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A SOCIO-SEMIOTIC STUDY OF MEDIA GENDER MISREPRESENTATION IMPACT ON YOUTH'S COGNITION AND IDEOLOGY

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Gender Misrepresentation, Media; Socio-Semiotic, Cognition, & Ideology	According to Cook (2001), the advertising content influences and persuades people and contributes to shaping perceptions and attitudes. Advertisers and image producers depict human figures on billboards to develop social affinity between images and viewers. This study aims to explore the patterns of gender misrepresentation in Pakistani print advertisements over socio-semiotic perspective. It focuses on its impact on Pakistani youth's cognition about the self and other gender dichotomies and gender-based ideologies. This qualitative study employs a descriptive approach to examine semiotic choices made in billboard advertising media. The interviews were led to get deeper insights into impact of gender misrepresentation on youth. Purposive sampling technique is adopted for data collection, while the convenient sampling technique is chosen for interviews. The study results entail that the image producers make explicit and implicit semiotic choices to ascertain gender stereotypical representation of both genders. It is recommended that advertisers and image producers pay heed to this serious issue and portray both the genders positively and neutrally, that can help in establishing an inclusive & progressive society where both genders are respected and play their parts equally.
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INTRODUCTION

Semiotics is the study of signs (Saussure, 1959), which serves the purpose of interpreting language use more effectively. Language serves the purpose of communicating and sharing ideas, thoughts, beliefs, opinions, and information. Communication occurs in different modes, such as verbal, non-verbal, and visual (Kamalu & Ojatula, 2019). Visual communication deals with semiotic resources and choices, symbols, signs, illustrations, and texts for disseminating meanings. Visual intervention

has enormously influenced the advertising field both in print and digital media. Advertisements significantly educate people about new services, products and create awareness about prevalent social issues by using eye-catching images and persuasive language to grab people's attention. The impact of advertisements is inescapable and ubiquitous (Williamson, 1978). The advertisers make skillful use of the semiotic, linguistic, and visual choices to transfer their intended meaning to the viewers. Fairclough (2006) propounds that the content presented in media is ideologically driven and contributes to producing and maintaining social relations of power and discrimination. It is generally believed that the term 'ideology' means a set of beliefs held by individuals & shared by a society or community.

In critical discourse analysis, the ideology refers to the concepts that serve the interests of powerful people who want to maintain the power over less privileged social groups (Mayr & Machin, 2012). Ideologies are disseminated through semiotic modes, including language, symbols, signs, pictures, illustrations, images, visuals, graphics, emojis, colors, and sounds. All this greatly impacts the public perception and cognition. The term 'cognition' is mental process that involves acquiring knowledge and comprehension. It includes processes such as; recollecting, reflecting, perceiving, assessing, and judging (Cherry, 2023). Cognition has a strong impact on our everyday observations. It allows us to perceive the world, form impressions, comprehend situations, and interact with the world. Thus, the advertisements play a major role in shaping the cognition due to their catchy content. According to Cook (2001), advertising content influences and persuades people and contributes to shaping attitudes focusing on semiotic mechanisms that underpin these processes. Billboard is an outdoor advertising medium, composed of brief, crisp, and simple messages with maximum reach and huge exposure, thus swaying a wider population (Chu & Kim, 2018; Herrera & Pasch, 2017). Advertisers and image producers depict human figures on the billboards to develop social affinity between the images and the viewers.

These gender portrayals on billboards impart information about social practices that help promote particular gender-based ideologies and sociocultural norms of society (Nasir, 2018). Advertising arena plays a vital role in constructing stereotypical depictions of gender. Representation of gender in media has long been area of interest for researchers because it is criticized for serving patriarchal interests by presenting women in suggestive ways and portraying men as dominant (Belknap & Leonard, 1991). These images also suggest and direct people on how they should view themselves as belonging to a particular gender and how the other/opposite gender should be treated (Ojiakor, Onebunne & Ekezie, 2019). The appeal of media is undeniable and leads to influencing, molding, and changing people's opinions which strongly affect people's lives. This explores patterns of gender misrepresentation in Pakistani print advertisements through a socio-semiotic perspective, focusing on Pakistani youth's cognition about self & other gender dichotomies and ideologies about gender roles perceived by media. The researchers were inspired by distorted depiction of gender in media which pays to normalizing gender asymmetries by strongly influencing Pakistani youth perception about gender roles and gender-based ideologies. Following research questions are crafted in light of the research aims:

1. How is the misrepresentation of gender portrayed in Pakistani print media through semiotic resources under considerations?

2. What impact does this gender misrepresentation mark on Pakistani youth's cognition of self and other gender dichotomies?
3. How does the gender misrepresentation in the media shape the Pakistani youth's ideology about the specific gender roles?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Fairclough (1995) argues that certain powerful groups in society control media, manipulate it, and hardly represent neutral reality rather portray the deformed reflection of reality. He further asserts that ideology is always implicitly embedded in media over tactful language use, that manipulates these media discourses. The term ideology was first used in 1800s by a French philosopher named Destutt Tracy. Nevertheless, it has conceptual underpinnings of Karl Marx's (1933) ideas which postulate that dominant groups and forces exert their power over dominated and subordinated groups over circulation of particular ideologies. Now, the meaning in a broader sense is associated with belief systems held by individuals and collective cognition (Mayr & Machin, 2012). Ideology and cognition are interconnected notions. Dijk (1995) propounds that ideologies are typically, yet not exclusively, expressed and reproduced in discourse and communication, including non-verbal semiotic messages, such as pictures, photographs, and movies. The term cognition is believed to be mental process of making sense of world around us through experience and senses. Ideologies are neutralized and normalized with same mental influence since ideologies are prevalent everywhere, the part and parcel of our social lives and ideas, and embedded in knowledge and social practices (Mayr & Machin, 2012).

Najafian and Kitabi (2011) examined the role of social semiotic choices; such as the ads' text (verbal), image, and color (non-verbal), made by advertisers in conveying hidden ideologies and impacting public cognition. The study reveal that these elements encode social practices serving advertisers' hidden agendas. Lemish (2004) investigated the representation of women in Israeli media by using the semiotic approach for analysis. The findings entail that woman are presented as victims and mostly in the private household sphere. Women are objectified and displayed for fulfilling sexual functions. Edegoh, Asemah, and Okpanachi (2013) highlighted discrimination of women in a drink Guinness Stout billboard advertisement. The results render that word choice and visual depiction contribute to marginalize and discriminate against female gender, therefore, propagating gender bias. Grammer (1998) asserted that advertisements sell much more than products including; values, images, and concepts of success and worth, love, and sexuality that define gender misrepresentation in media and provide examples. For this reason, the advertisements became the powerful tool for disseminating gender misrepresentation in media and became active area of inquiry for different researchers to work on. Therefore, he also argued for displaying women as sex symbols while men as dominant and successful.

Goffman (1979) drew attention to this aspect in his phenomenal work, the 'gender advertisements', which explains how men are depicted more in a larger size, erect body posture, and as independent. In contrast, women are depicted as caressing objects, reacting with smile, as subordinates reliant on on men, and in leaning positions. Zakia and Farida (2016) examined gender representation in two Algerian magazine and concluded that women are projected as decorative objects, submissive and

fragile beings while men are illustrated as strong, domineering, and confident, leading to ascertain gender-discriminating ideologies that discuss why youth are particularly vulnerable to the media influences. Furthermore, another study employed a multimodal social semiotic approach to analyze words, signs, and images used in Lager Beer billboard advertisements. The findings of study suggest that visual communication has a strong impact on people's perception of their gender orientation and other gender ideas as well. These ads exclude women and portray men as the dominant and powerful gender (Kamalu & Ojatula, 2019). Thus, several research studies are based on gender representation in media in Pakistani settings. Iftikhar and Aslam (2017) attempted to explore the gender roles assigned to women in Pakistani society by focusing on semiotic and linguistic features of ten TV commercials.

Women are glamourized as sex objects which aligns with Western ideas regarding female gender depiction in media, which completely ignores the constructive and progressive roles women are playing in the real-life world. Media adverts play a vital part in retaining patriarchal values and male hegemony besides the women objectification and subjugation. Tehseem, Sibtain, and Obaid (2018) also discussed male chauvinism and women's marginalization in Pakistani ads. The billboard advertisements demonstrate life-like images to grab the attention of the viewers, but these are also utilized to render gender bias and misrepresentation of gender roles (Mushtaq, Taseer & Ullah, 2021). Image producers and advertisers focus on factors that help them design attractive billboards. Hence, they cautiously consider selecting color, size, brand and celebrity pictures, logos, messages, and texture to have desired outcomes (Khan, Hussainy, Khan & Khan, 2016). Hussain, Arif, and Saleem (2021) further accentuated the stereotypical meanings and hidden ideologies encoded in billboard ads which promote gender objectification, distorted women portrayal, and gender bias. Mahmood, Arif, Tariq, and Yazdani (2022) emphasized the need to acknowledge false narratives recruited in Pakistani TV ads about gender representation that go against Pakistani society cultural and religious ideologies.

The way, the women are delineated in media ads negatively influences their self-esteem. They are painted performing limited household duties, passive in social relations & for decorative purposes. Conversely, men are shown as active members, playing progressive roles and engaging in various social activities and occupations (Ali & Shahwar, 2011). Barthes (1977) expounds in book 'Rhetoric of the Image' that images are never neutral, and their messages are normalized by associating them with specific objects or ideas. Media has a stirring potential to shape people's cognitive thinking and is designed to serve certain interests of powerful people. Researchers have always been keenly interested in exploring the public perception of media. Nasir, Hussain, and Waheed (2021) studied impact of women objectification on body image of Pakistani women and concluded that distorted depiction of women in TV ads harms women's body image. To counter this malady, proper checks & balances should be practiced so that women are not likely for marketing and appealing purposes that summarize existing research on media gender misrepresentation, its cognitive & ideological impacts on youth. Ismail (2019) has indicated the negative impact of women's portrayals in beauty product advertisements on cultural norms and values of Pakistani society that downgrades morale of women in general.

The objectified and sexually erotic images of women in ads legitimize and consolidate misogynistic societal behaviors, which do not mirror Pakistan's social and cultural philosophy (Afaque & Shah, 2018). Shahwar's (2013) survey study results infer that woman are unnecessarily and excessively framed in TV ads for the adornment, which impart a pernicious impact on the masses. This deformed representation is causing the harmful modifications in cultural norms, dressing styles, and general perceptions about women among people. This study aims to explore gender misrepresentation in media from a socio-semiotic lens and investigate its impact on Pakistani youth's cognition and ideology. Though some studies have dealt with these aspects, they either studied them separately or just conducted quantitative methods to measure the impact of media. However, this work has opted for a qualitative description of media billboard adverts and interview techniques to gather thick descriptions and deeper insight into Pakistani youth's perception of such misrepresentation. This explain how media samples will be selected and analyzed (e.g., TV shows, advertisements, social media). In this connection, this study has used the social semiotic approach proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) that further investigate the semiotic choices deployed by advertisers for the ideological depiction of gender representation in the media in general as well as in billboard advertisements in particular.

The theoretical underpinnings of this approach are based on the theory of semiotics (the science of signs) developed by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, who asserts that sign is the union of a signifier (an acoustic image/sound and a signified (a concept). The relation evoked in cognition between these two is socially and culturally constructed and is arbitrary (Barthes, 1973). Kress and Leeuwen's (2006) analytical framework are grounded upon Halliday's (1978) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). They proposed three meta-functions of the visual communication, aligning with Halliday SFL meta-functions: representational, interactional, and compositional. Representational meta-function considers representation of images as social constructs and social actions, which can be conceptual or narrative representations. Interactive meta-function deals with the relationship presented amid represented participants (image) interactive participants (viewers & advertisers) with the help of gaze, frame, size, angle, and perspective. Compositional meta-function studies how representational and interactive elements are linked together for overall unified meaning through features of salience, information value, and framing. The researchers have chosen this framework because Kress and van Leeuwen have attempted to divulge underlying ideologies and meanings embedded in texts & images, that serve the purpose in study of analyzing gender misrepresentation on the billboards.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study employed a descriptive approach to investigate the semiotic choices made in the billboard advertising media. The interviews are conducted to examine the impact of gender misrepresentation in media on Pakistani youngsters' cognition and its influence on their gender-related ideologies. The purposive sampling technique is adopted for semiotic data collection, while convenient sampling technique is chosen for interviews. Researchers have selected those billboards that reflect themes highlighted in past research studies conducted on gender representation. For interviews, 8 participants were recruited, aged between 18-35 years. Study focused on Pakistani

youth hailing from Sialkot city of Punjab, rural and urban geographical settings, including male and female participants.

RESULTS OF STUDY

The results through data analysis are presented here as data analysis is carried out in two phases. First, social semiotic analysis of advertising billboards is shown to answer first research question. Later, the interpretation of the recurring themes that emerged after the codification of interviews is done in the second phase to reflect the impact of gender misrepresentation in advertising media on Pakistani youth.

Social Semiotic Analysis

Women are sometimes depicted in roles with implicit negative connotations (Zakia & Farida, 2016; Nasir, Hussain, & Waheed, 2021; Grammer,1998). The billboards that illustrate this theme focus on the visual and the verbal message. The billboard analysed under this theme is of a vehicle hiring company, Careem, which provides rental conveyance services. It is a symbolic conceptual image of a woman pointing her hand to get a ride. The girl is looking away and wearing sunglasses. The smile on her face shows her willingness and a feeling of fulfillment. The picture is taken from a horizontal, oblique angle which places her in detached position and presents her as a stranger with whom one cannot relate. From a compositional perspective, whole picture is presented in a single frame, and the female figure is placed in the center, visually conveying the textual message. Hence, it highlights the idea of marriage escapade and associates it with a woman. It also appears to be a mockery of forced marriages. The streaks of hostility and rebellion are covertly associated with the word 'bhagna' and symbolize female. Woman is in traditional bridal dress but wearing sunglasses hints at modernization. Overall, the text corresponds with image, which consequently garbles the women's role. The billboard appears convincing in visual and verbal messages, but the underlying meanings confirm theme that sometimes the role of women is distorted and misrepresented through negative implications.

Figure 1 Distorted and Misrepresented Through Negative Implications.

Women are usually portrayed in the domestic and private sphere of life, like, mothers, housewives, or caretakers of families and children (Lemish,2004; Ali & Shahwar, 2011). In Pakistani society, women are mostly seen or associated with household activities, and caring for their families. Even if they are working women, doing certain outdoor jobs, they are still expected to take care of their household chores and families. Advertisements are observed to depict women mostly in domestic settings and roles of mothers, housewives, or family-oriented persons. The billboard image portrays a woman in a mother's role ushering her love by offering him a glass of an orange instant drink, Tang. Here, it is mentioned in text word, 'mother', to suggest the woman and child's relationship. The heart is made with mother's hands showing her affection and its significance in taking care of her children with these hands. The image is incorporated in centre of the billboard to highlight the core element. The image, hands, and text are in one larger frame, separated by small elongated horizontal orange frame on which the product and its name are displayed. The image of the represented participants is placed in a home-like background setting that shows woman's place being indoor, domestic, and family-oriented.

Figure 2 Women Misrepresentation

Men are usually shown as leading social relations and giving opinions and suggestions as experts. This is quite common in patriarchal societies that men make ultimate decisions. They are usually seen instructing, guiding, expressing their opinions and suggestions, and sometimes commenting on various matters as experts. Their ideas are believed to be more authentic and credible. The picture below of a billboard illustrates a singer commenting about his preference and choice of 'No. 1 network', Zong 4G. The tagline, 'Pakistan's No.1 singer prefers Pakistan's No.1 network,' indicates that the frontline celebrities' choice greatly impacts viewers' perception of the brands and products. This strategy of male celebrity depiction as an expert adds to the product purchases and makes billboards persuasive and authentic. Men are depicted as more credible and authoritative, while women as customers or consumers (Kamalu & Ojatula, 2019; Belknap & Leonard, 1991; Grammer, 1998). Men are usually seen more on billboards that advertise some challenging and competitive campaigns of brands. They are portrayed in ways that present them as credible and authoritative, and their words may appear authentic. Although most of the time, male celebrities are chosen for such billboards.

Figure 3 Gender-Based Ideology

The same gender-based ideology of authority and credibility is enveloped in billboard of 'Lipton', which portrays a male celebrity endorsing tea brand, who seems to be counter-challenging another tea brand's claim. In this billboard, the represented participant conveys that once you taste Lipton tea, you will forget Danedar (the other tea brand). He adds assertion by holding a card displaying money-back guarantee taste challenge. This male celebrity is not shown as a consumer or customer but merely used to give credibility to the message and add authoritative value, which is usually associated with men.

Figure 4 Gender-Based Ideology

The billboard of 'Ideas' delineates both the genders in the role of consumers or customers. This is a classificational and symbolic conceptual image in which items they hold symbolize their identity as shoppers or customers. The verbal cue 'Everyone' and the depiction of both genders justify the same role for both genders, but the way they are presented has certain implications and ironic streaks. The man on the left end looks unhappy and exhausted; he is shown holding female clothes,

which infers that he is accompanying a female and is not enjoying this situation or might be the salesman tired of displaying articles to the customers. This scrutiny suggests that he is not portrayed as a consumer. The other male is holding two shopping bags, but it is not shown what is in the bags as he is shopping for himself or somebody else though the smile on his face shows that he is happy with the shopping experience. The females in this billboard are shown in extreme reactional smiles, which depict them as crazy customers who have an intense love for shopping, and '70% off' makes them go frantic. Their expressions suggest extreme happiness, astonishment, confusion & aggression. Still, they are presented as customers explicitly in the contrast to men who are implicitly employed in this billboard.

Figure 5 Women in Decorative Roles

Figure 6 Transactional Narrative Billboard

Men are often presented in relational product use and women in decorative roles (Afaque & Shah, 2018; Iftikhar & Aslam, 2017; Shahwar, 2013; Grammer, 1998; Belknap & Leonard, 1991; Goffman, 1979). It is observed that men are shown more, either commenting about product/giving suggestions

about product choices. In contrast, the women either just display the product or accompany a male figure as a showpiece and, if depicted in a relational use, that is, too, with women's stereotypical underpinnings. The same sort of idea is portrayed on the next billboard. This transactional narrative billboard image depicts the woman celebrity holding a mango in her hand. However, she is not shown eating the fruit but looking at the viewers seductively. The word 'pleasure' in the text, woman holding a mango close to her face, and her gaze, all these verbal and visual elements work together to give this billboard a glamorous and enchanting appeal. The woman is not smiling; her eye lines form vectors and invite viewers to establish an intimate relationship with her. This is a mango juice ad but the first image that grabs the viewers' attention appears to be the female face with that the expression placed in the centre of the billboard makes it more salient than the product. The semiotic analysis reveals that the women are presented more in decorative and less product orientation in comparison with men.

Qualitative Analysis: Emerging Themes from the Interviews:

Media Plays a Significant Role in Influencing the Youth's Cognition and Ideology

Interviewees believe that media is an effective tool to disseminate information and potent element in shaping the youth's cognition and ideology (Fairclough, 2006; Cook, 2001; Nasir, 2018). As one interviewee remarked, "Advertising media is a useful persuasive source for attracting the people's attention and making them buy a product". Two interviewees stated that "people enormously learn from media and try to imitate the ways, how human figures are presented on billboards". "Ads do not only promote products but also (advertisers) agendas which strongly and significantly change people's thinking and beliefs". Media and advertisements are important sources for spreading the societal awareness and sharing life lessons. Another respondent commented, "It is age of technology and I think that media has a gripping impact on youth's mind, they try to copy that, and if there is misrepresentation in media about gender then people internalize wrong ideology, consequently, have harmful & damaging impact." Another perspective is that "media strongly influences youth's ways of thinking, living and deeply affects the opinions and views". Advertising media also plays a "manipulative role by presenting luxury products as one's need". One female interviewee said, "I get inspired by women presented in ads & I look up to them for latest trends". "Media plays powerful role in influencing youth's way of thinking and consistent misrepresentation of gender reinforces harmful gender biases".

The media Portrays a Stereotypical Representation of Both Genders

Results of many research studies conducted on gender representation indicate that media portrays gender stereotypically and in traditional orientation. Most interviewees shared the concern that media contributes to perpetuating and promoting gender stereotypes that serve the interests of patriarchal societies. Some views are mentioned here, "women are presented suggestively on media; men are never shown that way". One of the respondents claimed that women are mostly portrayed in evocative poses and dressing to grab onlookers' attention. Another representation of women is domestic sphere. "It is neutralized through media that men opinion is more authentic than women's", one of the interviewees commented about ideology in words such as "our ideology came from Indo~

Pak which dictated that males are strong and wise and females are weak, meant to be at home as housewives, slaves, and sex objects, media is still feeding these ideologies". Another dimension is "women are used in ads regardless of product relational use, which is misleading". One interviewee said that "advertisements sometimes portray men and women in idealized or stereotypical ways which do not reflect the complexity of life. In this regard, media repeatedly shows men as strong and dominant while women as submissive and passive, such depiction limits the opportunities for both men and women".

The Impact of Media Leaves Youth to Perceive both Genders in Limited Settings and Roles

Several research studies highlight that media positions both genders in specific settings and roles (Belknap & Leonard, 1991; Lemish, 2004; Tehseem, Sibtain, & Obaid, 2018; Ali & Shahwar, 2011). Researcher has gathered data showing that youth perceive both genders in same ways portrayed in media. Advertisements present women in domestic settings as mothers, caretakers & housewives, and most of interviewees commented that "this is a quite apt and true depiction of women", whereas men are shown as professionals "is also justified". "The household depiction of women in media is realistic and men as independent and women as dependent on them reflect our social practices". One participant perceived gender misrepresentation as "ads which show men and women equal is a misrepresentation because, in reality, both genders have different roles and duties to perform in our culture". Almost all respondents expressed same opinion that women are presented in media as sex objects, for the physical charm, beauty appeal, and decorative roles is unrealistic representation of women which is causing much detrimental impinge on society in general and specifically on youth's cognition.

There is an Adverse Impact of Media on Self-image and other Gender Images

Media effects how people see themselves and perceive others (Shahwar, 2013; Ojiakor, Onebunne & Ekezie, 2019; Nasir, Hussain, & Waheed, 2021; Mahmood, Arif, Tariq, & Yazdani, 2022). It is quite true regarding gender image perception dichotomies because when males see men presented as powerful, wise in media, they may associate this idea with their gender leading to development of this kind of self-image, and females seeing the same male depiction may also make them believe this to be true about men. "Gender misrepresentation in media is somehow affecting us as a youth because now we are focusing more on the swag thing and being cool rather than on our real goals in life". Most of participants remarked that gender misrepresentation leaves both genders feeling degraded and demoralized when they are unable to achieve idealized images of males and females manifested in media. Two of them opine that "people accept the roles assigned to both genders on media and in the same way related gender stereotypes become acceptable. So, it depends on media either it presents gender positively/negatively to impart positive or negative self and other gender images". Another two respondents shared the idea that billboards and media impact how Pakistani youth perceive their gender and opposite gender, they become what they see because it molds their way of thinking".

Westernized, modern, & glamourized depictions of both genders mislead youth's cultural, religious, and gender-based ideologies

Most of research respondents are of view that advertising media shows both genders unrealistically and portrays the picture of a society that is more often distant from our social, cultural, and religious values (Afaque & Shah, 2018; Shahwar, 2013; Iftikhar & Aslam, 2017; Ismail, 2019). Therefore, the Advertisements display both genders in modern, western, and glamorous light over their dressing, posing, and setting. "Advertising billboards do not show our culture but depict Western culture. These billboards show westernized images and show women negatively and men positively", one of the interviewees responded. "There are very few advertisements that show our true cultural spirit". Another youngster claimed that "the women are not bold in our culture, but ads show them so and portray men being excessively domineering which causes the wrong influence of the youth gender ideologies". "Gender misrepresentation on media imparts bad impact on our cultural norms and values as most of the times, media presents anti-Pakistani cultural and religious opposing the ideas which negatively molds people's perceptions". Such ads result in the developing contempt in youth for their own culture and leads towards deviation from their true social and cultural values. Thus, another point of view is "ads present women in the inappropriate and odd dressing which does not mirror our culture".

Advertisements can be Made Better by Depicting both Genders Positively

Interviewees have given some suggestions to improve gender depiction in advertisements which are as follows:

- Women should be represented realistically in fields and professions they belong to rather than just in domestic settings.
- Media should show more and more empowering women so that women can get motivated by looking at them.
- The media should show more women therefore they can get motivated by looking at them.
- Both genders should be portrayed as performing their roles similarly as well as positively.
- Women should not be objectified for sensual appeal or in decorative roles to attract people.
- Men should also be shown in nurturing roles and as helping hands in the household.
- Media should portray a diverse and positive representation of genders because it can help break down the gender stereotypes and biases and will equally promote gender equality which can lead to shift in cultural norms and values toward a more inclusive and equitable society.

CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to investigate the misrepresentation of gender in media, especially the billboard advertising media, and its impact on Pakistani youth. The study results entail that image producers make the explicit and implicit semiotic choices for ascertaining gender stereotypical representation of both the genders. They use salience, positioning, framing, gaze, color, and size, to portray gender asymmetries. The men are presented in roles that project them as strong, powerful, authoritative, credible, and active, whereas women are presented in nurturing roles of the mothers, housewives, and caretakers, or suggestively with negative connotations or in the decorative roles as models for sensual appeal. This distorted depiction imparts an adverse and damaging impact on

Pakistani youth's cognition and perception of not only their gender but opposite gender orientation, further deepening gender biases. The misrepresentation of gender in media is playing an influential role in wrongly shaping Pakistani youth's gender-based ideologies. It propagates misconceptions about both genders, which misleads the youth. It is recommended that the advertisers and image producers pay heed to this serious issue and portray both genders positively and neutrally, that can help in establishing an inclusive & progressive society where both genders are respected and play their parts equally.

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