



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Gendering Advertisements: A Comparative Study of Pakistani Print Media Semiotic Discourses**

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**ABSTRACT**

Print media advertisements are one of the most influential means of propagating a desired ideology to the target audience. The present study attempts to decode critically representation of Fe / male genders through the advertisements of two Pakistani daily newspapers, Dawn and Jung. The time span for data collection ranges from 1st June to 30th June 2022. The data has been analyzed by employing Kress and Hodge's (2010) model of social semiotics. This model focuses on the analysis at linguistic and semiotic levels. It finds that percentage of female representation in the advertisements is higher than male representation. The males and females have been shown in the advertisements of banking and finance, education, showbiz and media, and real-estate business. It contends that word picture conjunction works effectively in propagating desired ideologies. Therefore, the study concludes that genre of advertisement is one of the best sites for ideological investment.

**KEYWORDS** Advertisements, Ideology, Print Media, Visual and Verbal Practices

**Introduction**

The new media, including television, films, social networking sites, magazines, and newspapers, promote society's gender viewpoint. In recent times, it has been a great tool to influence the public's mindset and a great site for ideological investment. It is regarded as a source of knowledge as well as a creator of societal structures and serves as a medium for knowledge, ideas, beliefs, and attitudes. Our lifestyles are significantly influenced by the perceptions developed through media discourses. It is usually observed that people start believing that is made available to them through media discourses. Print media is considered a strategic force for shaping people's viewpoints, despite the popularity of digital media. Print media conveys information, including not only via textual content but also by using pictures, particularly visuals in advertisements.

Media portrayal of men and women demonstrates that while men are supposed to earn money and manage businesses, whereas, women are stereotypically expected to raise children and manage other household issues. In both electronic and print media, males are portrayed as dominating, while females are portrayed as obedient and sex objects. Generally, commercials show men as dominating, powerful personalities and women as housewives who rely on them. Stories about men focus on work and on their achievements, while images of women in newspapers are designed to reinforce sexism and make traditional gendered roles appear natural and normal. As in the media, women are rarely portrayed as intelligent individuals, businesspersons, or professionals who are focused on their careers. Their educational, social, and intellectual talents are rarely considered. According to prior studies, men typically take on higher-status roles, while women tend to play relatively lower-status roles. The conventional and mostly patriarchal and conservative viewpoints are often presented by this kind of media depiction of women.

## **Literature Review**

This section critically reviews the existing body of literature related to the present study to generate research gaps for the study. Some of the most relevant researches have been critically reviewed in the section that follows.

Through semiological discourse analysis of cartoons in Pakistani print media, Sajid & Zubair (2011) examined how images might influence people's perceptions regarding gender roles. Data from the English daily Dawn was analysed to highlight how word-picture conjunction works to keep women away from mainstream power domains. An amended research model was used to analyze the data by drawing upon Fairclough (1993) model of critical discourse analysis (CDA) and Barthes' (1973) model of semiological analysis. This research finds that print media semiotic discourses are one of the best sites for ideological investment.

A study was carried out by Damayanti (2014) to find out how gendered discourses are included in textbooks to shape the mind-set of young learners about gender stereotypes. The researcher conducted a textual analysis on four popular and widely used Indonesian primary school English textbooks: *Go with English* (2005), *Learning by Doing* (2004), *Grow with English* (2002), and *Fokus*. The findings demonstrated that the perceptions of gender imbalance were strengthened by the images published in these textbooks. Compared to men, women were portrayed as being more dependent and subservient. The research suggests that textbooks should be designed keeping in view the concept of gender equality.

Ali and Batool (2015) carried out a study to look at how the media shapes gender identities. The data for this study was collected from the English newspaper "The News," and discourse analysis research technique was used to decode the selected data. The findings show that most often media discourses promote patriarchy. Women's identities can be created and reproduced through the media, and these interpretations can subsequently prevail in the society and become accepted norms.

Hazir Ullah et al. (2016) investigate how men and women are portrayed in Pakistani print media. The key concern of this study was to evaluate gender stereotypes and sexism in Pakistani print media as a way to determine whether print media promotes or challenges gendered prejudices. The study highlights that women in Pakistani print media were mostly represented in traditional gender roles. Additionally, it states that print media is a tool employed by patriarchal social systems to promote male hegemony.

Ali & Hussain (2019) examine how men and women are portrayed in basic-level English and Urdu textbooks in Pakistan. Data was selected from AFAQ, National Book Foundation (NBF), and Oxford University Press (OUP) and analyzed using a qualitative method. Three key aspects were noticed, including the representation of female and male characters, images, and lesson narrators; the activities available; and the language used for both genders. The results make it quite evident that women are marginalized in many ways. Furthermore, the textbooks' discourses reflected the prevalent gender prejudices in Pakistani society.

Sajid & Buzdar (2020) conducted a research in order to critically analyze the linguistic and semiotic discourses of Pakistan's Sindh Textbook Board (STB) Jamshoro and Punjab Textbook Board (PTB) Lahore's Primary level ELT textbooks. This research examined broadly how gender is portrayed in local ELT textbooks. The researchers used Fairclough's (1993) model of Critical Discourse Analysis for linguistic analysis, Barthes' (1974) model of Semiological Discourse Analysis for visual analysis; and Kruger's (2001) model of Focus Group Discussion Analysis for data analysis. In this way a triangular research approach was used. The results indicate that, when compared to their opposite, Primary

English textbooks taught in Punjab have greater linguistic and visual content relevant to stereotypical portrayal of men and women to propagate gendered ideology. It also identifies the subtle ways in which textbook discourses influence young learners' perception of gender deconstruction and shape the perceptions of the readers in a desired manner.

### **Significance of newspaper advertisements**

Advertising in newspapers can directly target groups of people who are mostly harder to be accessed via other means. In comparison to other forms of advertising, newspapers provide the versatility. It is among the earliest and most successful methods for promoting various companies, items, and products. Manufacturers may target their consumers more effectively through print media advertisements. In addition, we could have our advertisements published in a local newspaper if we wanted to target a particular community or region.

In modern industrial nations, advertisements play an important role in socialization and serve as a strategy for perpetuating social structures. The term "gender advertisement" highlights marketing imagery that reflects stereotypical gender roles and behavior patterns. It is believed that manufacturers are interested in winning consent of the consumers. The beliefs, attitudes, and positions in society of men and women have also been shown from different perspectives. Both genders are generally divided into various categories depending on contextual variations. Gender-specific advertisements highlight prevailing social tendencies. In order to advertise items, marketers typically employ gender stereotypes. Similarly, the present research attempts to analyze the representation of men and women in the advertisements of Dawn and Jung newspapers from June 1st, 2022, to June 30th, 2022.

### **Material and Methods**

The current study employs an integrated research approach to analyse data by drawing upon Kress (2010) and Kruger (2000). Data used for this research was obtained from two Pakistani newspapers one Urdu (JUNG) and one English (DAWN). The delimitation of this study is that it only focuses on the semiotic discourses of the abovementioned English and Urdu newspapers from June 1st, 2022, to June 30th, 2022. Kress' (2010) multimodal sociological approach for contemporary discourses has been applied because the data collected for this study includes more than one medium, such as verbal and visual information. This model works at the following levels:

- What meaning is the text trying to convey?
- In what ways does the text make sense?
- What sources were used to create the text's meaning?
- In what social context is meaning being created?
- Whose interest and agency are involved in the construction of meaning?

Furthermore, this research also employed focus group discussions to collect the data. The selected advertisements were discussed during the focus group discussions from Urdu and English newspapers, which were selected randomly from June 1st, 2022, to June 30th, 2022. Participants in the first group were MPhil in English, while participants in the second group were MPhil in other subjects such as history, psychology, education, mathematics, business, etc.

### **Data Analysis**

This section deals with the analysis of the data selected from the Dawn and Jung newspapers from June 1st, 2022, to June 30th, 2022. The emerging categories related to the

representation of men and women in these two newspapers include banking and finance, education, showbiz and media, and real estate. The researchers chose one advertisement from each newspaper relating to one of these categories at random and analyzed it linguistically and semiotically. The researchers have also analyzed the data quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantification of data has been shown in the following table, which is as under:

**Table 1**  
**Content Analysis**

<b>Banking and Finance</b>				
	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Both</b>	<b>Total</b>
Jung	2	2	2	6
Dawn	4	3	2	9
<b>Education</b>				
Jung	2	2	9	13
Dawn	3	3	14	20
<b>Showbiz/ Media</b>				
Jung	14	9	55	78
Dawn	2	1	13	16
<b>Real-estate</b>				
Jung	3	1		4
Dawn	4	1		5



Picture 01 From Dawn

The very name of the bank, HBL (Habib Bank Limited), is ideological. It is full of meanings. Habib is an Arabic word that means friend, a close relative, or someone near and dear. So, at the level of naming, this particular advertisement highlights that this particular bank differentiates itself from others by imparting the sense of solidarity among the users that it is just like their friend, and in a friendly atmosphere, it holds business and other affairs with its customers. In this way, a concept of "Usness" has been imparted among the customers of this particular bank. Moreover, the very name of the bank, HBL (Habib Bank Limited), has been written in white on a green background. These two colors carry different connotations. The green color connotes calmness and peacefulness, and the white color is also taken as a symbol of knowledge and light, which means that on the one hand, this bank knows the pros and cons of modern banking, and on the other hand, it handles all the issues of its customers in a very peaceful manner, as connoted by the green color.

The concept of solidarity between the bank and its users has been highlighted, and there is also a concept of word-picture conjunction to convey the underlying ideology comprehensively. On one hand is HBL (Habib Bank Limited); as mentioned earlier, the word "Habib" means friend or a very close one. Similarly, the three women, belonging to different age groups, have been shown in the picture and they seem to be a grandmother, mother, and daughter. So, it can be observed that these are very close to one another and have personal relationships, and there is a strong sense of solidarity or bondage among them. So, the concept of one-ness has been imparted at linguistic level. The very name of the bank implies "Habib," which means friendship, solidarity, bondage, and closeness, and the picture also conveys the same thing. The colors of the dresses the women are wearing also represent this closeness. This is how the technique of word-picture conjunction has been plaid up.

Meta-linguistic features along with language impart lot of meanings. Similarly, it obvious from the postures and eye contact of these women, they are happy, confident, and relaxed by virtue of being customers of HBL (Habib Bank Limited) and having deposited their amount in this particular bank. In return, this bank has offered them a lot. This is because they are extremely self-assured that nothing unpleasant is going to happen with them. The standing position of three women carries different interpretations. For example, the woman who seems to be the mother of the youngest daughter is looking in front and is eying the public, which means she is conveying a sense of confidence and solidarity. By being the users of this particular bank, these three women are looking confident, relaxed, and independent. The other concept, like the person as a state metaphor, has also been imparted. Because these three women represent three different age groups, it implies that this particular bank takes care of women of all age groups. It offers very attractive incentives to those who open accounts in this particular bank.

This bank offers different facilities to the users, especially the females, by opening this account, "Financial freedom with HBL Nisa Asaan Account." Nisa is an Arabic word that means woman. So HBL (Habib Bank Limited) on the one hand is HBL, which means this particular bank is doing well for both males and females and is doing good for all, and on the other hand, HBL (Habib Bank Limited) is HBL Nisa, which means it has a speciality of its own and is offering facilities and special offers to the females as well. Banking facilities for females of almost all age groups are a prominent feature of HBL (Financial freedom with HBL Nisa Asaan Account). Therefore, it offers the concept of freedom and particularly to women. The use of the expression "Asaan Account" is a code-mixed expression. The use of the Urdu word "Asaan," which means easy access, is meant to attract the public, and then there is the use of the Arabic word "Nisa," which means woman, to gain the attention of women of all classes. So, at a deeper level, when the linguistic text is analyzed, it conveys the meaning that this particular HBL (Habib Bank Limited) is offering attractive and easy packages to the women belonging to religious families, middle-class families, or working-class families without any distinction.

Moreover, there are pictures of some trophies, including "Best Bank Award 2021" and "Best Bank in Pakistan." It means that this bank has been ranked as the best bank recently. It implies that it is fulfilling the requirements of modern banking. Therefore, its services have been acknowledged by the Pakistan Banking Association. So, it has been awarded with different prizes. The indirect message for the users is that, just as this bank can reign supreme among the others, similarly, the customers of this bank, belonging to different domains of life, including men and women, can be distinguished from the customers of the rest of the banking industry. Furthermore, this bank has the ability to provide services to both men and women in a friendly and stress-free environment. The overall impression that emerges after looking at the visual and verbal messages of this particular advertisement is that if you want to be prominent, relaxed, and confident, you must be a customer of this particular bank.

Then there are different blogs carrying different attractions, such as no minimum balance requirement, free insurance coverage, discount locker & personal loan processing fee, free chequebook and a free debit card. It means that everything is said against something unsaid by mentioning the underlying ideology. The reason behind mentioning these things prominently here is that this particular bank is offering all these facilities very easily, freely, and without charging anything. While the rest of the banks do not offer these services to their customers. The concept of digital banking is also obvious from the QR code, which is on the bottom right side. It means you can scan this code from anywhere to do banking without any difficulty. At the bottom of the picture, we can also see the different tags of modern technologies like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc., which means HBL digital banking can also be done through these modes of technology.

The advertisement for Superior Group of Colleges features a central image of four students: a male student in a white hard hat and safety vest, a female student in a pilot's uniform, a female student in a white lab coat, and a male student in a dark suit. Above them, the text reads "ADMISSIONS OPEN" followed by "F.Sc Plus ICS Plus I.Com Plus F.A Plus". Below the image, the Urdu headline "تمہاری سپر گروپ کالج" is prominently displayed. To the left, a circular badge states "100% FEE SCHOLARSHIP LIMITED SEATS AVAILABLE". Below the headline, there is a paragraph in Urdu and a list of bullet points in Urdu. At the bottom, the text "SUPERIOR GROUP OF COLLEGES" is written in large letters, with the phone number "042-111-00-00-78" and the website "www.superiorcolleges.edu.pk" below it. Social media icons for Facebook and Instagram are also present.

Picture 2 Jang (daily)

This particular advertisement about gender representation in Pakistani print media appeared in the Jung newspaper on June 12, 2022. It is highly loaded if we analyze it from linguistic and semiotic perspectives. Visually, it is obvious that there are two women and two men in this picture, and all are looking straight towards the audience. This implies a sense of confidence and a style of demanding that, being a part of this particular college (Superior Group of Colleges), we can enjoy every facility to excel ourselves in the educational field and we are on our way to make our presence felt in the fields of engineering, commercial piloting, business, and in medical profession. This is not the end of the story. This college trains its students in multiple domains of life and prepares them to play their roles actively in every field of life by seeking education in the relevant fields. Another important aspect of this particular institution is that along with imparting education in professional domains, its atmosphere also inculcates a sense of gender equality among both male and female students. The pictures shown in the advertisement illustrate that the most important service that is being rendered by this particular college is to make its students responsible citizens with a sense of gender equality. The message that is being imparted is that the students of this particular institute (Superior Group of Colleges) do not remain ordinary like the students of other colleges. Rather, they become superior to others, as the very name implies.

As far as the representation of women in this particular advertisement is concerned, two women have been shown in the center. The dress code of one represents her as a doctor, and that of the other as a commercial pilot. It means this particular college imparts the concept of gender equality as well along with preparing them for the challenges of life ahead. If men have been shown as engineers and businessmen, then, on an equal footing, women have also been shown as doctors and commercial pilots. In the past, domains such as being a doctor and a commercial pilot were considered to be males' domains. But now, after getting an education from this institution (Superior Group of Colleges), the sense of equality has become an important part of the female gender's personality.

The linguistic message in text "Tumhari superior Dastaan" (Your Superior Story) is connotative. Here, "Your" has been used both inclusively and exclusively. If seen exclusively, it means that these two specific women and men can be taken as a state metaphor because they represent all of the students working in these domains in various parts of the country and abroad. So, these people have been shown as the representatives of all the successful wo/men working in different fields.

Fairclough (2003) asserts that no use of language is ideology free. The use of exclamation mark is ideological. It is used to express a state of extreme happiness or sadness. When applied to this particular context, it illustrates happiness. It means those males and females who are part of this particular institute have every reason to feel happy, elevated, and delighted. It means those boys and girls who are enrolled in this particular college are superior to others. They are others, but in a positive way, and indirectly, students from other institutes, both male and female, have been negatively othered.

Then there's a linguistic message in white on a black background that points out "100% fee scholarship." It means that getting quality education is costly in Pakistani scenario. So, the message that is being propagated through this particular advertisement by using linguistic and visual practices is that those who are talented and capable students should come here and join this college without getting worried about their educational expenses because this is the college that provides numerous scholarships to its students and, like a near and dear one, it takes care of their professional and educational growth. At the same time it is providing endless opportunities to its students in terms of a relaxation in fees. Because of these relaxations, the students of this particular college are making their presence felt in every domain of life.

Moreover, at the bottom of this advertisement, there is a message for students: "Mazeed Maaloomaat Ke Liye Apne Qareebi Campus se Raabta Karain" (For further details, please visit your nearest campus). It means this network is countrywide. Wherever you are, you can easily find a campus of this particular network of colleges, and you can easily get yourself enrolled at your nearest campus. Furthermore, the Web address is also present, which connotes that it is technologically advanced and provides education on cutting-edge topics. The very logo of the college is highly connotative. A wrapped paper symbolizing degree is there with a crown like a hood. It means that if you are enrolled in this college, you will graduate with distinction and honor, and that degree will pay you throughout your life in various professions, as represented by these four people in this advertisement.



Picture 3 from Jang (daily)

This particular advertisement has been taken from the Pakistani Urdu newspaper Jung Daily. Here once again we find equal representation of men and women related to showbiz. From the left side, the first part of this advertisement is the front page of a weekly magazine. Here, a female has been positioned in the center, looking at the audience. This posture implies a certain type of demand that a woman is imparting to the rest of the women so that they can make their presence felt in different domains of life. If she can hold political talks with men on an equal footing, she can make her presence felt in showbiz and the fashion world as well. It is an open message to the rest of the women that they should challenge the constructed gender stereotypes that have deprive women of their due share in different fields of life.

The colors she is wearing are white and red. The very connotations of the red color include passion, vim, and vigor, while the white color connotes knowledge, soberness, and purity. This particular woman, which has been metaphorically represented here, is a combination of passion and reason. She is very passionate about making her presence felt, and at the same time she is equally reasonable and logical about how to make her presence felt. Now she has gained the status to be on the front pages of different magazines. It deconstructs the constructed gender stereotypes that women are incapable of performing leading roles. Nowadays, we can usually find women's pictures on the front pages of most magazines, which is an indirect indication that, to some extent, women have been able to push males onto the inner pages and have taken their position from the front page. Here is another example of deconstruction, and it is also written there that "Subscribe now" is an open invitation that such pages should be liked by many and many people. So, the message about the concept of challenging gender stereotypes should be propagated among more and more females so that they also come up like this particular model in order to make their presence felt.

In the next part, Shahzaib Khanzada has been shown in the forefront, and again, it is written there, "Pakistan ka sab se bara aur sab se zayda dekha jane wala news show (The most popular and most watched news show in Pakistan) is named as:

"Aaj Shahzaib Khanzada ke sath" (Today with Shahzaib Khanzada).

One of the basic motives of the show is "Sawaal ki chot se gire gi dewaar (Question will hit and every wall will be fallen). By asking questions, you can deconstruct the

constructed norms. Here, a man ,Shahzaib Khanzada has been represented as a state metaphor, imparting a message of revolution among the other males and imparting awareness to the people that instead of being in the background, now is the right time to come forward. This particular news channel, "GEO News," is acting as a torch bearer for both men and women by providing them with the opportunity to make their presence felt in different domains of life like political talks, fashion shows, and other sorts of programs. It is written there "Peer se Jumeraat" (Monday to Thursday), which means this particular program is on air for four consecutive days, which indicates its popularity and the success of Shahzaib Khanzada, its host. Here the use of black, red, and white color is highly ideological, which implies that now this particular news channel has taken initiative to bring people to the light who have been kept in darkness and also to provide the people with the latest and most realistic news. The use of white color is still another important typographic technique that connotes knowledge and awareness. It implies that this particular news channel and its anchors are doing wonderful things to provide news, views, and awareness to their viewers. These shows, which are aired on the Geo News channel, are so popular that they are broadcasted almost throughout the week.

The third part of the pictures under analysis is titled "Pakistan ka sab se bara comedy show Taabish Hashmi ke sath," (One of the most popular comedy shows in Pakistan with Taabish Hashmi). The important thing to mention is that not only males are hosting these kinds of comedy or political shows, but now women are equally participating with them in hosting.

One of the effective modes of representation that have been used is the use of color scheme in the advertisement under analysis. If we look at the color scheme used in the picture, the background is yellow, and "Pakistan ka sab se bara comedy show Taabish Hashmi ke sath" (One of the most popular comedy shows of Pakistan with Taabish Hashmi) has been written in black and red color. The very connotations of the color red are vigor, and passion. These connotations could be related to the image under analysis, which shows that not only males are full of vim, vigor, and passion when it comes to holding media shows, but women are also there side by side, participating in and managing such shows with equal competence. The use of red and white color is also quite noteworthy, and it is written in white, "Dekhiye Zarnish Khan ko" (Watch Zarnish Khan in this show), and the background is red, which means the concept of passion, vitality, vim, and vigor has been composed with soberness, seriousness, and knowledge. These attributes have been associated with a lady named "Zarnish Khan."

The logo of the comedy show is "Hansna mana he" (laughing is forbidden) which means that women can not only manage the comedy shows but are equally competent in managing the shows related to serious issues like politics as well. Then there is the name of the TV channel where these shows are hosted, and that is GEO News. It means these two anchors, Taabish Hashmi and Zarnish Khan, are the representatives of this particular media group.

Similarly, it can be generalized that if these two people are managing affairs in the form of holding different political talks on Geo TV, there must be other male and females who are managing such shows on other electronic media platforms in Pakistan. So, the overall message implied by the visual and verbal practices in this particular advertisement is that a lady has been represented on an equal footing, and "She" (Zarnish Khan) is making her presence felt along with other women, and her body posture and eye contact convey her confidence.

In the last part of this advertisement shown, there is written the name of a program titled "Report Card." It is written in the style of a book, which means that, like a book, this program contains various aspects of society. The same is true for this program, "Report Card," which covers a wide range of social and political issues. At the top, there is a picture

of the female host. Again, she has been portrayed as being very confident, and she is eyeing at the audience, which represents confidence and demand. It implies a message to the other women that they, too, can attain good status and a prestigious position like this particular lady. It is an open invitation to the female gender to educate themselves. In this way, they can be positioned at the top and perform a leading role. This particular news channel has enabled them to be in the leading role. Behind the picture of the host are pictures of four men and one woman. Here it is important to note that all these panelists are being handled by a lady, which implies that she is capable of managing all these things. These five people are the representatives of different political parties in Pakistan. And she is very tactfully handling them, which means that she is well knowledgeable about the political and social scenario of the country. And therefore, she is capable of managing all these five people. It is written there, "Dekhiye Peer se Hafta" (Watch this show from Monday to Saturday). It is written in white, and the background is red. It is a combination of knowledge and passion, and the sentence is in imperative form: "Dekhiye Peer se Hafta" (Watch this show from Monday to Saturday). The sentence is imperative in its construction. It suggests that this particular news channel has the consent of the maximum number of Pakistanis. And now it is in a leading position to shape people's perceptions of showbiz, political matters, comedy shows, and political discussions.

### **Conclusion**

The study has attempted to explore how male and female genders are represented in Dawn (daily) and Jung (Daily) advertisements. The analysis of the data reveals that the important domains of male and female representation include banking and finance, education, showbiz and media, and real-estate business. Different visual and verbal practices have been used to sell the desired product (ideology) comprehensively. The concept of gender equality through these advertisements has been observed. In these two newspapers, the total number of male representation advertisements is 22%, while the total number of female representation advertisements is 34%. Another significant finding of this research is that celebrities (both male and female) have been portrayed in the mentioned domains to persuade the target audience and to sell the product (ideology). This study also observes that ideology travels from top to bottom. This could be one of the reasons of hiring celebrities for the representation and marketing of banking and finance, education, showbiz and media, and real-estate business.

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