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## “Beat me Up” ; Analysis Of Femvertising In Pakistani Advertisements

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### ABSTRACT

Recent developments in the media industry have introduced new trends across all sectors, including advertising. These changes have expanded the role of advertising beyond merely attracting consumers to actively shaping public perceptions of social reality. This study investigates and documents the use of contemporary advertising techniques, specifically *femvertising*, in Pakistani advertisements. Adopting a critical approach, the study seeks to answer how innovative methods like *femvertising* are being utilized in a traditional society such as Pakistan, which is characterized by deep-rooted social taboos. Additionally, it explores whether these techniques challenge the stereotypical roles and images associated with women as a marginalized segment of society.

A qualitative study on 12 video ads selected through purposive sampling technique is conducted on the issue of women empowerment. Purpose is to seek answer to the question that how advertiser use language and visual representation of women empowerment to challenge inequality and power in Pakistan. The study illuminates how these campaigns tackle pressing problems like domestic abuse and encourage resilience and self-empowerment, question the conventional gender roles, and stress the value of family support in fostering girls' dreams. Through qualitative content analysis of these commercials, the article aims to shed light on how advertising shapes public

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perceptions of women's strength and promotes a movement in culture toward gender equality. The findings reveal that these commercials are not only captivating and motivational, but they also stimulate discourse on women's rights, empowerment and ideology. This underscores the significant role that the media plays in influencing public opinion and advancing social change.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Femvertising, Stereotypical roles, Social Reality

## **Introduction**

Advertising is a key communication tool in marketing, designed to promote products and capture consumer attention (Clow, 2013). It is a significant instrument that advertising agencies use to influence audiences and alter their actions and perceptions. Furthermore, it is also a mirror of the current cultural standards, new technological advancements, and inventions around the world. It educates the public about brands, products, services, and new concepts (Pollay, 1986).

Advertisers utilize a range of strategies and techniques to engage their target audiences effectively. Traditionally, the depiction of women in advertisements has been a common practice. However, with technological advancements and the rise of political and social movements questioning traditional domestic and social roles for women, the portrayal of women as commodities has come under scrutiny. This shift has prompted advertisers to reconsider their approach, focusing instead on representing women in diverse roles that were previously reserved for men (Gill, 2008). This has resulted in adoption of new approaches in Advertising, which previously has been reinforcing societal expectations of gendered roles for long i-e women's roles confined to being mothers and wives, while men seen as the primary family providers (Bernard, 1981).

In the past, women's roles were confined to being mothers and wives, while men were seen as the primary family providers (Bernard, 1981). They were considered as inferior and emotional creature who did not have much power to make tough decisions. (Knoll et al. 2011; Taylor et al., 2013) These traditional gender roles were also reflected in the media, with women portrayed as submissive and focused on relationships, while men were depicted as breadwinners, aggressive, and adventurous. However, in recent decades, significant changes in the market environment have resulted in a major shift in the responsibilities assigned to women and their position in society. Women, once dependent on men, have transformed into empowered individuals in the 21st

century. This paradigm shift is attributed to factors such as the introduction of modern education, rising female literacy rates, increased enrollment of women in higher education, their growing participation in the labor force, expanded perspectives, emerging ideas, and the impact of the feminist movements. These changes not only transformed women's roles and status in society but also influenced how they were depicted in advertisements. Many women now have independent incomes and hold their own views. Instead of being confined to household duties, they are active in the workforce and are seen as independent careerists. Women fill positions (like lawyers, pilots, CEOs, elected officials, parliament members, police officers, and army soldiers that are not meant for women according to some people (Tolentino, 2015). Their role has evolved from being domestic managers to being the primary decision-makers for family purchases. As a result, they have become the main targets of marketers and are increasingly being depicted differently in a wide range of advertisements.

It should be noted that a considerable change in the representation of women in media took place in the late 1960s (Bardwick & Schumann). Earlier analysis suggested that women in advertisements occupy traditional roles and are dependent, being wives, girlfriends, parents, friends, etc. (Bardwick & Schumann, 1967; Goffman, 1979; Sullivan & O'Connor, 1988). They were depicted mostly in homes, advertising beauty, kitchen, and bathroom products, and rarely as adults with career orientation (McAruther and Resko, 1975; Silverstein and Silverstein 1974). New and rising trends in advertising however, show women in atypical and more active positions (Grau & Zotos, 2016). They are now presented in ads as being emotionally and **divisionally** masterful and capable of changing the behavior, thought, and attitudinal patterns of others (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2020). Now a day's women endorsement is becoming an important part of modern and appealing advertising but from a unique perspective, they focus on empowered women called *femvertising* (Yorgos & Zotos, 2016), that refers to represent women as powerful, spirited and independent in advertisements.. A paradigm shift has occurred in the premise of today's commercials, with the primary focus on empowering women. A new age of advertising has evolved that aims to empower women: in advertising (Repisky, 2015). Advertising is now presenting women's performance as more neutral and equal to men's, with a call to both sexes to contribute. More so, there emerging trends of portraying both men and women in the sale of consumer durable products like washing machines, refrigerators, microwaves, dishwashing gel, etc. marking increased cultural legitimacy of males to engage in home chores (Das & Sharma, remittancesreview.com

2014). Moorthi, Roy, and Pansari (2014) found that the role of women in television advertising has evolved throughout the years.

The portrayal of women in advertising has been extensively studied in Western contexts, but there is a lack of research in the Pakistani context. Given the vast differences in values, beliefs, and norms between Western and Pakistani societies, it is unjust to generalize conclusions drawn from Western studies to the Pakistani context. While the issue of women's portrayal in Pakistani advertising has been addressed, existing studies predominantly focus on print advertisements, which often depict women in a negative light. This study intends to academic contribution by analyzing and documenting the role of advertisements in promoting women empowerment.

### **Research Questions**

RQ1: What significant stereotypical gender roles are challenged in copies and visuals of advertisements and How?

RQ2 : In what ways, *femvertising* is applied in advertisements?

### **Methodology**

Study employed qualitative content analysis. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 10 most appropriate video ads that runs on national television channels and social media. Selected on the basis of viewership and popularity, these advertisements were analyzed to identify the representation of women and to figure out how the copy and visuals in them contribute to the empowerment of women - consequently advancing gender equality in society. Bracketing was ensured to confirm that personal perspectives and biases of researchers do not affect the analysis and interpretations. The researchers were committed to remain open and impartial. Further the construct of “Empowered Women” was defined in the light of literature review and in context of Pakistani society. Power relationship and the gap of inequality possessed by society of Pakistan in social roles of gender is examined.

## Results and Findings



Figure 1: Shan Thematic – Baitee ko jeena seekhao Shan say (*Raise your daughter to live with self-esteem*)

Figure 1 reflects that the Shan Food commercials where the father teaches his daughter how to drive and change a tire carries a very compelling social message. It emphasizes the message of women's empowerment. The basic theme behind this ad is to make women independent and develop a sense of strong ability that women can do anything that is even not made for them.

Here's an analysis of how this ad conveys this message:

The ads portray a father, (representation of authority in most societies, specifically in patriarchal societies like Pakistan), taking his young daughter through what is traditionally tagged as a 'boy's stuff'. For instance, how to drive a car or fix a flat tire is purely associated with males. This advertisement mainly highlights the role of male figures in a girl's life to convert her into an empowered woman by boosting her confidence. This is employed by teaching her practical, supposedly masculine skills. The father is trying to make his daughter a super strong woman who can beat every tricky situation in a very calm manner. Fathers are supposed to be heroes for daughters. Fathers give lessons of life to their children to make them independent. So Shan Food did a remarkable job in promoting the message of women's empowerment. This is contrary to

Shaikh et al. (2015) which argue that an advertisement ideologically promotes stereotypical images in their content and context.

Driving and minor car maintenance is empowering and enables a person to be more independent. Sumaira et al. (2023) noted that in the context of visual representation, ads bring change in society. This part of the ad in line with Sumaira et al. (2023) that like men, women should be independent of others and strong enough to perform normal tasks that beget confidence. In some of our cultures today there are still activities like driving or the maintenance of cars that are widely associated with the male gender. In illustrating a father teaching his daughter the skills of how to become a man and a woman respectively the ads are also a way of persuading people to change from the existing norms of discriminating men and women.

In this respect, this portrayal supports the philosophy that ‘the education and development of women begin in the development of woman’s capacity.’ Javed et al., (2024) argue that in the Pakistani society earlier, men have been very superior .They did not even allow women to go outside but now due to advancements in technology and awareness, men are more conscious about women's health, privacy, and objectification associated with gendered role replaced with much empowerment to women.

From the marketing perspective, such ads also appeal to the contemporary audience’s liberal SPIN and equality. They defy the stereotype of women, assert independence, and signify advocacy of women’s credibility, which are themes that are highly appreciated in Western nations . Lazar (2007) argues that hierarchal gendered social order is sustaining in Western world.

Figure 2: UN Empowerment of Women Ad-Try to Beat Me: I am Unbeatable



Figure 2 shows that ‘I dare you, or rather attempt to beat me; I am unbeatable’ that is the view of UN Women Pakistan. The slogan of the advertisement, "Try to Beat Me: I Am Unbeatable" is a challenge to physical abuse, which women face. UN Women Pakistan plays the role of ending violence against women and girls, supporting women’s rights, and empowering women to fulfill their potential. This ad is by UN Women Pakistan which aims at building positive changes and turn Pakistan into a country where women are equal to men in the development process (Jain, 2005). The ad poses a challenge to male by inviting them to beat women in different fields of life ;from labor in fields to conquering a mountain instead of beating them physically. UN Women Pakistan The "Try to Beat Me: The ‘I Am Unbeatable’ advertisement shows the formidable determination of these women who face various forms of adversity, and still seek to do better and make a good life for themselves and their kin.

The ad represents a woman’s strength for her to be able to lead future changes.

Gender-based violence is one of the focus areas that UN Women Pakistan seeks to eradicate. It engages in outreach to raise awareness of incidents, assisting survivors, and lobbying for enhanced laws on the plight of women. This empowering message of the ad is to create awareness and realize that no matter how strong the man is, she is strong enough to stand against violence and get her life back.

Ory et al. (2003) assert that a large part of the prevention strategy is the organization’s media campaigns, and community programs for raising awareness and cooperation with cultural role models to fight against stereotyping of women. Thus, the jingle “I Am Unbeatable” corresponds to the promotion of these initiatives as it presents powerful women with a sense of perseverance.

Figure 3: Shan Foods - Oath for her



Figure 3 is a still image of ad film by Shan Foods's campaign "Shan Oath for Her". This ad seeks to bring out the message of gender parity and women's chant. The copy focuses men swearing to stand by the women in their lives and share the load and value their efforts. The campaign seeks to challenge the stereotypical use of gender roles and change men's and women's relationships to become equal and responsible which is in line with Cook & Cusack (2011).

Also, the ad shows different cases when men promise to be with the women they care about, presenting the situations most women deal with on their own. The male characters commit themselves to doing more chores, being active- beings that assist their wives, and spending quality time with their families. This illustration regards the division of labor in households and speaks against its segregation. This work stresses that the process of women's uplifting starts from home, starting with appreciating their work and helping to alleviate their loads. By linking this ad to feministic views it realized one of the basic issues of women which unpaid housework. Hoskyns & Rai (2007) argue that inequality in gender exist because of not counting the unpaid work done by the women at home. Therefore, the campaign will go a long way in spreading the messages of gender parity and make men take up chores at home and responsibilities for children. It also prolongs the women's health and contributes to their longevity and energy to search and develop individual and occupational goals. On the aspect of representation, the commercial is very empowering since it means that whatever few roles culture seeks to lock women into can be dismissed so that women can be great at all professions.

The "Shan Oath for Her" ad also promotes the demand for encouragement in an unobvious manner. It is an encouragement for men to be there for women and to share the burden with them since they are symbolic partners. This part of empowering women is essential because compassion can make a considerable difference in a female's mood and psychological state (Neff, 2003). The ad also thus advocates for a comprehensive strategy for the empowering process since people need a hand to be lifted both literally and figuratively.



Figure 4: Eva Cooking Oil – My Hero Mom

The cadenced creative selling appeal of the Eva Cooking Oil - My Hero Mom commercial broadcasts a capable and strong narrative idea that encapsulates the spirit and goals of women's encouragement which is at the heart of the freedom theme through celebrating the societal roles of women – especially mothers. The concept of this advertisement is to reflect the hardworking, tireless, and enduring spirit of the mothers, the everyday superheroes.

The ad begins with sequences representing Mother's Day starting from early morning chores to mid-night activities. This is depicted in her daily struggle between cooking healthy meals, assisting kids with homework, doing various household chores, and even holding an employer-like job. Thus, the focus is made on such aspects as the persistence and passion that the mothers put into taking care of their families. Concerning this ad, Women Empowerment makes an extraordinarily strong statement regarding the necessity to acknowledge and appreciate the roles of women in every sphere. Thus, the ad not only exposes the traditional, competitive, often masculine view of the world but also reduces the role of women, paying special attention to the cult of the mother as the main support of the family (Gilbert, 2008). It does not just assert the importance but also stresses that a mother is a critical figure in any man's life and needs to be respected and appreciated.

In addition, the "My Hero Mom" campaign shares objectives with the enterprise's initiative on women empowerment by focusing on the abilities and potential of women. It characterizes the mother as a hope for her children and an example of the need to follow her instructions and imitate her behavior. Inness, (2018) note that the representation is important because it enables young girls to grow with the dream of being strong women on their own while on the other hand young boys

are encouraged to support women and respect them. Moreover, it is also symbolic that the ad features the opportune cooking oil as the main product. Cooking oil is one of the most indispensable commodities in our day-to-day preparation of meals, and its quality determines the health and well-being of the families. The ad thus connects Eva Cooking Oil with the kind of task mothers perform– providing nourishment and ‘saving the flock’ – and consequently reminds the viewers that giving families good oil is also a positive measure. This underlines the fact that mothers are very special members of society who contribute a lot by caring for the family and creating a healthy environment that helps make families happy.



Figure 5: Master Molty foam - *Log Kya Kahengy* (set your daughter free / unchain your daughter from fear of society’s whispers).

Figure 4 portrays the advertisement series titled “Master Molty Foam – Log Kya Kahenge” describes the impacting story of fatherhood and self-fulfillment of the dreams of the young girl in defiance of traditions and conventions. Encouragement and uplifting messages from family are a focus of this movie along with emphasizing female power and breaking the tradition.

The specific ad features a young girl and opens with her saying that she wants to compete in a rowing championship. The females’ excitement and joy are juxtaposed with condescension, discouragement, and disbelief from male counterparts who challenge her capability and the propriety of her ambitions with the ‘Log Kya Kahenge’ slogan that translates to ‘What will people say.’ This phrase symbolizes what people or communities expect women to be or do as they continue to be restricted in terms of their freedom.

This change of tone is the climax of the ad where the father's retort comes into play. Barely does he give in to the traditions and norms of society and without any hesitation he encourages the girl child. He grows into a coach, a teacher, and the biggest encouragement she needs, and prepares her for the competition. The sequences of their training depict the father's commitment and the daughter's aspirations while presenting the audience with an example of the importance of support. When concerning this ad to women's empowerment, Tubbs (2023) argues it pragmatically demonstrates the significance of not conforming and moving past the restrictions and prejudices of society. Support from the father predicts the second fundamental aspect of women's liberation and for this reason, symbolized by the allies. Finally, he opposes the negative voices and supports her against expectations put in place by typical culture, thereby liberating her. This act of support is important in a way that women can fulfill their dreams and fight for what they love regardless of the norms of society.

Resilience, as another major theme, is also effectively communicated in the ad. The striving of the daughter to get to the championship of rowing is not an easy one. She has many adversities including physical and psychological ones. But she does not give up and with the help of her father she continues. This account serves to reinforce the theme that 'where there is encouragement and sponsors and all-round support for women they can drastically transform themselves.'

Besides, the subject of rowing as a sport is meaningful. Rowing is an effective exerting activity that demands power, stamina, and cooperation, principles that were not attributed to women for a long time. Thus, by depicting a young girl as performing in this rigorous sport, the ad refutes the notion of 'women's work,' or certain occupations and endeavors being off limits to females. This assists in placing the notion of women's capability to achieve in any field of their choice across the social divide thus eradicating stereotyping of women.

Therefore, one can conclude that the "Master Molty Foam - Log Kya Kahenge" ad is a very inspiring story that convinces people of women's rights overthrowing the stereotypical norms with a man's support of his daughter. It is put into development a conception of overcoming, changing traditional standards, and arguing the significance of a family's support for women. Thus, it can be concluded that apart from the ad's advocacy of gender equality, it also associates Master Molty Foam with such positive qualities as comfort, support, and power according to Fairclough (2013).



Figure 6: MacDonald's Pakistan *Kholo Soch K darwazay* (Enlighten/ Broaden your vision/  
Expand the Spectrum of your vision

Figure 5 shows that the McDonald's Pakistan ad campaign with the girl who dares to dream of being the McDonald's female rider also contains a positive message that empowers women and breaks the stereotype by providing the workplace of women with safety. Speaking of the viewed ad, it is a strong statement about gender segregation and female dreams.

The ad starts with a young girl revealing what she wants to be when she grows up, a female rider at McDonald's. Her spirit and enthusiasm are portrayed even in her choice of a career meanwhile her family and relatives are boring and discouraging her. These scenes are repeating a usual saying, 'How can girls work in a restaurant?' The lines depict society as restrictive to women about the kind of jobs they should be undertaking.

In this case, the movie illustrates the girl's determination to follow her dream despite the discouragement that comes her way. The scenes then shift to her beginning her employment at McDonald's and getting full support from the team. The ad also emphasizes the company's focus and efforts in giving their employees a friendly and safe workplace and involves the girl receiving training and protective gear with assistance from fellow McDonald's employees.

About the theme of women empowerment, this ad speaks to aspects of defying conventional perception and opening doors for women in all channels. McDonald's is presented as a progressive and acclaimed employer that provides mangling and developing opportunities to women and gives

them a rider which was not appropriate for a woman in the old days. Notably, the ad removes stereotypical portrayals of woman as they are shown as capable of taking up any profession of their choice.

The ad also stresses the importance of having a favorable workplace. Describing the training and measures McDonald's uses to protect its ladies, the advert reassures the audiences that such women are safe working for the company. This aspect plays a key role in promoting women to follow their dreams and career goals regardless of being discriminated against or even being provided with harsh working conditions. The narrative also describes the change in attitude of the girl's family and other relatives towards the girl's sickly state. Blokker & Vieten (2022) argue that in the beginning, doubts and fearing the opinion of society, they begin to appreciate and even envy women hard work and achievements. Such change in the view is a bold proclamation of the transformation of the male gender and the whole society where women are encouraged and facilitated to stand for what they want. It presents McDonald's as the corporate titan that is fighting for gender equality and against discrimination and helping women in terms of employment and having strong corporate policies regarding work-family conflict. In addition to presenting the audience to the car and enticing individuals to purchase it, the ad also encourages people to do away with prejudice against women and embrace their ambition.



Figure 7: McDonald's Pakistan ad reflects female rider

Thus, figure 7 analyzed advertisement of McDonald's Pakistan, where a girl dream of becoming a female rider supports women employment, and fight against prejudice and discriminations in women at workplace through showing safety and inclusion.



Figure 8: Your Rishta in your Hand - *Meri Bhi Sun lo* ( My say matters, as much as yours)

The advertisement of Muzz TV's 'Your Rishta in Your Hand' entails a socially and culturally sensitive message that many women must endure in arranged marriages (See Figure 8). In what follows, this analysis will focus on three main aspects: gender discrimination, the issue of women's emancipation, and the message of change embodied in the advertisement.

The ad starts with a young woman who, after being eyed by several families of potential grooms, is regarded only as a receiver of various criticisms. The families' express negative remarks about multiple features of her appearance and performance, height, color, cooking, and fatness. Such criticisms are portrayed as society's prejudices which have negative impacts of drawing attention to outer and conventional features to determine the appropriateness of a woman for marriage.

The first scenes of the ad depict the kind of injustice that women go through in many societies across the world. This is evident where the theme of beauty is based on factors such as skin color and weight thus painting an evil picture of the norms that continue to be placed on women. Also, the role that was associated with cooking skills brings up the image of women as domestic animals, and stay-at-home spouses, which is questionable. These biases DO NOT simply suppress the woman but also destroy her morale and keep her reminded that her worth is in serving unrealistic

expectations.

This is by no means an exhaustive list, but the most noticeable songs include Mullah Noman's song, 'Meri Bhi Sun Lo' ( Listen to me, too) .The climax of the commercial can be viewed when the young woman, feeling angry and sad due to the comments she has received, suddenly regains her assertiveness, and demands the audience to listen to her.



Figure 9: Salman Shahid – An eminent and veteran Pakistani celebrity in performing arts

Figure 9 reflects that As the young woman claims with certainty, the image in the ad is accompanied by a message from Salman Shahid, a man who is trusted by the audience, and who urges women to make their own decisions in terms of choosing partners. This endorsement underlines the need to celebrate women's rights and equality with men to understand that women, like men, have a right to make decisions concerning their lives. Through Shahid's message, he understands that women should have the ability to choose their husbands by choice not by force hence the need to be allowed to be evaluated based on their qualifications without the interference of the community.

The curtain drops of the ad tie thematically to a facet of gender inequality in as much as the woman is empowered. Since it breaks away from the social order and empowers women to decide who they want to be with, the campaign has an element of gender equality and women's respect. It opened society's eyes and made people realize there are no fixed molds, and personal inclinations and choices are vital in a partnership. This advertisement from 'Muzz TV' named 'Your Rishta in





Figure 11: Pepsi's "Tayyar Hain" (Prepared)

In Figure 10, Pepsi's campaign celebrates the achievements of Pakistani women in sports and various professional fields. By featuring prominent female athletes and professionals, the ad underscores the message that women can excel in traditionally male-dominated areas. This portrayal not only empowers women but also encourages a shift in societal attitudes toward women's roles.



Figure 12: Sapphire’s “Woh Kya Kehna” (That’s marvellous)

Sapphire's campaign focuses on women's choices and personal expression, challenging traditional beauty standards and societal expectations. The ad highlights the importance of self-confidence and individuality, encouraging women to embrace their definitions of beauty and success.



Figure 13: Jazz’s “Reclaim Your Life”

Figure 12 reflects Jazz’s campaign empowers women to take control of their lives and assert their rights. By highlighting stories of women overcoming obstacles and achieving their goals, the ad promotes the message that women have the power to shape their own destiny.

Previous studies have also supported the notion that Pakistani ads reflects ideological, linguistic and visual elements in commercials ,reflecting women as empowered (Javed & Sadiq,2024). People have come a long way in changing traditional gender roles through ads on women's emancipation. Indeed, brands such as Ufone, Pepsi, Sapphire, and Jazz have played a significant role in bringing women's rights and independence into the current discourse. However, to achieve the goal of empowering women in real life situation, it is crucial for the brands to go deeper than the surface implications. If one wants to change the lives of women in the country and bring a positive change towards gender equality in Pakistan, it calls for real, sincere, and deep-rooted interventions.

## **Conclusion**

Following themes emerged after a careful and thorough analysis of selected advertisements:

- Challenge to stereotypical domestic and professional roles associated with women.
- Societal challenges for women empowerment.
- Depiction of the concept of Empowered women in Decision making.
- A positive narration building for empowered woman as resilient, determined, daring, confident and brave.
- Celebrating women achievements specifically in fields that are traditionally denoted to men.
- Role of males in supporting women empowerment both at individual and societal level.
- Highlighting unacknowledged roles and contributions of women as housewives.

All these advertisements are part of the formation of a significant cultural change which is aimed at changing women's affirmation and liberation. These are empowering women because only that society develops when both men and women share equal standing, home, and workplace power or decision-making. Because of the provided message portraying set practices related to gender norms, enhancing self-esteem, and embracing women's rights and opportunities, these advertisements have the potential of altering mindsets within society. The above points suggest that ads can influence people more and it alters the perception of people by ensuring that ads are made as per the interest of people that is why they pay much attention and make a decision to buy.

Not only do they succeed in arousing the viewers' emotions and influence them positively, but also through presenting familiar stories and actual examples, they raise the relevant issues concerning women's rights and their empowerment in our society of Pakistan.

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