

**THE MARKETIZATION OF FEMALE CHARACTERS: A FEMINIST
STUDY OF THE PRIME-TIME COMMERCIALS OF PAKISTAN
TELEVISION**

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Abstract

The present research is based on the role of the female character in advertisements, showcasing their projected role in television commercials. It illustrates that how a woman's body is used as a sex object for financial purposes. Many unforeseen factors improve how the 'woman body' is being used as a symbol of attraction for particular market purposes. The image of women is disguised and made fictitious to catch the viewer's attention. In advertisements, the illustration of the woman is used to increase the particular product sale by advertising her beauty. Advertisements use the female body as a medium to manipulate the audience to buy a product. Most of the advertisements portrayed on television nowadays utilize women for the purpose to boost product sales.

Key Words: Women-body, the beauty myth, advertisements, product sale, market.

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Background of the study

In the modern era, the presentation of the woman in commercials is a research area that has attracted the attention of feminists. This area has not been extensively explored by researchers in Pakistan. According to “The PocketOxford Dictionary of Current English”, “Feminism is the advocacy of women’s rights on the grounds of equality of the sexes”. It is a set of beliefs that ensure equal political, economic, social, and cultural rights for women all over the world. This movement intends to ask for women's rights in the law, property, voting, reproductive rights, sovereignty, and bodily integrity. Believers in feminism hold the view that women suffer from discrimination because of their sex. They, moreover, believe that they have specific needs which remain neglected and unsatisfied. The satisfaction of these needs requires a radical change in the social, economic, and political order.

Television Commercials

These days the advertising agencies are one of the fastest rising industries, every company, organization, and institution takes the help of advertisements to make people aware of their products and services. Advertisements inform people about the fresh brands of the particular product offered in the market and about the upcoming ones. They also help in creating a necessity for the product in the mind of the viewers. They also help in building the image of a brand and generate a place for it in the present as well as a potential market. According to Pokharel, advertisements are convincing and motivating tools that can leave a deep impact on the minds of the viewers and play a major role in molding the culture and attitude of the people. Advertisements include the name of a product, its narrative, how that

product could benefit that targeted consumer along with its symbolic meaning (Pokharel, 2012)

The primary function of television commercials is to produce social information and to enhance the viewership that, in turn, helps boost product purchase. But it also plays a vital role in constructing as well as reinforcing gender stereotypes. The stereotype is a widely held preconception about characteristics that are understood to be possessed by members of a certain group. According to the Dictionary of Sociology, "These are one-sided and exaggerated images of men and women which are deployed repeatedly in everyday life". They are found in their representation by others because they operate as widely understood shorthand.

Women-representation as a Commodity of Market

Television commercials promote the target product to compete and struggle to defeat their market competitor. For this purpose, they have to create awareness in the viewers about the target product by presenting it attractively. To create this attractiveness in the commercials female characters are used with slender bodies, long hair, fair skin, and such like feminine qualities. In these commercials, the female body is more focused upon than the product itself. According to Mauricien, women have been depicted as sex objects since the beginning of dawn. The diverse forms of media and advertising continue to project women as sex-appealing symbols. Women are put on display like pieces of commodities or 'merchandise'. It is a notorious fact that "sex sells". One can say that it sells like peanuts. The more nudity or sexual reference depicted, the greater the sales generated in an exploitative and profit-driven media industry (Mauricien, 2013).

Women are presented in TV commercials as if they do not advertise for a particular product but their bodies, converting their image of women as the object of desire and sex rather than human beings with feelings. Ali and Rameez argue, "As far as the participation of women in media is concerned, female models are often seen in advertisements sensually dressed up for the sake of alluring customers. Moreover, the female character in some commercials even has nothing to do with the actual product". One of the most active and vital tools that are used by the media is female characters' youthful looks and bloomy beauty. Her exterior is used for financial profit where beauty is sold like a market item with a pricetag (Ali & Rameez, 2015).

In similar words, Dickey argues in his work that "Commercials, advertisements, and posters only portray women as sex objects and they are for sexual pleasure. Most of the commercials are designed in ways that depict the curves and cuts of the female body" (Dickey, 2006). The present study will use the Feminist theory by Naomi Wolf which she presented in her work "The Beauty Myth". The thesis provides a comprehensive theoretical framework for the article where she gives a view that the concept of women is naturally trapped within the feminine mystique, has been forced on us by popular sociology, by magazines, and by fiction to disguise the fact that women in her role of consumer have been essential to the development of our industrial society (Wolf, 2002).

This topic is not explored extensively in Pakistan and is avoided. The commercials portray women more in an inappropriate and unsuitable way. This is becoming part of our culture slowly and gradually. The present study aimed to help bring to the front the unforeseen factors of how the woman's

body is being used as a symbol of attraction in marketing and as a tool for increasing the product sale.

1.1 Research Objectives

Objectives of the present are:

- To explore the representation of women in television commercials.
- To discover the role of women in these commercials as a tool of the market economy.
- To find out how woman image is used for increase/growth of particular product sale.

1.2 Research Questions

1. How a woman is represented in television commercials?
2. What role is being played by a woman in these commercials as a tool of the market economy?
3. How woman's image is used for the increase/growth of particular product sales?

Literature Review

The role played by women in mass media, especially in television advertisements, is a field studied from different angles by various researchers and scholars. Hazirullah and Hifsa Nisar Khan in their work examine that in advertisements women are used as a piece of attraction. Their function in these commercials only is limited to an object of sex by showing them slender, fit, and fair. They represent women as an object of desire and leisure for both males and females. Women are presented as decoration pieces in advertisements rather than human beings with feelings and emotions. Woman images are, thus, used to broaden the ratio of manufactured goods sales (Hazirullah & Khan, 2015).

Ahmad Rameez and Roshan Amber Ali argue that the role of female models in advertisements is only to attract the attention of men by dressing sensually. Sometimes the models have nothing to do with the actual product. Not only this role of woman is projected in the advertisement but is also extended to media, in general, to catch the attention and persuade the clients and sponsors. The exterior youthful looks and splendor beauty of a female model is used for the function of trade where beauty sells like a market item with a price tag. Women are exploited only for unfair illustration and selling commodities. They have no function in commercials other than this. It is considered that the only concern of women is their looks, long hair, and beauty. They are sexual objects who have no responsibilities but to delight men. Other than that their hobby is to do reveries and dream. Unfortunately, today media is neglecting morals, customs, and respect by violating existing standards in society. Their deteriorated representation does not allow them to grow beyond stereotypes and change the negative image of the woman despite all her efforts. In Pakistan models that compromise their values while working in commercials are considered to be immoral. This misrepresentation of women leads to the supposition that any woman involved in media is morally corrupt. Due to this misrepresentation, women are targeted and victimized by the people inside as well as outside the media (Rameez & Ali, 2015).

Naomi Wolf in her book argues that a woman's appearance influences her ability to carry out her work well in every field including the fashion industry and media also. Women are expected to achieve unattainable standards of beauty, especially by women working in mass media. The myth is spread through images of women in magazines, film, and advertising. Wolf moreover, argues that images of women from such sources

bring change in the way women perceive themselves as personified women as well as their social roles. Wolf criticizes the fashion and beauty industries as exploitative of women (Wolf, 2002).

Another study that highlights this research area is conducted by Pratima Pokharel where she is of the view that advertisements use the female body as a medium to influence the audience to buy a product. Media draws concentration of audience through its pleasant image and descriptions. For this purpose advertisements use female bodies with amusing slogans (Pokharel, 2012).

Avanija Katiyar in her work argues that visual leaves a greater impact on the audience than spoken or written discourse so that one may recall things easily. Advertisements, therefore, are more effective in coining a product value in the market and viewer's mind. Advertisements are made with the purpose to help in the sale of the product but on the other side hinder the image of women. Most of the advertisements portrayed on television nowadays make use of women for the purpose to enhance the particular products sale. Women are being depicted as mere sex stuff in most of the advertisements. Moreover, the girls utilized for the different kinds of advertisements are shown to be fair and unusually thin. This has created a negative image of women in society and set high expectations about their appearance. These advertisements leave an impression on a common man's mind that a woman is just an object, which can be exploited effortlessly as she is fragile by nature. This type of projection of women is termed stereotyping (Katiyar, 2011).

A research study "Sex Does Sell" conducted by Daily Mail Reporter in 2011 on this topic gives the opinion that dressing a model seductively over the product on sale has long been a trick much-loved by advertisers. Researchers

found seeing an attractive man or woman in advertisements excites the areas of the brain that make us buy on impulse, bypassing the sections which control rational thought. Their study found that adverts using logical persuasion, simple and convincing facts are less effective in making us spend than advertisements using non-rational influence feel good, stimulating images. The findings support the assumption that some advertisers wish to seduce, rather than persuade, consumers to buy their products.

The present study focuses on the particular sample commercials that were analyzed inside the parameters provided by the theory of feminism by Naomi Wolf to bring out the justified/unjustified use of female characters in these commercials:

- Jazz X mobile
- Tarang milk pack
- Lux jasmine beauty soap
- Cake Rusk
- Eco star television

Women in commercials are only utilized for attraction and increasing viewership. They are used to add spice and flavor to particular commercials. Sometimes the female body is unnecessarily focused to promote the product. In these commercials, the image of a woman as an embodiment of beauty is utilized to catch the attention of the audience that in turn, adds value to the product sale.

Research Methodology

3.1 Qualitative Research Method

The research follows the qualitative research method as a methodology because the qualitative research method comes under the paradigm of constructivist/interpreters. Data analysis and interpretation of the text/language go hand in hand in the framework provided by feminist theory, presented by renowned scholar and author Naomi Wolf. This framework served as guidance to the researcher throughout the text of this research.

3.2 Design of the Study

The present study is based on marketizing female characters in Pakistani Television commercials. This work provides a feminist view on the representation of women as a tool of a market-based economy. The article focuses on the text, visuals, and language used in the collected set of data i.e. five television commercials broadcasted inside Pakistan, and analyzes it from a feminist perspective.

3.3.1 Population of the Study

The population for the collection of data for the present research is television commercials selected from the prime-time broadcast on Pakistan Television.

3.3.2 Sampling Design

The sample design used in the present research was systematic random sampling. Commercials belonging to different categories of the product including mobile industry, milk pack, beauty soap, cake, and television

industry were selected systematically. One commercial sample for the present study was then, selected randomly from the categories selected systematically.

3.3.3 Samples of the Study

Five sample commercials were selected from the population:

- Jazz X mobile
- Tarang milk pack
- Lux beauty soap
- Cake Rusk
- Eco star television

Other sources of collecting data were some research works related to this area published in different international research journals and internet websites that helped in providing data for this research area.

Data Analysis

The analysis of data collected was based on the framework provided by the feminist theory presented by Naomi Wolf in which the sample advertisements were analyzed in the light of the theory “The Beauty Myth” proving a justified/unjustified showcasing the female characters in television commercials. According to the theory, The concept of women as naturally trapped within the feminine mystique has been forced on us by popular sociology, by magazines, and by fiction to disguise the fact that woman in her role of consumer has been essential to the development of our industrial society. The sample advertisements were analyzed in light of this subsection of “The Beauty Myth”. Moreover, the sample ads were analyzed with a special focus on feminine mystique, woman’s role as consumer, woman

as socially disguised, her projected role in fiction and magazines, and finally bridging the idea of woman as naturally trapped and/or used as a tool of improving product-sale in a market-based economy. Furthermore, a special emphasis has been developed throughout this research by analyzing the discourse presented in each advertisement according to the limitations/requirements of the study.

Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Woman-role as Consumer

Women's role as a consumer is significant and central in the age of industry. Women as consumers prefer to buy less expensive products and try to save money because they are considered as a miser when it comes to household items and products in which they are less interested. But when it comes to shopping for themselves, their interest and concentration arouse as they buy it irrespective of its price. In the advertisements for particular products, the resource persons persuade the viewers, especially women, to buy their product irrespective of its price. For this purpose, the advertisers advertise the product in a way that adds glamour and color to the commercials. For this glamour and color, they include attractive models with all feminine qualities. Through these adverts, the product companies persuade the viewers which are mostly women to buy their goods that in turn, increase their product sales. According to a Daily Mail Reporter, "Researcher found seeing an attractive man or woman in an advert excites the areas of the brain that makes us buy on impulse, bypassing the sections which control rational thought". For example one of the sample commercial from this research paper *Lux Beauty soap* attracts people by saying certain things like:

- Purkashish mehak ty jil dkay li ay naya Lux

In this commercial of beauty soap, the product company compels the woman-folk to use this specific product for beautiful and fragrant skin, thus, increasing the productsale in the market.

In another line

- Chutay hi huwa aik raishmi ayhsas

The viewers are tempted to use thisproduct, which will make their skin feel silky like velvet.

- Bas Zarasa Lux

In this tag line, women are *assured* that they can also get these qualities like beautiful, fragrant, and silky skin by applying little amount sum of this specific beauty soap Lux (*Zara sa Lux*) on their skin.

4.2 Industry or Feminine Mystique?

In today's world, if we thinkof a woman, an image comes to our mind that woman is a personality holding charm, charisma, an air of mystery, that makes her interesting and exciting. Are these charisma, charm, and aura are given to women for a certainpurpose? Is it given to the woman as a woman or is it given to her for some other purpose? And who created this image of a woman? There is an appeal and magnetism which attract the attention of both genders. This present image replaces the old image of woman-folk which suggested domesticity, her role at home, children, and husband as her responsibility while the present image suggests that the personal identity of a woman as housewife or mother is not enough. This,in turn, changed the concept about the role of women ona commercial basis and set newconcepts,

molding the approach and mindset about the woman. They gave it the name of freedom and liberty of modern women. They intentionally brought this change in woman's life for their interests. They utilize this image of the modern woman in advertisements because they knew that it attracts everyone's attention. Whenever we watch advertisements and commercials the images of female model catches our eye and get our attention. Catching the attention is due to this 'pseudo image' of woman which stimulates our interest. This fake and artificial representation is formed by the industrialists for their interests. Through this image and representation, the product industry enhances their product awareness and boost their product sale. Whenever we watch a commercial the image of the female model gets saved on the blank curtain of our mind and due to that the name of that particular product brand is also stored in our mind. The customer therefore whenever want to buy commodities with preference to buy a 'name-branded product' than an 'unfamiliar brand'. This is a trick and tactic used by the production industry for their business yield. For example in one of the sample commercials in this research paper, the model is more focused on than the product. At the beginning of the advertisement, it seems that the advertisement is about the model. The model is clothed in a revealing dress exposing her femaleness, presenting the modern image of a woman created by industrial society. The model gestures and body- language are sexualized and appealing. The lines of the commercial seem to be about the woman like:

- Justuju Aik Jahan ki
- Takhayul husn-e- bay missal ka
- Arzoo aik hal ki si muskan ki
- Aik dil kash khwab ki takmil
- Takhliq aik lazawal shahkar ki

The above lines give the impression that if these lines are about the model, not about the product. The lines describe the woman/female model that everyone wants her, her beauty is matchless, people desire for her smile, and that she is a splendid creation.

4.3 Society Disguised

Society has disguised the presentation of woman folk. This is mainly achieved through media, both print and electronic. But it is mostly the advertisements and commercials which mislead viewers about the woman. It presents a woman as a piece of attraction, the one who may belong to a fairy tale. The models in these advertisements are presented as perfect, having no deficiency. The audience receives a misleading image of woman-folk that they should be perfect and exact like these images with no imperfection. Most of the time women play roles in commercials that are lighter, like beauty or cosmetic commercials, advertisements of fashion, and house items. According to Pokharel, Women are always shown as if they are subordinate, subjugate, inferior, weak, dominated, dependent, demure, and more importantly as a pleasing object (Pokharel, 2012). For example in one of the sample commercials (*Lux Beauty Soap*) in this research paper, the female model is presented as eye-candy to showcase. In this commercial, the model is sensually dressed up and shown in a bathtub taking bath applying the particular soap on her body which (supposedly) makes her skin fair, soft, and fragrant. After that, she wears a beautiful but revealing dress and approaches the man. She ties a blindfold to his eyes and hides. The men then find her out with the help of fragrance given to her body by applying that particular beauty soap.

- This strengthens the idea that women are involved in trivial and non-serious activities. It also, moreover, suggests the idea that they have nothing to do other than spend time on their selves to look beautiful. Being beautiful is most important to them.
- Secondly, the woman is shown as if she wants to embody beauty to attract and seduce the man. This ad constructs the idea that the life of a woman revolves around a man and that she always needs a man on her side because she is inferior, weak, and dominated.
- The third idea behind making this ad is that woman is a pleasing object to a man and that she serves as entertainment to him.

In another sample commercial (*Cake Rusk*) the female model is beautifully dressed up in apparel where her body is exposed and carrying a tray and serving it to everyone. Then she dances. It leads to the idea that she is dressed up for the man and tries to entertain him with her revealing dress as well as her dress.

Woman in common is not like this. Today's woman is progressing and participating in the very field of life, including media, along with men. But the woman in media is shown apart from her real picture because media is run and owned by men. Furthermore, Pokharel is of the view that "Women are almost every time presented as passive, weak, soft, delicate, innocence, demure, shy, and simple with low self-esteem". A woman has to fight with this stereotypic and disguised representation of her and prove that she is worth more than what is shown on media about her although it is extremely difficult and hard to change this misrepresented image of her and bring the reality before the viewers. Ali and Rameez in their work argue that "Their deteriorated representation does not permit them to flourish beyond stereotypes and change the negative image of a woman despite all her efforts" (Ali & Rameez, 2015).

4.3 Fictional Character

In the present era of business-based politics that use media for developing and molding people's minds for the particular productsale, the female character is made fictional and fictitious. These commercials show women as they do not belong to this world. These advertisements fix standards and set ideals for common people who watch/follow these advertisements and commercials. The images they produce are unreal and imaginary.

According to Khan and Hazirullah, Media construct an unattainable and objectified image of female bodies as feminine beauty. The image of an ideal woman (as presented in advertisements and other textualizations) regulates women to be the mere object of desire, leisure, and sex rather than people (human beings) with emotions and feelings. The intensification and normalization of physical appearance as bodily exposure as the standard of feminine beauty upon which women have to seek their acceptance in man's fantasy world are harmful to society in general and women in particular (Khan & Hazirullah, 2014).

In another sample commercial, (*Tarang Tea Whitener*), the setting is that of a 'fairy tale' in which there is a castle, a prince, and a princess, which is deep in love with her. All this does not look real. It is imaginary because every woman is neither a princess nor having a prince charming. The life of the common Pakistani woman is not like this as most of the population belongs to the middle class who can't afford all these accessories. Moreover, not all women are thin, beautiful, and good-looking.

Women watching these advertisements follow and idealize these 'created and disguised characters' and thus build up a sense of dissatisfaction

about their bodies that develop an inferiority complex in them as they are not equivalent to the standards put by media, magazines, and fiction. These fictional characters create anxiety and pressure in women to attain these qualities.

According to Pokharel, Serious social problems have been arising. The major ill effect is the pressure on the woman to get the perfect body. They get so pressured that they take the unhealthy way to reach the set goals. They develop an eating disorder that may result in irreparable damage (Pokharel, 2012).

The viewers try to embody these characters and involve themselves in unhealthy activities. They develop an eating disorder by doing extensive dieting and improper eating habits. Sometimes the women/models do cosmetic surgeries, Botox, and silicon jell implantation to make themselves attractive and perfect which is unnatural and unhealthy.

According to Khan and Hazirullah, Type of woman, her body and ideal image of beauty shown on television is something impossible for the vast majority of women to achieve. And if they are real, they may represent a small segment of women across Pakistan; and yet, of that small numbers, none will meet all the requirements to be considered perfect and ideal (Khan & Hazirullah, 2014).

4.5 Is Woman Naturally Trapped?

The question arises: Is woman naturally trapped in this beauty myth? Is she forced to represent herself like this? Is she doing all this under a pressure or according to her wish? The answer for this is complex and multidimensional. She is trapped by media and industry. Though not directly

but indirectly she is enslaved in this web in which she becomes unaware of it, consciously though. The industry has set such standards and shaped the ideas that are now prevailed in the fashion industry as well as in media. If she does not follow these standards she will not be able to stay in the industry. If in a commercial a model is asked to be a sex symbol and put on revealing clothes, she can leave that project and pick another one that is according to her taste. She has the choice and is independent to choose what is good or leave what seems offended to her. After all, no one can force or compel her to perform in a certain commercial, as she does not need it. She can get a lot more ads to work in. Today woman is freer and liberated, with no chains or restrictions. The modern woman is more aware and conscious about her rights. But still, she is not free as she should be. According to Naomi Wolf, "The affluent, educated, liberated women of the modern world, who can enjoy freedoms unavailable to any women ever before, do not feel as free as they want to" (Wolf, 2012). Today's woman is more trapped and chained in the sense that she has to attain the beauty standards set by the modern world especially by the beauty industry. Moreover, as Wolf adds, "The more legal and material hindrances women have broken through, the more strictly and heavily and cruelly images of female beauty have come to weigh upon us". If a model refuses to work in a certain commercial, she would be replaced and her market value would drop down. To compete with other models she has to accept these standards and do more than other models. In one of the sample commercials, (*JazzX Mobile*), the female model is dressed in modern clothes, driving a car late at night and chasing a man, she pushes him and snatches his phone. This reversed the old idea and changed the old perception. Also, the model has done the job of showcasing in the advertisements.

This is the new picture they want to portray of both genders. Consequently, if someone wants to call him/herself liberal and moderate he/she has to accept the current ideas build by industry otherwise they will be stamped as extremist, fundamentalist, and narrow-minded. This is a trap for common people, especially for female folk.

Conclusion

In today's industrial world advertisement is a key tool to make people aware of a certain product and arouse their interest in the product. A woman has always been an essential part to play in these advertisements. Women in these commercials are presented as sex objects and pieces of attraction. In the commercials, women are presented as glamorous and fascinating. Usually, they are dressed sensually, in skin-tight and revealing clothing. Women are like decoration pieces in the commercials. Women are always shown slender, fit, and fair, embodying beauty. They are used to add spice and color to particular commercials.

Women working in advertisements are presented as a tool of the market in advertisements. The exterior of the female body is used with the purpose to gain financial profit and enhancing market value. The beauty of a woman is sold like a market item with a price tag. It seems that if it is not the *product* but the *body* of the woman which is sold. Women are exploited only for selling commodities with an unfair illustration of their projected beauty images. They have no or lesser function in television commercials.

In advertisements image of the woman is used to increase the particular product sale by selling her beauty. Advertisements use the female body as a medium to influence the viewers to buy a product. Most of the advertisements presented on television screens nowadays make use of women

for the purpose to enhance the products-sale. Some advertisers wish to seduce, rather than persuade, consumers to buy their products.

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