

# Gender and Advertisements: A Content Analysis of Pakistani Prime Time Advertisements

Aaminah Hassan

**Abstract**—Advertisements carry a great potential to influence our lives because they are crafted to meet particular ends. Stereotypical representation in advertisements is capable of forming unconscious attitudes among people towards any gender and their abilities. This study focuses on gender representation in Pakistani prime time advertisements. For this purpose, 13 advertisements were selected from three different categories of foods and beverages, cosmetics, cell phones and cellular networks from the prime time slots of one of the leading Pakistani entertainment channel, 'Urdu 1'. Both quantitative and qualitative analyses are carried out for range of variables like gender, age, roles, activities, setting, appearance and voice overs. The results revealed that gender representation in advertisements is stereotypical. Moreover, in few instances, the portrayal of women is not only culturally inappropriate but is demeaning to the image of women as well. Their bodily charm is used to promote products. Comparing different entertainment channels for their prime time advertisements and broadening the scope of this research will yield greater implications for the researchers who want to carry out the similar research. It is hoped that the current study would help in the promotion of media literacy among the viewers and media authorities in Pakistan.

**Keywords**—Advertisements, content analysis, gender, prime time.

## I. INTRODUCTION

ADVERTISEMENTS are steeped in the values, ideologies and taken for granted beliefs of any culture which produces them and consumes them. Both linguistic and extra-linguistic features and trends in advertising are emphasized to achieve the desired response from the audience. Advertisements use various tactics to persuade and influence the behavior of the audience. Positive feelings and attitudes can be provoked by associating a product with happy families, dreams, colorful setting, dance, successful romance, celebrities, beautiful women, childhood, nature, etc. Advertisements make their claim appealing by the implication of beautiful woman who would arouse our skeptical feelings [7].

Gender representation is a crucial issue in advertisements. Women are associated with specific domestic roles that have been solidified by advertisements [3]. Limited range of roles is given to women that include their confinement to four walls. Chodorow [2] is of the opinion that almost in all the cultures of the world, gender is subordinated due to the universal functions and values of the family.

Aaminah Hassan is with Department of Basic Sciences and Humanities, College of Electrical and Mechanical Engineering, National University of Sciences and technology, Islamabad, Pakistan (e-mail: Aaminah.hassan@ceme.nust.edu.pk)

Visual literacy is required to better understand the social and cultural embedding of advertisements. The research at hand examines the portrayal of gender in Pakistani prime time commercials through content analysis. Prime time is selected for study as it is the time of day when families are likely to watch television [4].

## II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

### A. Main Research Question:

1. How do prime time Pakistani commercials portray gender?

### B. Subsidiary Questions:

1. How gender roles are represented in Pakistani prime time commercials?
2. What proportion of female are portrayed as compared to males?
3. Are the discourse and narrative reinforcing gender stereotypes associated with each gender?

## III. DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

### A. Advertisement

The word advertising comes from the Latin word "advertere" meaning to turn the minds of towards. According to Stanton [9]: "Advertising consists of all the activities involved in presenting to an audience a non-personal, sponsor-identified, paid-for message about a product organization." "Advertising is a paid non-personal communication form with an identified sponsor using mass media to persuade or influence the audience." [10]

### B. Prime Time

Prime time is usually taken as when networks air their most popular programming--comedies, dramas, and high-profile sports events. It is the time of day when working men and women are likely to watch television [4]. Additionally, Pakistan Television Network has defined prime time ranging 7:45 PM to 9:00 PM with the sponsorship charges of Rs.178.150 per minute.

## IV. METHODOLOGY

The present study focuses on gender representations in Pakistani prime time advertisements. To get to the answers and to achieve set objectives, research method of content analysis is employed for this study.

### A. Content Analysis

Content analysis refers to "any technique for making

inferences by systematically and objectively identifying special characteristics of message” [5]. Holsti [5] further emphasized the importance of content analysis by stating that “the inclusion or exclusion of content is done according to consistently applied criteria of selection; this requirement eliminates analysis in which only material supporting the investigator’s hypotheses are examined.”

For this study, both quantitative and qualitative content analysis is carried out. Berelson [1] suggested that content analysis is, “objective, systematic and quantitative”. Quantitative content analysis may not provide rich descriptions of content. For deeper latent content analysis, qualitative content analysis becomes an ultimate need. Manifest content refers to the elements that are physically present and countable—quantitative. Latent content analysis is extended to an interpretive reading of the symbolism underlying physical data—qualitative. Therefore, qualitative content analysis refers to the subjective interpretation of the content by systemically classifying the data based on underlying themes and pattern. [6]

13 advertisements are analyzed by carrying out the content analysis. These advertisements were selected from channel ‘URDU 1’ during the prime time slot. Advertisements are further categorized as

- Foods and Beverages: All advertisements with products related to food and drinks; for example, Nestle Nesvita, Nestle Cerelac, K&N’s Deli Line, Coca Cola, Cadbury Perk, Lipton Tea, Nestle Everyday Milk. (7 advertisements)
- Cell Phones and Cellular Networks: Advertisements with products like cell phones and cellular networks; for example, Q Mobile, Telenor Talkshawk, Telenor Djuice, Ufone 30 paisa offer, Samsung Galaxy Star. (5 advertisements)
- Cosmetics: Advertisements with products like soaps, shampoos, conditioners; for example, Dove Soap. (1 advertisement)

#### V. DATA COLLECTION

Data collection from each advertisement is carried out on basis of following variables.

- Gender: Gender of principal or dominant characters (Male/Female)
- Age: 18-26 years (young) and 27-35 years (middle aged)
- Tasks and Activities: Domestic tasks, leisure activities, shopping, dancing, using product etc.
- Setting: Indoor (home), Outdoor (office, ground, shopping mall etc.)
- Voiceover announcer: Male/Female

#### VI. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Content analysis of advertisements of cell phones and cellular networks revealed that number of female principal characters is higher than the number of male principal characters as depicted in Table I. Reason for this higher percentage of 75% is that advertisers consider using more

female models in their advertisements to promote the value of their product.

TABLE I  
GENDER AND TOTAL NUMBER OF PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN CELL PHONE AND CELLULAR NETWORK ADVERTISEMENTS

Cell Phone and Cellular Network advertisements	Principal Characters		
	Male	Female	Total
Q-Mobile	1	1	2
Ufone 30 Paisa Offer	1	1	2
Samsung Galaxy Star	-	1	1
Telenor Talkshawk	-	2	2
Telenor Djuice	-	1	1
Grand Total	2	6	8
Percentage	25%	75%	

Advertisers of cell phone and cellular networks are not only using female models to attract more consumers, they are also designing such activities and roles for these models through which advertisement becomes more appealing. The trend in Table II revealed that the female models are made to dance and sing around in the advertisements in order to make the products more appealing and attractive to the customers. However, such portrayal is not culturally appropriate in Pakistani society.

TABLE II  
ACTIVITIES/ROLES PERFORMED BY PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN CELL PHONE AND CELLULAR NETWORK ADVERTISEMENTS

Cell Phone and Cellular Network advertisements	Activities/Roles of Principal Characters								
	Domestic Tasks			Leisure Activities			Eating/Using Product		
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Q-Mobile	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ufone 30 Paisa Offer	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-
Samsung Galaxy Star	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-
Telenor Talkshawk	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	1
Telenor Djuice	-	-	1	1	-	1	-	1	1
Grand Total	0	1	1	1	0	2	1	5	2

TABLE III  
SETTINGS IN WHICH PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS OF CELL PHONE AND CELLULAR NETWORK ADVERTISEMENTS ARE PORTRAYED

Cell Phone and Cellular Network advertisements	SETTINGS							
	Home		Outdoors		Combination of both		Any Other	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Q-Mobile	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ufone 30 Paisa Offer	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	1
Samsung Galaxy Star	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
Telenor Talkshawk	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
Telenor Djuice	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	1	1	0	3	0	0	1	1

Content analysis for settings in these advertisements revealed that mostly they are set in outdoor places. This trend is depicted in Table III. However, Table IV revealed that even when number of female principal characters is higher in the advertisements, the voice over at 80% of times is male. This is

the one area where males, through their voice are dominating in advertisements. Females are just used for their face value, but to convey authentic information and to give an authoritative and demonstrative end to any advertisement, mostly male voiceover is used.

TABLE IV  
GENDER OF VOICEOVER IN CELL PHONE AND CELLULAR NETWORK ADVERTISEMENTS

Cell Phone and Cellular Network advertisements	GENDER OF VOICEOVER	
	Male	Female
Q-Mobile	1	-
Ufone 30 Paisa Offer	1	-
Samsung Galaxy Star	1	-
Telenor Talkshawk	-	1
Telenor Djuice	1	-
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>20%</b>

In Table III, it can be seen that the setting of male dominant advertisements is mostly outdoors. Similarly Table IV reveals the dominant male voiceover in advertisements as well.

TABLE V  
GENDER OF VOICEOVER IN CELL PHONE AND CELLULAR NETWORK ADVERTISEMENTS

Product Category	Number of Commercials	Principal Characters		
		Female	Male	Total
<b>Food and Beverages</b>	07	<b>08</b>	<b>02</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Cosmetics</b>	01	<b>02</b>	-----	<b>02</b>

TABLE VI  
THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN CERTAIN SETTINGS OF THE COMMERCIALS

Product Category	No Of Commercials		Setting					
			Room		Outdoor		Both	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Food And Beverages	7	----	6	—	0	1	2	1
Cosmetics	1	----	2	—			----	----

TABLE VII  
THE VOICEOVER DISTRIBUTION IN ADVERTISEMENTS

Product Category	No Of		Voice Over Distribution							No Voiceover
	Commercials		Female		Male		Both			
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M		
Food And Beverages	7	----	6	—	0	1	2	1	01	
Cosmetics	1	----	2	—			----	----		

TABLE VIII  
ACTIVITIES PERFORMED BY PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

Product category	ACTIVITIES/ROLES OF PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS									
	Domestic Tasks		Leisure Activities		Eating/Using Product		Singing, Dancing, Conversing, Acting		Shopping	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Food and beverages	-	3	-----		-	2	-	4	-	1
Cosmetics	-----		-----		-----		-	2	-----	

In Table VI, it can be seen that setting of female dominant

advertisements are mostly “room”, whereas for men it is either outdoors or either it shifts between home and outdoors.

## VII. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Advertisement is not only a communication tool between companies and their customers, but also a social actor and a cultural artifact. In the present study, we aimed to identify gender portrayals in the Pakistani advertisements. As an answer to the first research question it is clearly evident that the behavior of men and women are clearly different. Women are portrayed as “women like”, feeble, caring, expressive and emotional. Some advertisements like that of cosmetics include only women. Such advertisements fall under the food and cosmetics category in present study. However, men are shown as authoritative and serious.

No woman is shown financially active or set against office premises. Although, at present, Pakistani women are actively participating in all fields of life but the absence of females in any official setting of advertisements is deliberate to maintain and strengthen the gender stereotypes. As an answer to second research question we can clearly see from the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data that in Prime time commercials females occupy the larger percentage as compared to males. The quantitative results in Table V show the higher percentage of females in food and cosmetics category. The reason could be to strengthen the already defined roles of gender as they are fulfilling the purpose of advertisers. At some instances portrayal seems absurd and far from reality like in case of Everyday milk advertisement. Discourse of females is depicted quite limited in scope. They can be seen either talking about recipes or their beauty.

Overall, there appears to be a wide line between the gender representations in Pakistani primetime commercials. The reason for this divide relates with the marketing strategy of “segmentation” and “targeting” in order to persuade the viewers to buy the advertised product. Considering this, there is a great need of acknowledging advertising ethics and reformulation of philosophies that operate at the deeper level and are inculcated among the viewers through commercials.

In almost all advertisements gender representation is stereotypical. More females are used in same traditional roles with same fixed ideas and false assumptions. There is excessive use of female models, for their bodily charms to promote products. As in Samsung Galaxy Star advertisement model is not showing proper use of the gadget that she is trying to advertise. All we saw is a beautiful famous model doing some action sequence which is totally not guiding viewer about features of the cell phone. Advertising in such stereotypical way can form unconscious and unthinking attitudes regarding women and their abilities in society.

## APPENDIX

Links for Advertisements: Accessed on: 2-1-2014

- Cadbury perk advertisement: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RtsNoDeRshE>
- Ufone 30 paisa offer advertisement

[https://ufone.com/uvideo.aspx?video\\_id=Ufone30PaisaTV.C.flv](https://ufone.com/uvideo.aspx?video_id=Ufone30PaisaTV.C.flv)

- K&n's deli line advertisement:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FxraZROUrVI>
- Nestle Nesvita advertisement:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x2pnFzY4UoY>
- Telenor Talkshawk Advertisement:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aYroYWMr-Nc>
- Coca Cola Advertisement:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=In1bNVb6Wiw>
- Telenor djuice advertisement:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RM1yZReaX38>
- Samsung Galaxy Star advertisement:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j2BMkGwsiX4t>
- Nestle Cerelac Advertisement:  
<http://vimeo.com/61519459>
- Q Mobile Advertisement:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4wkWYKPOQ3M>
- Dove Beauty Soap Advertisement:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=62JUPhPuT1Y>

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Berelson, B. (1952). Content analysis in communication research. Glencoe, IL: Free Press
- [2] Chodorow, N.J. (1994). Femininities, Masculinities, Sexualities: Freud and Beyond. Lexington: University of Kentucky
- [3] Courtney, A. E. and T. W. Whipple (1983), Sex, Stereotyping and Advertising. Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company.
- [4] Craig, R. Stephen (1992): "The Effect of Television Day Part on Gender Portrayals in Television Commercials: A Content Analysis", *Sex roles* 26(5/6): 197-211
- [5] Holsti - The handbook of social psychology, 1968 - Addison-Wesley Reading, MA
- [6] Hsieh H.-F. & Shannon S. (2005) Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research* 15, 1277-1288.
- [7] Myers, Greg (1999) *Ad worlds: brands, media, audiences*. Arnold. ISBN 0340700068
- [8] RA Sydnie - A Feminist Representative on Sociological Theory, 1987
- [9] Stanton, William J. & Layton, R. A. & Miller, Kenneth E. (1985). *Fundamentals of marketing*. Sydney : McGraw-Hill
- [10] Wells, William D. Burnett, John and Moriarty, Sandra. 1989/1992. *Advertising: Principles and Practices*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.