

## **Social Neuroscience Approach of Persuasion in Visual Communication(s): A Qualitative Content Analysis of Female Representations in Pakistani Advertisements**

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The present study discusses the social persuasion advertisers use to implicitly communicate society's sociocultural norms through visual communication in advertisements, specifically in Pakistan. For instance, the research explores how advertisers, as cultural brokers, represent women by challenging established sociocultural norms by utilising persuasive strategies through visual communication in Pakistani ads. The research comes under the qualitative content analysis paradigm; the data were collected, identified, interpreted, and analysed, focusing on the cultural values/norms represented through women's dressing and sexually devised postures in Pakistani society. Moreover, the research employed the constant comparison method for the data analysis. Findings indicate that Pakistani advertisers represent women mainly in a stereotypical manner. However, when they deviate from representing her in a non-stereotypical way, they go far beyond the set norms to persuade them quickly. For instance, they found representing women as a posture of sexual appeal to persuade ordinary people's minds by employing social neuro-persuasion challenging the Pakistani established sociocultural beliefs, norms, or values. These advertisers seem to deviate from traditional ideologies because they minutely know the sensual, desirous nature of most Pakistani men. Henceforth, they represent women as an alluring tool of persuasion.

**Keywords:** social neuro-persuasive communication, visual communication, cultural representation of women, media and advertisement in Pakistan, Pakistani cultural norms, Turkish culture

The process of advertising for marketing is frequently conceptualised as a competition for the attention of consumers. In today's competitive and fast-paced business environment, the primary goal of advertising a product is to attract customers; however, the question remains to what extent one is willing to stoop to achieve this fleeting attraction. Would it be morally acceptable to degrade women by portraying them in an advertisement as sexual objects to attract additional attention to the product being sold? That is a serious concern. The use of overt sexual appeal has significantly increased in advertising, even though it is not universally accepted and is looked down upon by many people. It is believed that the nurturing mother and the alluring seductress are two common stereotypes used in advertisements (henceforth ads) that use women's manifestation (Holtzhausen, 2010).

The study investigates the neuro-persuasive techniques advertisers use in Pakistani ads' visual communication(s) to project female representation that influences sociocultural or religious values (Kilbourne, 2012). Ideologically, Pakistan is considered an Islamic (majority uni-religious) state (Gabriel, 2021), and primarily, its national, cultural, and social values revolve around traditional/conventional Islamic guidance. For instance, although various social groups exist in Pakistan, Muslims are the majority (Shah and Amjad, 2011 for details). The Muslim majority can be divided into sub-groups possessing distinctive social and religious values. For example, the rightist Muslim group (a realist) keeps traditional/conventional Islamic status (Naz et al., 2013). The middle class, which follows conventional Islamic values, plays a mediator role in every sphere of life (Maqsood, 2017), while the lower class, which is Muslim-majority, follows Islamic values. In contrast, the liberal-elite<sup>1</sup> class concerns do not follow traditional/conventional Islamic values (Cheema, 2018).

Moreover, there are also non-Muslim minorities, but they also have a flexible ideology and practice while reflecting national (conventional) Islamic culture (Akhter, 2020). Moreover, in the context of communication(s), the media makes its way to get benefits from the ambiguity that exists in the minds of people of different classes (Grau & Zotos, 2016; Daalmans et al., 2017; Ullah & Jan, 2021). The media also intends to represent liberality and, therefore, re/constructs (visual) representations of women differently from society's expectations concerning the socio-religious aspect. All this diversity is due to the upcoming changes in the conventional era regarding modernity.

Additionally, the ads incorporate visual stimuli containing social neuro-persuasive communication, making the women (in ads) controversial for orthodox Muslims, middle class, lower class, and non-Muslim minorities. In Pakistan, rightist Islamic religious values and norms contribute significantly to every sphere of life, influencing electronic and print media persuasively. Therefore, the advertisers (the writers or visual directors) would mostly need to collocate their *Personal (stimulus)*, making them tangible and contrastable. It aligns with Pakistani culture in advertising communication.

During the last two decades, the Pakistani entertainment media industry utilised a significant foreign component, i.e., content, workforce, technology, and locations (see Ahmed, 2015 for more details), to meet the global concept of modernisation. Initially, Indian content (drama) penetrated Pakistani media, but after the ban on Indian content on Pakistani television (see Baloch, 2018; Malik, 2019 for more details), Turkish drama came to fill the gap progressively after 2012, fulfilling the audience's requirement. The Turkish drama industry gradually gained a stronghold in Pakistani media in 2019-2021 due to the remarkable success of *Dirilis Ertugrul*<sup>2</sup>. Due to the captivating content, the plot construction of the story of the previously mentioned Turkish drama attracted the audience by introducing the similarities in the religious background of both countries. It becomes evident why the Turkish drama industry made its strong entry into the Pakistani media industry possible.

Consequently, Pakistani advertisers started casting the actors from the prior-mentioned series in Pakistani advertisements (see Ghafoor, 2020 for more details). Resultantly, there revealed a conflict when the Pakistani advertisers acted as cultural brokers (Malefyf & Moeran, 2020) and tried to bring global modernity into their local culture through ads. For instance, Turkish actress

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<sup>2</sup> *Diriliş: Ertuğrul* (transl. Resurrection: Ertuğrul), is a Turkish historical fiction and adventure television series. The show is set in the 13th century and centers around the life of Ertuğrul, the father of Osman I (the founder of the Ottoman Empire).

Esra Bilgic, who played the role of Halime Sultan (the female protagonist) in the series, appeared in various Pakistani television ads. On the one hand, she gained popularity amongst the Pakistani audience due to her stereotypical/traditional visual appearance representing the Seljuk warrior princess –the quintessential ‘Islamic’ heroine (Rehman, 2020). On the other hand, her (visual) representation in the ad(s) (see Figure 1 in the Analysis section) seemed to mismatch the image that was built in the minds of the Pakistani audience (see Rehman, 2020 for more details). For instance, her visual representation in the Ertugrul series – with traditional headgear and headdress was traditional. Nevertheless, the ad(s) seemed the opposite (see Figure 1 and Figure 2 in the findings section).

Whereas Turkey’s present-day dressing culture concerns it, it appears distinctive from Pakistan, especially in the media. Moreover, it can be observed in urban and non-urban cultures. In urban culture, most women follow modernity by wearing shorts, short trousers, tight jeans, heavy make-up, and revealing dresses (Özcan and Turunç, 2011) that also boldly reveal women’s cleavage in the urban areas. Still, in non-urban areas, women wear their traditional dresses (Koç & Koca, 2011). While in Pakistan, in urban areas, tight jeans with a long shirt would be acceptable to some extent. Still, in urban/rural regions, body-revealing dresses and women’s cleavage-showing dresses would be considered to negate cultural and religious contrastable, tangible or visual stimuli definitions – hence, may not be acceptable in the national rightist cultural values and norms. It reasons that nationwide, *stimulable* societal, cultural, or religious restrictions would never permit a non-stereotypical representation of women in media, specifically in visual communication(s). Hence, in any occupational persuasive (Petty & Cacioppo et al., 2018) influence (Romanova & Smirnova, 2019), the persuader would need to know involvement feelings and beliefs (Harkins et al., 2017) and the favourable/adverse effects of the persuasion attitudes, cognitions, or behaviours (Cialdini & Griskevicius, 2010; Harkins et al., 2017) of the audience, i.e., consumers in the present case.

At the same time, the representation of the male gender focuses on their authoritative nature by playing the dominant roles, i.e., working in offices and not being confined to beauty but being presented through power (Mirza, 2016). Hence, it can be said that women are historically represented as typical housewives, and this is the only way to restrict them in their roles through similar ads (Jamil, 2018). Similarly, advertisements play a specific and vital role in persuasion in any field, especially in social and cultural life.

### **Objectives**

Having the evidence of leading non-stereotypical and stereotypical advertisements in Pakistan, it becomes necessary to how the visual representation of female models is used to conceptualise how advertisements are made in the present. However, more extensive studies that use the persuasive theoretical lens must be conducted to explore how visual persuasion is imposed through female models in advertisements. Therefore, this study aims to achieve the following:

- To examine the (visual) representation of female models in Pakistani ads by advertisers against sociocultural norms.
- To investigate the ideologies that advertisers promote through non-stereotypical elements by utilising persuasive strategies involving foreign female models
- To understand the significant role of persuasive strategies in changing the established ideologies of society by employing the conceptual model of social neuro-persuasion.

### **Significance**

The present research is significant on a social and cultural level. It lays out the conceptual enlightened national values and norms about women’s visual representation in media, specifically ads. It is an explorative topic for academicians and practitioners (Furnham & Paltzer, 2009).

Politically, the description of women's (visual) image in television ads creates a strong perception of women's duties. For instance, in the case of traditional Islamic values, women are assigned the household and some other specific responsibilities related to their marital life (Ullah & Khan, 2014). However, this research will evaluate the conventional and non-conventional ads on Pakistani television channels. Advertisers generally persuade the audience using visual, semiotic, and textual means to convey their messages (Kilbourne, 2012), contributing to inequality and patriarchy in Pakistan. This study will also examine how the production and construction of the doctrine of 'perfect' and 'ideal' social roles occur through advertisements (Moorthi et al., 2014). This phenomenon of the representation of women incorporating social neuro-persuasion leads this research to a new qualitative conceptual approach to analysing the data. To the best of our knowledge, the framework of social neuro-persuasion has never been employed in television advertisements for sociocultural and visual ideological representation, specifically on Pakistani television and print media ads. The objectives/significance stated above would lead to seeking answers to the following questions.

- How do the advertisers try to represent women against/favour the established sociocultural representation?
- What kind of ideology do advertisers promote by employing persuasive strategies of featuring foreign female models in Pakistani ads?
- What significant role do persuasive strategies play in changing the established ideologies of society?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The present research employed conceptual, social, and neuro-persuasive elements (Morin & Renvoise, 2018) to manifest permanent effects on the spectators' minds. For instance, Morin and Renvoise (2018) suggested that six aspects of stimuli and responses should be studied in any persuasive communication between a sender and a receiver and vice versa. The present research aims to employ these stimulating elements in the sociocultural scenario. The advertisement's aspects evoke the spectators' (favourable or unfavourable) thoughts connected directly with advertisers (Hoeken et al., 2020). Six stimuli persuasive strategies highlight the intentions of the advertisers who prepare ads to get specific advantages (Kilbourne, 2012). Moreover, stimuli help analyse the aspects represented in Pakistani ads in Pakistani social and cultural background to highlight the advertisers' agendas. The stimuli model (a: Personal, b: Contrastable, c: Tangible, d: Memorable, e: Visual, f: Emotional) discussed and explained below has been adapted and modified from the work of Morin and Renvoise (2018) as follows:

A) Personal stimulus helps the communicator and the audience understand mutual communicative pre-established shared personal ideologies. To survive their ideologies, the communicator uses selective language comprising specific communication patterns for effective persuasion while leading society (Lorusso, 2017; Feinberg & Willer, 2019). Their primary purpose is to make the audience realise they are following the right path, which would benefit them (Narvaez, 2007). Although conflicts of interest may arise, the audience feels positive change and societal protection (Panksepp, 2004; Morin & Renvoise, 2018).

B) The Contrastable element refers to the two extremes: pain and pleasure, black and white, good and evil, and quality differences (stereotypical vs non-stereotypical in the present case). In this strategy, comparing specific and prominent features seems beneficial for the orator and the viewer. If an orator has the capacity and efficiency to highlight the notable, comparative, and convincing aspects of his message, he will be more successful in his mission (Beard, 2013). While communicating their message (through ads) or contrasting their performance with others, they bring the contrastive objects (Lin & Tsai, 2006; El-Dali, 2019) or ideology and solve the problem.

C) The Tangible element is about the social validation, credibility of a point, and its existing nature, and the advertisers often offer reliable anti or non-anti directions to an advertisement in social, cultural, or religious contexts (Malefyt & Moeran, 2020), hence, to make information processing easy (Laham et al., 2012; Miele et al., 2011).

D) The visual element(stimulus) plays an initial, vital, and influential role in any visual advertisement, especially with the involvement of a woman as a model. In this case, the domination of visual stimulus increases over any other stimuli processing (Morin & Renvoisé, 2018); hence, it controls the receiver's mind with the help of auditory stimuli *enhancing visual processes* (Li et al., 2017). Therefore, the advertiser tries to visualise a situation reflecting a picturesque aspect. It also persuades the audience more effectively as they can vividly envision a situation or event. E) memorability is a stimulus-driven effect (Goetschalckx et al., 2018); the memorable element comprises the ad's distinctive nature in which specific features of the product are described to make it unique and long-lasting (Mohsenzadeh et al., 2019). F) The mentioned stimuli ultimately activate the emotional stimulus of the overall situations (Yuan et al., 2019), which is closely relevant to raw human emotions, passions, and emotional triggers (see Morin and Renvoise, 2018, p. 77-110 for details). Hence, social neuro-persuasion directly derives the elements from their connection to the human brain.

Previous research has employed several persuasive strategies in recent studies analysing political speeches in the socio-political scenario. Nonetheless, the present research has adapted and modified the previously used frameworks of persuasion (see Iqbal et al., 2020; Sibtain et al., 2020 for details), merging with the current framework of Morin and Renvoise (2018), naming it neuro-persuasion in exploring the persuasive strategies used in advertising media for the attraction of the common public and consumer. However, the previous research generally employed traditional persuasion using traditional rhetorical devices – Ethos, Logos, and Pathos that typically dealt with the aspects of the language of the actor (Higgin & Walker, 2012; Ting, 2018; Sibtain et al., 2020) to attract/tempt the audience. However, these strategies could change the listeners' minds to get social and political advantages. From this perspective, this tactic could not convince the audience fully due to the quick process of raising emotions.

### **Literature Review**

Regarding the portrayal of women's roles, her depiction in ads depends on stereotypical thoughts delineating women's primary position in society (Furnham & Paltzer, 2009; Frith & Mueller, 2003; Hussain et al., 2014). Whereas women in Pakistani ads are concerned, they are restricted to stereotypical activities like being taken as an object of attraction because of their physical (visual) appearance. Moreover, their depiction can be observed in household work, supporting men, or depending upon men (Kabi, 2015; Ali & Shahwar, 2011). Whenever an ad about a woman is concerned, she mainly appears in stereotypical ads such as cooking oil, washing powder or preparing a meal for her family (Azin & Tabrizi, 2015). The portrayal of both gender in advertisements gives rise primarily to "gender stereotypes attitudes" (Craig, 2018) because it allows the male members of society to interpret an idea of how women could or could not be represented in the ads as they are here to satisfy men's ordinary life's objectives (Ashfaq & Shafiq, 2018). Instead of helping women fight against gender discrimination, the media intends to show women remorselessly in a biased sense (Afshan, 2014).

The advertisements try to attract consumers' minds by showing the products' advantages in an exclusive style and expressing their quality preference to get the spectators' attention. The advertisers' primary purpose is to get a proper return on their capital to invest in their product, influencing the minds (Kilbourne, 2012). Nevertheless, it is also a fact that not all advertisements can attract or persuade customers because they may feel irritated due to their needs and interests,

i.e., what they need and what they do not. Therefore, most people do not respond to the advertisers' messages and avoid the circumstances surrounding them.

Furthermore, while advertisers aim to captivate audiences by showcasing product advantages in unique ways, psychologically persuasive strategies can sometimes alienate consumers (Kilbourne, 2012; Verlegh et al., 2015). Notably, the failure to consider the diverse roles of women, including modern working women, in advertisements might lead to an oversight of a significant consumer segment's interests and preferences. Incorporating a broader representation of women's roles in advertising could enhance the effectiveness of advertising strategies, resonating with a more diverse buying audience (Verlegh et al., 2015). In the past few years, many psychologically active and passive ways of communication have been introduced by observing the customers' moods and responses (Verlegh et al., 2015). These psychological ways significantly affect ordinary customers' interests, and thence, they sometimes avoid ads. Hence, business people seem successful through such psychologically persuasive strategies (Verlegh et al., 2015).

### **Methodological Approaches Used in Literature**

The scholarly discourse on gender stereotypes in advertising spans various studies, each illuminating the evolving portrayal of women while concurrently perpetuating stereotypical representations. Zotos and Tsihla (2014) meticulously outline the historical evolution of female stereotypes in print advertisements, emphasising the necessity for a comprehensive understanding of these stereotypes within a sociocultural framework. Plakoyiannaki and Zotos (2009) contribute by focusing on the frequency of female role portrayals in U.K. magazines, referencing the importance of comparative analyses across diverse methodologies to contextualise findings within a global theoretical framework. Veloso et al. (2021) delve into the historical contexts of Brazilian print advertising, advocating for comparative analyses of methodologies and theoretical perspectives, particularly referencing institutional theory and societal developments, to elucidate the impact on gendered ads. They stress the need to evaluate how differing theoretical frameworks affect interpretations across cultural contexts. Heathy (2020) critically examines contemporary trends in women's media representation, urging comparative analyses of critical discourse methodologies employed globally, referencing social semiotics and critical discourse analysis, to discern nuanced shifts in gender portrayals. Alkan (2016) and Luo (2022) explore women's cultural representation in advertising, advocating for cross-cultural comparative analyses to delineate varying theoretical perspectives such as semiotic analysis and critical discourse analysis utilised in distinct cultural settings. While these studies offer profound insights into gender stereotypes in advertising, a notable gap in the discussion section regarding comparative analyses of methodologies and the concurrent theoretical frameworks utilised, essential for a more comprehensive understanding across varied cultural and theoretical landscapes, remains. Also, a gap focuses on women's representation in advertisements in Pakistani culture. Accordingly, the following methodology was developed for the study.

### **Methods**

The present methodology is grounded on Aslam et al.'s (2023) and Kibiswa (2019) conceptual methods. As qualitative social sciences researchers, it was decided to utilise this conceptual model of persuasion in the media advertising field. The idea of employing this model in advertisements came to hand while watching an ad comprising the protagonist (Halima Sultan) of the famous (in Pakistan) 'Ertugrul' series on television. Consequently, it was observed how advertisers persuade their audience by utilising specific persuasive tools, including or hiring current celebrities, and how they induce the visual representations that the stars depict through the mainstream media. Surprisingly, it was observed that the representations of celebrities, specifically females, varied in dramatic and advertisement media.

The directed qualitative content analysis (DQCA) method, which has been used under the qualitative research paradigm, has been modified for the current context by Assarroudi et al., 2018. For instance, the images were the unit of analysis in the present case (Graneheim et al., 2017). Categories emerged based on prior research and theory (Mayring, 2000; 2014) to obtain the data's relevant meaning (Elo et al., 2014), specifically in advertisements (Chand & Chaudhary, 2012). Such categories are non-stereotypical representations of women and stereotypical representations of women. To increase inter-coder reliability (Vaismoradi et al., 2013) for the current study, which involved multiple researchers, each researcher interdependently encoded the data and discussed the challenges of decreasing the disparities (Assarroudi et al., 2018). Following the talks among the authors, categories were allocated, and anchoring samples were chosen from the meaning units. The final data analysis phase involved extracting meaning units from the examined content centred on the study's objectives and categorisation matrix (Mayring, 2014).

### **Directed Qualitative Content Analysis (DQCA)**

This paper utilised qualitative content analysis (DQCA) to analyse the image data using a systematic coding sheet to collect data by seeing and decoding it (Rasool et al., 2022; Assarraudi et al., 2018). It examined data primarily from the viewpoint of communication, which may be regarded as a subset of data (Kibiswa, 2019; Mayring, 2000). Enhancing, testing and utilising Qualitative Content Analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008) further created categories and patterns for data processing (Assarroudi et al., 2018; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Elo & Kyngäs; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). In the present case, the visual communication by the advertisers, specifically in the context of Pakistani society's cultural values, employed Directed QCA interpreting image (visual) data to build the arguments and specific characteristics (Holsti, 1968). Hence, the research modified the adapted directed QCA from Assarroudi et al. (2018) for the present context as follows;

### **Sample Design**

The sample selection was designed to capture diverse advertisements that portray female representations in Pakistan using purposive sampling. The research employed a purposive sampling technique, leveraging the expertise gained in researching visual communication tailored explicitly for this study. Ads were selected based on several criteria aligned with the study's objectives. Firstly, a comprehensive sampling strategy was devised, targeting a mix of traditional and contemporary media sources, including television commercials, print media, and digital platforms. To ensure depth and relevance, key informants, as Elo et al. (2014) suggested, were consulted to identify information-rich images and video advertisements resonating with the central theme of challenging conventional gender roles in Pakistani advertising.

Furthermore, the selection process prioritised advertisements that explicitly addressed or subtly hinted at issues central to the study's purpose. This entailed an in-depth focus on how these ads targeted specific audiences within Pakistani society. Information-rich images and video ads were selected, focusing on the issues that keep the central importance of the purpose of the present study (Patton, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018) through purposive sampling (Coyne, 1997).

The process included a comprehensive examination of how these selected advertisements might subvert or reinforce conventional mindsets regarding female representations, recognising the multifaceted nature of cultural norms and the diverse interpretations within different societal segments.

### **Data collection process**

It was decided that manifest and latent contents were considered for analysis, guiding research's interpretations and posture of images (Elo & Kynga's, 2008), respectively, for deeper understanding by employing directed QCA (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Assarroudi et al. (2018) devised the development of an interview guide and transcribing interviews, respectively. However,

Aslam et al. (2023) conducted their research only by employing directed QCA on text without any interviews. So, the present research would also focus on the content (i.e., images' content). Based on the present research's objectives and questions, the present study developed a guide to extract images to anchor the main categories (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005); these categories were made depending on existing literature. For instance, the focus was on variations that may represent socio-demographics (in the context of cultural values in the present case) and distinctive characteristics (Sandelowski, 2010). For instance, the current research was delimited to the representations concerning visual communication linked with cultural values through the dressing of females in the ads. The study purposefully focused and transcribed the images/video ads that seemed to deviate from cultural values related to female dressing. These images often become controversial and face criticism. Therefore, the study selected those images that became controversial due to their appearance representing the sociocultural norms that negatively deviated from Pakistani society.

Moreover, employing the constant comparison technique (see Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009) to provide evidence of how advertisers positively represent cultural values through dressing, some relevant images and ads concerning cultural dressing are also included to understand both advertising techniques better. For instance, the advertisements appeared briefly on television or in newspapers. Therefore, advertisement data were collected from YouTube and uploaded by the advertisers or the other influencers (who provide reviews or criticism). The source links of selected advertisements have been provided in the references section.

Hence, the research focused on the cultural representation of women by advertisers through media television advertisements in Pakistan. The data were collected, identified, interpreted, and analysed, focusing on how cultural values were utilised in the representation(s). The image/video data were collected using the purposive sampling technique associated with the cultural values to express their associations with the culture, observing the visual acts (from video and image ads) and interpreting their symbolic meaning through interpretations (Chand & Chaudhary, 2012). Qualitative research depends on the nature of the research questions, which are appropriate to make sense of the association between phenomena and implications in a cultural context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2016).

### **Specifying the Unit of Analysis**

An organisation, classroom, individual, program, coded text, interview, transcript (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004; Assarraudi et al., 2018), or image could be the unit of the analysis (Short, 2019). The image was designated as the unit of analysis following the theoretical arguments of previous researchers (Aslam et al., 2023; Assarraudi et al., 2018).

### **Data Analysis Process**

The communicators' identity, the communication's locale, the nature of communication that would have been taking place, its purpose, and the time it occurred were all reviewed (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Assarraudi et al., 2018). For example, retrieved from the data, the meaning was linked to the research (Assarraudi et al., 2018; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Elo et al., 2014; Kyngäs, 2020).

The major categories for analysis were developed inductively using the existing study as a basis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Subcategories were objectively defined based on the connections between the current theoretical framework and past research (Mayring, 2000, 2014). For instance, objectively and precisely developed, challenging ideologies through persuasive strategies, challenging Pakistani cultural norms featuring foreign female models and representation of women against cultural norms, promoting ideologies, promoting Pakistani cultural norms featuring foreign female models, and representation of women in support of cultural norms.



Table 1:

*Coding Protocol (Description of coded variables)*

Variable	Description	Details
Action	The action of the model in the image	Posing not related to cultural values (anti-cultural dresses); Posing related to cultural values (e.g., wearing traditional dresses); Engaging with an advertisement (e.g., showing a product).
Objectification	Sexual objectification is present or not:	Posing in rather revealing clothing (absence or tightness of clothing); Posing in untraditional dress.
Focus	The focus of the image is on a specific body part:	Breasts; Buttocks; Abdominals; Arms; Legs

Adapted and modified from Belinska (2018)

The research outlined the primary categories and subcategories' coding criteria based on the coding schema by Smith and Sanderson (2015), Tiggemann and Zaccardo (2018) and (See Table 1) based on theoretical definitions (Mayring, 2014). The coding criteria establish a clear separation between the matrix's primary and subcategories, which may further increase the study's credibility. As a result, the theoretical definitions would be used to extract the theoretical coding rules. Samples were finally anchored to major categories and subcategories, emphasising the meaning units (Mayring, 2014). The data were analysed following the aims and categorisation matrix, reviewing the content summarising the meaning units (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004), and applying preliminary coding (Mayring, 2000, 2014) to the data as suggested in previous studies (Aslam et al., 2023; Assarroudi et al., 2018; Kibiswa, 2019).

Inductive derivation was used to organise and categorise the data, identify similarities and differences, and create relationships between general and major categories by constantly comparing subcategories (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). For instance, the research employed the constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Triana, 2019) for the data analysis. Possible meanings from visual representations were extracted, focusing on their relationships and differences (Cilliers & Spurrett, 1999) with the targeted culture. Different cultures keep different persuasive appeals in advertisements concentrating on their core dimensions, i.e., American advertisers tend to use individualism, while Koreans emphasise collectivistic attractions (Han, 1994). It was observed that advertisers often employ individualistic appeals in Pakistani advertisements to attract an audience which holds collectivist cultural buying behaviour (Miao et al., 2020). Therefore, the present study has drawn findings basing the analysis more open to the '*individualistic appeals*' in the lens of the said model, incorporating the 'collectivist appeals' to highlight the differences and relationship of visual representations with the Pakistani culture in the context of specific visual communication in ads. Theoretically, With the concern to highlight these cultural differences in the representations described above, a comparative textual analysis was determined as an appropriate method for the study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; Strauss, 1987).

## Results and Discussion

### Non-stereotypical Advertisements

In Figure 1, a Turkish protagonist of a recently popular series *Ertugrul*, which recently gained popularity in Pakistan and parts of the Muslim world, has been represented through an ad in which she portrays a non-stereotypical trend (see Jamil, 2018 for more details) apparently against the traditional cultural and social norms in Pakistan.



Figure 1 Mobile Ad (Source: BTSgang, 2020)

### Challenging ideologies through persuasive strategies

Through this ad, the advertiser intends to attract the common public by utilising women as a persuasion tool through media. The advertiser does not highlight mobile in the advertisement through a contrastive strategy, as can be seen in other ads. Instead, they intend to show the woman's body and style in the ad (Varghese & Kumar, 2020; Reichert & Carpenter, 2004). The primary purpose seems to be to attract the audience/viewers by producing a glamorous element. Using a 'tangible' stimulus that creates ease for the customer regarding decision making, the advertiser has tried to get an advantage in his business. The visual stimulus is the most effective persuasive strategy that persuades the viewers from a different angle, but this ad, instead of showing a product, manifests a woman's posture (Alam et al., 2019; Shartiely, 2005) (i.e., without dupatta or shawl on the head, the nakedness of arms, cleavage display, and alluring smile) against the traditional social and cultural norms of Pakistan. Although dupatta or shawl removal may be acceptable and limited to modern and liberal culture, chest cleavage display is prohibited due to Pakistani cultural norms. It may be a fact that some Pakistani individuals may consider it liberty when advertisers represent women's nakedness (Alam et al., 2019). Therefore, judging the Pakistani individuals' nature and getting financial advantages, the advertiser has intentionally displayed a woman's body, dress, and style by manipulating a woman's chastity (Varghese & Kumar, 2020). In the Pakistani male-dominated society, such fascination harms the social norms that guarantee people's dignity and grace (Agha et al., 2018). Through such ads, the advertiser raises the heart-touching emotions of the viewers through emotional stimulus. Arising emotions may be a successful product seller strategy because it is a tact that permanently influences the viewer's primal brain. However, it can be said that it is merely a personal touch of a persuasive strategy that highlights how a high-level personality, especially a woman, can influence the viewers' minds but go against the accepted norms set by the dominating male society (Agha et al., 2018). For instance, if the advertiser intends to promote cultural values, they would represent her with her protagonist's look (see Figure 2).



Figure 2 Protagonist of Ertugrul Series (Source: IMDB, 2014-2019)

### Challenging Pakistani cultural ideologies featuring foreign female models

It reveals that the advertiser consciously takes advantage of the woman's moderate style, which looks comparatively distinctive from Islamic cultural norms. So, it seems that the advertisers have purposefully shown her in a sexually attractive dress, which persuasively gets gazing attention from people, specifically men. When the exact depiction of the ad is seen in Pakistani culture, it shocks the audience because of the conflict found in Halima's (protagonist) personality ("Pakistani fans are", 2020).

While in the Turkish series Ertugrul, she wears a full-body and short-covering dress representing a woman's gentility and soberness according to the Islamic traditions (see Figure 2), but in the ad (Figure 1), she looks completely different from the personality depicted in the drama and seems going beyond the represented Turkish traditional and cultural values. The same ad also receives dislike in Pakistani culture due to its permanency and stability in its nature ("Ertugrul star Esra", 2020). In Pakistani culture, religion has a leading and vital role in people's life. Therefore, people do not seem ready to accept shows or ads that negate their culture or social values. In Figure 2, the same protagonist is portrayed differently: sobriety and gentleness are acceptable in any Islamic society. In this regard, advertising media plays a vital role in changing the masses' ideology according to industrialists' wish to sell their products at any cost, ignoring that women are not so free to expose their bodies openly in Islamic society. However, they do it just for their materialistic interests.

In the facts mentioned above, it can be observed that Turkish culture may vary slightly from Pakistani culture even then both countries have the same religion and social values to some extent (references). For instance, in the Turkish series 'Ertugrul,' she is represented just as a housewife, always assisting her family with chores and is bound to just domestic boundaries, obeys her husband, mother-in-law, and all other family members. She is not allowed to interfere with the matters associated with her husband or any other male affairs (Rehman, 2020). She is depicted as an obedient woman who cannot express herself or do anything according to her desire because she is a part of a typical patriarchal society unwilling to consider any woman equal to a man in status (see Figure 2). However, in the ad (Figure 1), she seems to expose her physical posture on the demand of media gentility exposed due to her lust for the money she gets from her exposure (Alam et al., 2020; Varghese & Kumar, 2020).

To some extent, advertising media is responsible for such types of acts. However, primarily women themselves desire to get change in this perspective, and they too want to get rid of the restrictions of religious, cultural, and social values because they think that to be restricted just in household work, their personality damaged, and they cannot grow properly (Rehan & Raza, 2017). While on the other hand, stereotypical elements never give women so much liberty, thinking that giving independence to women spoils society. They believe that women should remain under the men's domain, and the men decide what activities should be assigned to them (Amir-ud-Din & Abbas, 2020). Similarly, dominating male societies think that women are feeble, timid, and delicate and are unable to perform complex jobs; they should be given chances in the fields which suit them, such as cooking at home, washing, sewing, giving birth to babies, and their nurturing, and sweeping as well (Nasir et al., 2019). However, due to these bans and restrictions, women now feel deprived of their fundamental rights (Hadi, 2017)—women's objectification and representation against sociocultural norms.

Women may be an “object” of beautification; however, in this ad (Figure 3), the woman herself seems to be objectified as a beauty product. For instance, advertising media represents her (own wish) in this ad (Figure 3) as an object that attracts society's gaze, making a smartphone ad poster more attractive.



Figure 3 Jazz Smartphone ad (Source: Ibrahim, 2017)

The model girl (Figure 3), shown in this Jazz ad, has fully exposed her body figure in an attractive way that gets the viewers' full lusty attention and may not be acceptable stereotypically. This act of attraction may be known as a persuasive(contrastive) strategy to attract most men. Watching such a sexual exposure of a woman through such an ad, most men, not all, might be tempted and consider it the proper action of the woman in the display. They move to buy the attractive product display, becoming a source of help for the advertiser in selling their product.

Nonetheless, there might also be a big part of the society that dislikes such ads assuming these acts (represented in such seductive ads) unsuitable because such portrayals may corrupt the whole ideological, religious, social, and cultural beliefs primarily related to women's chastity. Due to these conflicts, a clash arises between the groups – liberal-elite and rightist (Naz et al., 2013; Cheema, 2018; Maqsood, 2017). These conflicts of interest always cause dispersion, and advertising media and other related agents get full advantage of the situation by manipulating the woman, who ultimately becomes a victimised ‘object’ (Varghese & Kumar, 2020) in the society where she lives or belongs. Whether she works consciously or forcibly in such ads (as shown in Figure 3), she eventually becomes a victim of a patriarchal society that always observes her as a harmful object, not a bearable or acceptable thing.

Whereas the ad mentioned earlier is concerned, it goes beyond the limitations of established norms of a specific society that sets its views about women who are just restricted to the home or outdoor activities. Similarly, in such ads, Pakistani culture and social norms consider women's nakedness against Islamic and cultural values. However, despite limitations, non-stereotypical elements come forward and benefit from the opportunity, ignoring the societal norms due to societal conflicts (Jamil, 2018). The models in such ads might be considered role models for some female members. Even males may be attracted to and want these beautiful and seductive women who rarely come into their real lives. T.V. ads might be designed to attract customers to do a profitable business. They intend to play with people's emotional and psychological states by representing females as ad showpieces. This representation of women would not attract most people of some specific community because it seems against their societal and religious norms. However, the ad (as shown in Figure 3) can be attractive to the liberal-elite class that never minds such display, i.e., female body exposure, and it is the class that also influences the people of stereotypical minds of the society (Jamil, 2018). Hence, many middle- and lower-level groups are attracted to and follow such ads. However, the reality is that conservative people never seem ready to accept such ads because they think of them vulgarly according to their cultural norms and even consider them against their religion. It can be viewed as the multinational company's duty to see society's cultural and religious values and norms to keep the peace.

Another well-known stereotypical national (state-owned) company, Ufone, has presented an ad (Figure 4) that can be considered similar to the Jazz smartphone ad.



Figure 4 Jazz and Ufone Ad (Source: Jang, 2015, December 20, p. 1; Express, 2015, December 28, p. 1)

A man (Figure 4) can be seen lying in the same position as the female is lying in the Jazz ad. The Jazz ad's parody may be, but it also insults the girl/woman following stereotypical Pakistani psychology (Jamil, 2018). The stereotypical point of view never allows a woman to show herself in such a posture. The lying position of man might not be considered wrong according to societal norms. However, as shown in the Jazz ad's previously mentioned picture, a woman may not be expected to expose herself that way. Its main reason may be that the patriarchal system prevails almost globally but in various approaches. In Pakistan, the same system prohibits women from adopting a freestyle body exhibition anywhere or in any society. The woman is wearing a red dress symbolically, which shows the extra attraction of her body. Furthermore, her hips are offered upward to create a sexually appealing effect on the viewers' minds. It is a fact that stereotypical

elements of the said society also tend to insult women's non-stereotypical representation – hence, ultimately, only the woman is much criticised in both cases.

### **Stereotypical Advertisements**

#### **Promoting Pakistani Cultural Ideologies featuring foreign female models**

In the ad (Figure 5), the model is the same (as in Figure 1), but her exposure is differently represented as stereotypical by the same media advertising agency.



*Figure 5 Jazz Ad (Source: Jazz, 2020)*

The advertiser has depicted her as a stereotypical character reflecting Pakistani society's social, cultural, and religious values. Although she belongs to a distinctive culture with no fully stereotypical style in Turkish Islamic cultural background, she is represented in this ad in Pakistan's stereotypical manner. The role of advertising media (in the case of ad) and television media (in the case of the Ertugrul series) intend to show her in aspects of persuasion – as advertising media utilises her as a tool of persuasion for alluring purposes. T.V. media uses her as a persuasion tool for stereotypical purposes (Jamil, 2018). Hence, in both situations, utilising the same woman/girl (actress/model), the consent/attention of the advertiser/producer seems to manipulate a woman because she plays both roles controlled by patriarchal societies' managing agents.

A persuasive, tangible stimulus is a powerful tool that plays a pivotal role in every stereotypical Pakistani advertisement, adding validity and acceptance from the social and cultural perspective (Jamil, 2018). These ads (as shown in Figure 6) depict women's social responsibility in a society that fully attaches them to domestic activities according to Pakistani society's stereotypical norms and values.

## Representation of women favouring sociocultural norms



Figure 6 Family Ads (Source: Zameen.com, 2018; Wall's Creamy Delights, 2017; Tapal Official, 2017; Benish Mahmood, 2016)

Moreover, it seems to possess a unique persuasion approach (contrastive stimulus) in which distinctive and comparable product features are represented in the ad, indicating a family's inclination towards the Coca-Cola product. Contrastable stimuli always convert the viewers' primal brain, giving a stereotypical impression (Jamil, 2018) necessary for success. However, this ad shows its reasonable or stereotypical impact on a family to unite them. The whole family shows their happier moods in favour of Coca-Cola's product due to the ad's stereotypical nature on behalf of the producer. Through the visual image, the producer highlights a willingly stereotypical reflection of society. In these social and domestic activities, the advertiser seems successful in getting an advantage on a large scale regarding his business.

For instance, the ability to perform these traditional activities as the roles of sister, daughter, mother, and wife can be celebrated and considered respectable in Pakistani society, which limits all these roles in strict societal norms. These ads (Figure 6) reveal that male and female duties are pre-decided and predictable. For instance, all the family members seem happy and elevated if they show interest in the kitchen and household work. The ads might be valuable in representing female participation in these activities. They refer to traditional norms and Islamic teachings without the proper knowledge to prove the ideology that only women should be involved in household work. However, at the same time, another class, i.e., the liberal class, does not consider this trend essential to be followed.

According to these liberal groups, working is women's responsibility in household activities, but men's equal participation should also be there. The women want freedom from such limitations set by Pakistani patriarchal society and intend to break rules that restrict them within a limited boundary. This picture further elaborates on a new trend of liberalism when the young family females are portrayed without a dupatta (shawl), an essential norm in a traditional Islamic society. On the other hand, the media has its strategy to create confusion in all the groups of a society divided into social groups with different ideologies. Hence, observing these various ad

perceptions shows that advertising media seems responsible for generating stereotypical and non-stereotypical roles or trends (Jamil, 2018).

## Discussion

### Inferences of Analysis in Social Context

The present research's data describes and discusses the representation of women in television advertisements, which are utilised as impressive, motivational, and influential persuasive tools. Pakistan is an Islamic society, and Islamic values can be reflected in any Islamic practice, culturally and socially motivated communication(s). Therefore, the present research analysis suggests that most advertisers who deviate from the national religious and cultural values face criticism with less appreciation in the social domains. For instance, in Figure 1 and Figure 3, models from Turkey and India are hired by QMobile (a mobile company) and JAZZ (a cellular network provider), respectively. In Figure 1, the ad represents the woman in a bold dress (deviating from culture). The Turkish model was chosen due to her popularity (see Figure 1 for details), which she gained through a series named *Ertugrul* (a Turkish drama) in which she wore a traditional dress throughout the serial, representing the Turkish Islamic culture which is now can be found in its rural areas mostly.

Moreover, the advertisers also know the nature of the audience, who often get attracted to intercultural features from other cultures, i.e., according to the best knowledge, the Pakistani audience habitually watches and is fascinated by Bollywood (Indian) movies and dramas for the last two decades. However, since the previous decade, after the ban on Indian content by the Supreme Court of Pakistan due to its negative impact on Pakistani culture (see Figure 3), they have been attracted much to the Turkish entertainment industry, especially during the COVID19 pandemic after the success of *Ertugrul* series (see Introduction section for more details). Nonetheless, when advertisers cast female protagonists in the ads, they know the nature of most Pakistani men as they are easily captivated by the women's seductive representation(s). So, the casting agents/directors mostly cast attractive and alluring figures (girls) who can easily seduce men. Pakistani models, often fearing criticism, refuse to perform seductive roles due to cultural and religious restrictions. Hence, their (casters/directors) ultimate choice persuades foreign models who intentionally and liberally play these roles. Whatever is depicted in the ads (see Figure 1 and Figure 3 for details), women (models) are represented against Islamic cultural values and norms that keep influential and impactful persuasive influence. That is why, through encountered criticism, the state-owned cellular company (Ufone) immediately criticised the woman in the Jazz ad, featuring a male model on its own with a tangible *tagline* "*Excuse me! Mobile phone hamara behtr aur sasta hai*" (trans. Excuse me! Our mobile is low cast and better). The ads represent two different cultural trends, i.e., non-stereotypical and stereotypical. Due to women's non-stereotypical representation, advertisers pave the way for women to be criticised by the stereotypical society, which becomes the cause of this criticism (Jamil, 2018). The contrastable stimulus urges the audience to recognise the differences in their specific cultures' backgrounds. That is why society criticises women who belong to the liberal class and do not follow their traditional social norms and values.

Consequently, if the advertisers offer any behavioural change that does not incorporate the cultural and social norms existing in society, they would not be able to persuade and get the stimulative attention of the audience (idea extracted from Falk et al., 2010). Similarly, in semiotic/verbal communication(s) of culturally deviated ads, *contrastable or tangible stimuli* (Morin & Renvoise, 2018) seem inactive when incorporating Islamic cultural values to some extent. For instance, the featuring models from other cultures would not justify the original cultural and social values due to the Pakistani audience's absence of Personal (self-concepts) even though these representations would conceptually hurt the emotional stimulus, leaving negative impacts on



Pakistani culture against national (Islamic) cultural influences (Romanova & Smirnova, 2019). Henceforth, the audience's culturally controlled cognitions and behaviours (Cialdini & Griskevicius, 2010; Harkins et al., 2017) would be affected by a negative social influence—persuasion— (Cacioppo et al., 2018). Therefore, based on conceptually derived findings, it would be argued that the advertisers seem to fail to mould, pour and promote the original norms and values of Pakistani society. Ultimately, due to the negligence of advertisers, women get stuck in the phenomenon of objectification (see Fredrickson & Roberts, 2006) through this type of representation.

The results of the present conceptual study support the already existing persuasion models yet incorporate a new conceptual model of neuro-persuasion, which is adapted and modified from Morin and Renvoise's (2018) theoretical frameworks.

Moreover, the results of the present study need to be revised and generalizability incorporated. Although the ads are included in a limited number, the theoretical assumptions are made based on foregrounded theoretical frameworks maintaining trustworthiness by quoting the textual and pictorial evidence from the advertisements.

Finally, the present study is qualitative, and the neuro-persuasive strategies and their implementation are purely studied based on theoretically established frameworks. The implications of the present study would need to be verified through quantitative studies involving the real-time participation of the audience for further clarification. However, the conceptual neuro-persuasion framework (adapted from Morin & Renvoise, 2018) would need to be quantitatively verified, and the experimental justifications would also be provided involving the real-time participants from two more cultures explicitly related to changes in brain activity in reactance to persuasive communication (see Chua et al., 2011; Cooper et al., 2015; Falk et al., 2011; Falk et al., 2015; Falk et al., 2016; Riddle et al., 2016; Vezich et al., 2017 for more details).

### **Conclusion**

The portrayal of women's roles in Pakistani television advertisements seems to go beyond the general public's social surroundings based on routine life exercises. Television ads should depend on a socially acceptable phenomenon according to the said social phenomena. However, most ads deviate from social, cultural, and religious norms. The above-analysed advertisements depict sociocultural acceptances and rehearse by visually portraying various characters in Pakistani T.V. advertisements. Both stereotypical and non-stereotypical represent the conflict in the audience's minds (Jamil, 2018). The public's depiction of people (in ads) delineates the rights, obligations, status, and individual traits that any individual holds in that specific culture. In television commercials, women's depiction can generally be found in conventional patterns that trail the subordinative role in jobs and explicit undertaking portion. In general, women receive a terrible reaction in advertisements that depict women's disempowerment in male-oriented Pakistani society.

Hence, they start considering themselves inferior to men. Women always expect to possess good character in all walks of life as they mostly portray themselves as mothers or homemakers taking responsibility for the house and people living there. Furthermore, if they do not obey the commands of a patriarchal society, they may have to face many problems. On the other hand, males display authority, dominance, and hegemony in the house and outside. Gender portrayal of women in Pakistani television channel ads shows the customary acceptance of individuals towards women's interest in their day-to-day practices.

The research indicates that women can also enjoy a certain level of freedom and liberty in single and married lives. Through the advertisements on television channels, it becomes evident that women avail themselves of equal opportunities in both cases, i.e., whether single or married. The concept of modernity and gender inequality would still prevail in society. On the contrary, the deep-rooted stereotypical elements in the patriarchal Pakistani society would not distract people's minds from embracing the sociocultural norms that show discrimination against women.

Whereas visual representations are a concern, they have an immense effect on their viewers, and these advertisements reveal a significant impact of ads showing their practical implications on people's minds. However, it would be an excellent point to investigate future inquiries about the responses submitted by perceiving such a traditional portrayal of gender orientation (mainly women). The stereotypes can be mentally connected with individuals' traditional attitudes and gender approaches to show women in various aspects. These ads' premise might be the earlier factor in reinforcing women's subordination and objectified position in public. To weaken the conventional conceptualisation of women in ads, it needs to demolish those traditional roles that can be the physiological and mental barriers towards self-rule and self-acknowledgement of the women of Pakistani society. It may be that the present man-centric structure would also be another real help towards the false conceptualisation of women's portrayal. The male-oriented society never needs and wishes for the equivalent status of women in various fields of life. So, we need to reshape the appearances, depictions, and examples of our social and cultural structures to make an equivalent and reliable condition for both males and females so that they might be able to express their real potential, capabilities, and capacities to introduce their selves in an actual setting.

It also becomes clear that scholarly discourse provides a multidimensional prism through which to analyse the representation of women in media when combining the local cultural context in Pakistan with the more significant global theoretical developments around the representation of women in advertising. The scholarly discourse around gender roles, stereotypes, and cultural norms elsewhere can be assessed, and it becomes clear that theoretical frameworks and the specific challenges experienced by women in Pakistani society are at variance.

The way that women's roles in advertising are defined concerning the status of women in the local society necessitates an in-depth examination of the various topics that have been covered. These themes include the representation of women as stay-at-home moms, their status as second-class citizens, their underrepresentation in professional settings, and the perpetuation of gender inequality. In this regard, advertising regulations constitute an essential foundation for regulating ethical portrayal; yet, the reported infringement reinforces stereotypes and is not in step with the advancement of society. The concepts of gender equality are compromised by these violations, which uphold social norms and traditional gender roles which restrict the agency and potential of women.

The final discussion incorporates scholarly viewpoints to emphasise the need for a paradigm change in the current context. Academic research provides a path forward by challenging prevailing preconceptions and empowering women through inclusive representations in advertisements. Rewriting the community narratives and pushing for significant changes in how women are portrayed are opportunities that arise from bridging the gap between theoretical acquisitions and local cultural nuances.

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