Muslim countries this is issue of concern as the cultural and the religious values both are having strict obligations.² There are different attitudes of the people having different

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¹ Gillian Rice, "Islamic ethics and the implications for business," *Journal of business ethics* 18, no. 4 (1999), pp.345-358

² G. Chachula, H. Kucharski, A. Lubaś, K. Małachowska, and B. Martinovski, "The 16th NIC Conference on Intercultural Communication," *University of Borås, Sweden* (2009).

religious backgrounds and faiths as there are various studies which presents that the Muslims are having a different response and attitude over the advertisements as compared to the believers of the other religions.³ There are certain aspects like the religious and ethical values which are considered important by Muslims or media in an Islamic society which makes them unique as well. In the contemporary world the research to explore the linkage between the religion and advertisement has been increased as the world has been transformed into a global village and in this global age the media has become integral part of the states and religions as well.⁴ Islam being an important religion and having billions of believers across the world is being researched in comparison with rest of the religions in various contexts; moreover Islam is the fastest growing religion across the world as well.⁵

Muslims are having different opinions and attitudes towards advertisements as compared to the followers of other religions.⁶ While discussing the religion and advertising particularly Islam and advertisement the thing which must be kept in mind is the time period as the recent age is the age of a global culture where the multinational brands are transforming a global culture which became possible through advertisement given through media, it is creating a global culture decolorizing the cultural boundaries which to some extent is also referred as threat to the native culture and cultural values. Multinational branding through advertisement is presented which also refers as contradictory to the true Islamic values, the advertisement aired on Pakistani television channels also refers to the same conception that the anti-Islamic values are being promoted through television advertisements and an unfamiliar culture is being produced.

The key point of concern is the presentation of female in particular is questioned along with the message in the advertisement which is mostly referred as anti-Islamic projection. There is no doubt that the television advertisements are the best tool to promote and sell the products, the study is focused to understand and highlight that either television advertisements aired on the Pakistani television channels are having the religious values and the true Islamic values are kept in focus or they are presented without having focus over religion being an Islamic state like Pakistan. It is observed that the female is having prominent or prime focus in advertisements and are presented as a sex object to grab the attention of the viewers to sell the product.⁷ Television commercials are basically presented on the basis of culture and similar is with Pakistani culture where commercials represent the country in context of its norms, values, beliefs and religious mind-set as well. The presentation of gender images in the commercials help to understand the gender role within any society. In Muslim states particular in Pakistan the advertisements are not much influenced by religion and are rather influenced

³ Purnama, Fadhil Akbar, and Anya Safira, "Investigating Islamic advertising ethics: Perceptions of Indonesian Muslims," *Journal of Emerging Economies & Islamic Research* 5, no. 2 (2017).

⁴ Akram Abdul Cader, "Islamic challenges to advertising: a Saudi Arabian perspective," *Journal of Islamic Marketing* 6, no. 2 (2015), pp.166-187

⁵ Ahasanul Haque, Khaliq Ahmed, and Syeada Irfath Jahan, "Shariah observation: advertising practices of Bank Muamalat in Malaysia," *Journal of Islamic Marketing* 1, no. 1 (2010), pp.70-77

⁶ Paul Gibbs and Mustafa Ilkan, "The ethics of marketing in Islamic and Christian communities: Insights for global marketing," *Cross Cultural Management: An International Journal* 15, no. 2 (2008), pp.162-175

⁷ Shahzad Ali and Deebe Shahwar. "Men, women and TV Ads: The representation of men and women in the advertisements of Pakistani electronic media," *Journal of media and communication studies* 3, no. 4 (2011), pp.151-159

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by capitalism where women in particular are presented as sex appealing object.⁸

The study is an attempt to investigate either women are presented as a sex appealing object or they are given respect and importance as an important and respectable part of the society, moreover the television commercials aired on Pakistani television channels are having message and Islamic values or they are entirely influenced by the capitalist culture of capitalist class. The television advertisements are selected by using random sampling focusing on the advertisements where a religious aspect is witnessed, moreover the advertisements are mostly aired advertisements in Pakistani mainstream television channels during month of Holy Ramadan (May-June 2018). The dominance of the television commercials on the lives of people is always there and in a country like Pakistan it may be observed easily as television has become integral part of our lives. The study is focused to address the following objectives:

- To study the gender role in the advertisement.
- To study either any Islamic value presented or not in the advertisement.
- To study either advertisement is presented observing cultural values of Pakistan.

Research Questions:

- Q1. Are advertisements portrayed in a traditional or glamorous manner?
- Q2. Are the Islamic culture and values presented in the advertisements?
- Q3. Is the gender role defined clearly in advertisements?

Hypothesis:

H₁: True Islamic values are not depicted through advertisements defining Pakistani and Islamic culture.

H₂: The advertisements presented are no more Islamic values oriented and are representation of a capitalist class.

Literature Review:

Advertising is considered very important today to run the business of media organizations; it is important all over the world. Media is having a key role here to advertise the products on one hand but at the other end the success of business is based on strong, effective and successful advertisement strategy.⁹ A huge investment is involved in advertisement business as without strong media advertisement a businessman cannot get his product promoted in the market so advertisement is a must to grasp the attention of the consumers at both local and brand/multinational level.¹⁰ There are different conceptions regarding advertisements as the question is that is it ethical or not. In Islam Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) clearly said that "He who cheats is not one of us" so advertisement should be there to sale the product but cheating while advertising is unethical and non-Islamic act so, a lot of questions arise here that cheating in both

⁸ Adeel Bari and Rana Zamin Abbas, "Advertisement & Islam: A Muslim world perspective," *Australian Journal of Business and Management Research* 1, no. 6 (2011), pp.152-157

⁹ Abdus Abbasi, Waheed Akhter, and Sadia Umar, "Ethical issues in advertising in Pakistan: An Islamic perspective." (2011).

¹⁰ Mohammad Saeed, Zafar U. Ahmed, and Syeda-Masooda Mukhtar, "International marketing ethics from an Islamic perspective: A value-maximization approach," *Journal of Business Ethics* 32, no. 2 (2001), pp.127-142

material and non-material matters.¹¹ Products are sold out through exaggerated feature that is an unethical practice and comes under cheating. In various countries including Pakistan women is presented in advertisement as an object identifying her body and promoting glamour.¹²

Sexual appeals are in common in various Islamic countries including Pakistan.¹³ The use of sexual appeal is only to grab attention of consumers and to sale the product. In Pakistani advertisements the focus is on the beauty and the sex oriented thing rather traditional identity and a cultural look within an advertisement.¹⁴ Female is presented as an eye grabbing tool creating a gender imbalance as well, the presentation of women Pakistani commercials is not more than a product for sale which attracts the eye of customer at first sight.¹⁵ Yousaf & Shehzad (2013) deliberated television commercials as the spring of learning along with being a medium of knowledge for the purchaser. It acts as a model and creates psychological effects where literate consumers are less affected than illiterates. Knowledgeable viewers understand that commercials are not ultimate truth but just an incentive for selling so their behaviour is less influenced. It is observed that female is attributed as a beauty and sex object whereas professionalism is linked with men in the advertisements. The physical appearance of females is also considered as beauty where the female is presented as a sex object.¹⁶

In a country like Pakistan which is an ideological Islamic state having the strong religious norms, values and beliefs have defined separate roles and rights of both genders in the light of defined and true values of Islam, media is a representative of the society, culture, norms and the values along with defining the belief system of the country which is based on the Islamic values.¹⁷ In a Pakistani society Islamization is the most important thing and the veil in Pakistani society is having great importance as well.¹⁸ The Islamic system is having detailed and comprehensive guidelines providing full assistance and can play an integral role to present Islamic stance based on Islamic values.¹⁹ The true values based on ethical and Islamic principles is there where the exaggeration and un-ethical and unfair practices are forbidden along with the restrictions over sexual appeal while presenting advertisements following Islamic values. Truthfulness and promotion of

¹¹ A. al-Misri, "Reliance of the Travellers: a classic manual of Islamic sacred law (translated by Nuh Ha Mim Keller)." (1994).

¹² Adeel Bari and Rana Zamin Abbas, "Advertisement & Islam: A Muslim world perspective," *Australian Journal of Business and Management Research* 1, no. 6 (2011), pp.152-157

¹³ Abdus Abbasi, Waheed Akhter, and Sadia Umar, "Ethical issues in advertising in Pakistan: An Islamic perspective." (2011).

¹⁴ Moneeba Iftikhar and Mehwish Islam, "Construction of Female Identity in Pakistani Television Commercials (November, 2015-April, 2016): A Semiotic Analysis," *Pakistan Journal of Gender Studies* 25 (2017).

¹⁵ Zainab Kamran Mirza, "Male Gender Stereotypes in Pakistani Advertisements," *People: International Journal of Social Sciences* 2, no. 1 (2016).

¹⁶ Hazir Ullah, "The Objectification of Women in Television Advertisements in Pakistan" *FWU Journal of Social Sciences* 8, no. 2 (2014).

¹⁷ Husain Haqqani, "The role of Islam in Pakistan's future," *The Washington Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (2004), pp.83-96

¹⁸ Richard Kurin, "Islamization in Pakistan: The Sayyid and the Dancer," *Russia's Muslim Frontier: New Directions in Cross-Cultural Analysis*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press (1993).

¹⁹ Ahasanul Haque, Khaliq Ahmed, and Syeada Irfath Jahan, "Shariah observation: advertising practices of Bank Muamalat in Malaysia," *Journal of Islamic Marketing* 1, no. 1 (2010), pp.70-77

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Islamic thoughts and ideas is a key term to be identified while airing advertisements.²⁰

The malpractices using sexual, fear or emotional appeals should be forbidden while presenting advertisements on television.²¹

Theoretical Framework:

The study in hand is linked with the theory of orientalism by Edward Said, this theory is employed as it deals with the western thoughts about the lifestyle of the people, the art and the culture, the languages, values, norms and the living standards of the people particularly the Arabs or the Islamic states considering their non-lavished lifestyles, considering them backward and as an uncivilized nation. Western presents Arab women as a sex symbol with exotic belly dancing phenomena and all time focusing on their sexual appearance. So, the stereotypical images of women are there in the media all over particularly in Asia which is a harm to their identity as well, the identity misinterpretation by media is largely observed as the real time picture of the women by said region are mostly loyal and submissive. The stereotypes are a danger to the true identity of the women of the said regions.²² The theory addresses that how inaccuracy is being presented by the west showing the reality as well. The study is focused to present the gender and the ethical values in the light of Islam in the television commercials. It addresses the commercials and the presentation of Islamic values in the commercials, as at present gender relations that are not close to the reality and creating false gender identity that the world perceives as real at one end or natural at the other.

Research Methodology:

The employed methodology for the study is semiotic analysis as the major focus is to study the presentation of gender in the advertisements along with the examination of the messages presented in the advertisements that either the cultural and Islamic values are considered in the advertisements on aired in major Pakistani television channels during the Holy month of Ramadan May-June, 2018. The study is a qualitative investigation using semiotic analysis technique of the selected commercials during the said time period.

The key focus is to examine the language, dressing, interaction of the characters, background and most importantly the message given in the commercials. The key focus is to examine the cultural and religious aspects/messages given in the selected commercials. The channels are selected according to the top ratings of the channels as ARY Digital, Geo Entertainment and HUM TV were among top rated channels during the said time period. The following commercials were mostly on aired and viewed by the consumers/viewers.

For the current study the following ads are selected in the Holy month of Ramadan, May-June 2018 to analyse the gender role, Islamic values and the messages based on the Islamic teachings and values. Lemon Max Bar, Meezan Cooking Oil, Coca

²⁰ Munazza Saeed, and Aysha Karamat Baig, "Islamic Shari'ah-compliant marketing," *International Journal of Social Entrepreneurship and Innovation* 2 2, no. 2 (2013), pp.166-178

²¹ Mohammad, Saeed Zafar U. Ahmed, and Syeda-Masooda Mukhtar, "International marketing ethics from an Islamic perspective: A value-maximization approach," *Journal of Business Ethics* 32, no. 2 (2001), pp.127-142

²² Stuart Hall, ed. *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. Vol. 2. Sage, 1997.

Cola bottle of change, Rafhan Custard, Pepsi and Lays, Safeguard, Tarang Tea Whitener, Tapal Danedar are selected for analysis. Semiotic analysis of the said advertisements is presented as follows.

TVC 1: Lemon Max Long Bar:

The commercial is of a dish wash bar Lemon Max where a female is washing dishes and singing and dancing along. Meanwhile she is washing the dishes the male partner comes to the kitchen where his female partner is washing dishes while singing, the male partner also starts dancing and singing along. The female model is presented as a sex-role where her body and physical parts are given prominence. The entry of male partner is useless here and is used only to focus on the female gender making her more prominent. The capitalist ideas are truly observed as the major role of capitalist class is to sale their products and here the gender is used in more prominent manner just to make it appealing for consumers. Non-Islamic stance is presented in the commercial.

TVC 2: Meezan Cooking Oil:

In the commercial a family is gathered for Sehr during month of Ramadan, the son asks her old mother to make Poorian for them, mother who is suffering from short memory commits to get them prepare at Aftaar but she gets busy in a phone call and later on forgets to prepare Poorian whereas her daughter in law remembers and prepare Poorian for family. At Aftaar family is served by the required dish, here the son praises her mother but as she starts speaking and denying that she has not prepared, her daughter in law speaks immediately that when she is going to train her for making Poori. Here, daughter in law keeps the Islamic traditions in mind and keep respect of the old lady who is her mother in law. The message is that the true family value system is there which is ensuring the respect and love among relations. Meezan (Balance) among relations is there and everything in Meezan (Balance) seems good. The females in the advertisement are true picture of an Islamic and traditional society and true family system is observed in the advertisement where sex role is also there as there was no scarf, covered head of the females in the advertisement which is not true representative of norms and values of Pakistani society and culture.

TVC 3: Coca Cola Bottle of Change:

The advertisement is based on cold drink Coca Cola under slogan Bottle of Change where donation was gathered for Edhi Foundation (A charity organization) from Pakistan. The donations gathered in bottles by the people for Edhi Organizations were doubled of the collected amount by Coca Cola. Representation was there from all provinces of Pakistan where the young boys and girls are collecting donations, the slogan was the collection of Eidi with Edhi Foundation. True values of service to mankind were observed in the advertisement. Gender representation was equal and but the dressing presents non-Islamic values where the gender role particularly females' physical representation is focus in the advertisement.

TVC 4: Rafhan Custard:

The advertisement is based on the developing fasting habit among children where a young girl intends to keep fast. Initially she keeps half fast and later on she keeps fast for whole day where she observes here family particularly her mother, she helps her mother in preparing Aftaar cooking Rafhan Custard. Message is the love and affection among the relations with sweetness of love. Rafhan Ramadan is related to bond of sweetness in advertisement. Gender representation was equal, the female dressing and presentation was sober at first glance but there was no scarf, covered head of the females

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in the advertisement which is not true representative of norms and values of Pakistani society and Islamic culture.

TVC 5: Pepsi & Lays:

In the commercial a boy named Asim is going outside with friends meanwhile he receives a call from his mother who asks him to come home for Aftaar but he denies saying that he will be eating Aftaar outside. Meanwhile they go a friends' place to seek his company but there Asim witnessed that entire family is gathered as their young boy is having his first fast so Asim returns back without taking their friend Imran. He asks his friends to leave Imran and go to bring Pepsi and Lays for Aftaar while his friends are standing away from him, at same time he thinks of his family waiting at Aftaar and runs to his home leaving his friends outside. He enters where his family is gathered around the table waiting for Aftaar time, while entering in home with Pepsi and lays he says some things looks nice together. He points out towards two things one the family is gathered and it seems good while the other is Pepsi and lays which seems good together. In the add a true economic point of view is presented or capitalist thoughts are there on one end and at the other end the family members are shown where females are not having scarf or not covering their heads at time of Aftaar which is non-Islamic ideology. In the commercial a capitalist ideology is presented at all by presenting an Islamic event of fast and Aftaar, negating the true Islamic values and norms of Pakistani society.

TVC 6: Safeguard:

The commercial is fun oriented with the theme where children are playing in the lawn with mud and dirt all around where three boys and one girl are playing. It is an advertisement of the antibacterial hand-wash intended to promote confidence of the children to play while fighting with germs through antibacterial hand-wash. The mother is standing in the lawn making video of the kids playing while the grandmother is asking her to stop them from playing in the mud and dirt. The gender representation analysis shows that one little girl is playing in the garden while the other three kids are boys. The boy is more active and leading the other kids while the girl is again submissive. The mother is wearing traditional Pakistan dress that is shalwar kameez but she is not wearing dupatta that is not according to the Islamic values. The grandmother is weaving something that is another traditional role of the women showing women in the home while the men are probably away and have no attention towards the kids playing.

TVC 7: Tarang Tea Whitener:

In the commercial a tea whitener is being advertised where a housewife is serving a cup of tea to her life partner and soon after this they start dancing, the parents come to the place and they feel happy over this. Later on in a family event like Mehndi same things repeat where dance is there. The entire commercial is presenting anti-Islam stance as the presentation of commercial is against the Islamic values in every aspect including dressing, family values and the overall message is leading towards destruction of the societal values. Sex-role is there where gender is used to attract and appeal sexually.

TVC 8: Tapal Danedar:

The advertisement with the setting of a modern home and the targeted area is the counter kitchen of the home. It is a well decorated and modern, furnished home showing an elite class family with husband, wife and a daughter. The wife is going to job again after three years and she is a little confused. The husband makes tea for her to give her

confidence. The camera angle focused on the nail paints of the woman and the beautiful heels again shows the beauty of the woman and presented her in stereotypical way of objectification. The wife is wearing formal eastern dress having no cultural harmony with Pakistani-Islamic culture. She has no dupatta or Islamic dress. The gender relation depicted in the advertisement is also contradictory as husband is holding the daughter in his lap and making tea; while wife is ready for the office.

Evaluation and Conclusion:

The focus of the study in hand was to examine the presentation of the television commercials during May-June 2018 that either the selected commercials were message oriented on one hand and full of sexual representation of females on the other hand negating the conception that female in Pakistani advertisements and Islamic countries are presented as a sex role or just glamour is being presented in Pakistani television channels. The advertisements presented the true values of Pakistani society based on equality, respect and strong family system. The advertisements presented true cultural and moral values keeping the norms and values of Pakistani society in mind. The commercials show that these are well researched and well presented. The female representation in the advertisements is good enough to show strong family and societal bonding based on the teachings of Islam. The women are presented as a respectful and most important part of the Islamic and Pakistani society where they are given respect and are having great moral character and presence.

The clothing and physical appearance of the women is not according to our cultural values and there is more glamour or female representation as a sex-role as claimed by the west. The semiotic relationship is established here as an ideology that makes use of signs to convey its message.²³ The equality of masculine and feminine is there negating the overall dominance of men in the commercials but females are presented mostly in negative manner. There are defined roles of both genders and are well represented in the advertisements where females are not presented as a respected part of the society. It also presents that it is the women's job to take care of the household as well as to look appealing for the man and looking after the family. Moreover, the protection of female in house is there but the dressing is controversial and her role is above all stereotypical conceptions as presented and claimed by most of the people particularly in west. The women are an important part of the Islamic society and culture that deserve respect rather than presentation as a sex-role in media but women are presented as a sex-role in the commercials analysed.

The findings of the study show that the advertisements are presented in a traditional manner rather a glamorous manner (Q1). The Islamic culture and values are presented in the selected advertisements (Q2). Gender role is clearly defined as an important family and society member who deserve respect rather presentation as a sex-role (Q3). H1 which addresses True Islamic values are not depicted through advertisements defining Pakistani and Islamic culture is approved. Similarly, H2 which addresses the advertisements presented are no more Islamic values oriented and are representation of a capitalist class is approved.

There is more glamour and capitalist interest presented in the commercials than a true Islamic culture. It may be concluded that the females in the advertisement are not true picture of an Islamic and traditional society on one end but on the other end true

²³ Daniel Chandler, "Semiotics for beginners," (1994).

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family system is depicted in few advertisements. Sex role or gender discrimination is also there, the commercials are not presenting Pakistani culture and Islamic values. A negative and unrespectable gender role in Pakistani advertisements is presented in the selected advertisements. More glamour is observed in the commercials. The messages are not true representation of the Islamic values based on the teachings of Islam in the light of Holy Quran and Sunnah.