



## **Gender Inequality in Pakistan: An Analysis of Selected Pakistani TV Commercials**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The current study examines the discursive techniques employed in Pakistani TV commercials to perpetuate social injustice and patriarchal authority. It examines ads like Dalda, Shan, and Glow & Lovely using a critical discourse analysis approach based on the writings of Michel Foucault and Norman Fairclough. The results show that these advertisements employ discursive strategies to maintain familial structures, exert control, and promote deceptive rebranding. Additionally, the study demonstrates how ads personalize systemic unfairness, create narratives about gendered issues, and portray consuming as the main remedy. The theory also emphasizes how advertisements create subjectivities that demand ongoing self-control, sustaining internalized oppression, and exacerbating gender disparity. Research has shown that incorporating celebrities into advertisements enhances brand recall and awareness. This study has further highlighted the importance of critical discourse analysis in comprehending how language, power, and ideology shape social connections and advance equality and social justice.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Television is still the most popular medium in Pakistan, and its commercials offer a wealth of social conventions, cultural beliefs, and inferences. These ads are promoting identities and social roles at the same time, even if they are purportedly selling items. More specifically, Nunan (1993) defines discourse as a meaningful and significant unit that uses words to express a complete idea and message. One of the main ways that gender inequality is maintained in this discourse is through the consistent and predictable depiction of gender. This research applies an integrated Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) methodology to go beyond a cursory content analysis and reveal the ambiguous connections between language, power, and ideology. Power is implicit in

discourse and used to maintain role relationships in society. Keating (2011) asserts that discourse is the sole factor that enables human culture to exist and exhibit unique traits. This study enhanced how language is used to exert power across multiple domains and through different language patterns. However, it would also use discourse analysis to examine gender inequality. Using a mixed-method approach, the current study adheres to the pragmatic paradigm within Michael Foucault and Fairclough's framework. Three Pakistani commercials have been chosen that depict how language shapes the perspective of society implicitly.

1. The Domestic Goddess (brands of flour and cooking oil)
2. Chat Masala,( the Patriarchal Savior)
3. The Fairness Ideal (creams that lighten the skin)

## **2. Research Questions and Objectives**

### **2.1 Research Questions**

1. Which gendered attitudes are promoted by verbal and visual strategies?
2. In what ways do these commercials' production and consumption environments (a discursive activity) gain more fame and support the maintenance of gendered power structures?
- 3-How can the combined theories of Fairclough and Foucault provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between media discourse and social inequality?

### **2.2. Research Objectives**

1. To create a thorough framework for researching the connection between media discourse and social inequality that incorporates Foucault's power theories and Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis.
2. To identify and analyze the unique textual components (language, imagery, and story) in the three selected commercial archetypes that lead to more fame.
3. To integrate the findings of the two theoretical stances to demonstrate the cyclical nature of media discourse, patriarchal ideology, and the social practice of gender inequality in Pakistan.

## **3. LITERATURE REVIEW**

When introducing Critical Discourse Analysis in 1989, Fairclough talked about how language serves a social purpose. He defended the idea that a text can be studied by looking at its processes, social context, and content. In his theory, he addressed three topics: interpersonal (the relationship between text and interaction), explanation (the relationship between text and interaction with social environment), and description (the formal structure of content/text). Power-to and power-over are concepts introduced by Wartenberg (1990, p. 27). This game is essential to conversation. Power-to can regulate the power-over person's speech. Each person speaks in accordance with their ability. "A theory of power has, as a priority, the articulation of the meaning of the concept of power-over," stated Wartenberg (1990, p. 5), who distinguished between power-to and power-over. Schmied (2020) talked about how discourse has grown over the past few decades, yet it still has limitations for productive communication. He used instances of academic, political, and interpersonal interactions to illustrate his major research goal, which was to determine whether the conversation is truly a genuine discourse. According to his theory, social coherence is upheld via speech cohesiveness. Lamb (2013) provided the critical discourse analysis methodology. He attempted to examine social actors from social discourse analysis and genres from the discourse historical method.

According to Khalid & Baig (2016), advertising manipulates customers' thoughts by utilizing their social structures and cultural knowledge. In addition to using TVCs to advertise their product and brand, they also support patriarchal norms. Women are portrayed in the gender-based TVCs as docile housewives who are emotionally and physically weak. However, the men are portrayed as being robust, emotionally and physically strong, more logical, breadwinners, and domineering. Semiotic analysis of a few chosen TV commercials is used to try and uncover the hidden meanings created in our cultural landscape. The LUX 2014 commercial featuring Indian actors and actresses was chosen. This study investigated the ways in which the global luxury brand is redefining Pakistani women into contemporary, fearless, and glitzy new-age ladies. According to a study, Pakistani culture, social norms, and values are being contaminated by the way foreign culture is presented in these advertisements.

Similarly, Yumna (2023) uses the frameworks of historical discourse investigation (Woods, 2006) and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995; Fairclough and Wolak, 1997) in his study, "A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Language Used in Dove's Advertisements," which examines the language used in the Dove care brand's "Real Beauty" marketing campaign, which ran from 2006 to 2020. According to Yuman's research, Dove made an attempt to give women of all backgrounds the ability to establish their own standards of beauty. Every study illustrates how women are portrayed in commercials. Additionally, they are talking about how ads affect various facets of society, but no study looks into how ads contribute to a cultural shift in Pakistani women's society or to their forgetting their religious code.

In their study on gender inequality in Pakistani higher education institutions, Shaukat and Pell (2016) used random sampling to gather data from ten government and ten private schools in Lahore. The findings indicated that less than half of the population enjoyed gender equality. Gender discrimination affects more than half of the population. The decision-making process was identified in this study as the primary cause of gender discrimination. Women endure this discrimination constantly because they accept it. They have the power to alter the choice if they speak up and demand equality. In conversation, the element of power is being examined. It also examines how language is used to exert control over others and how one's position of authority influences language use.

#### **4. Methodology**

##### **An Integrated CDA Approach**

For the current analysis, I have chosen Norman Fairclough's model as his discourse analysis approach focuses on the relationship between language, power, and ideology. By questioning accepted wisdom and uncovering hidden meanings in literature, he aims to promote social justice and equality and further highlight the gender stereotypes and differences that are quite prevalent in Pakistani culture. Fairclough's critical discourse analysis highlights the importance of language in establishing social ties and constructing reality. Michel Foucault's approach has also been chosen as it examines the connection between knowledge and power, focusing on how prevailing discourses shape our viewpoint. By examining the evolution of discourses and power dynamics over time, Foucault's genealogical analysis challenges prevailing narratives and ideologies. While Foucault's approach is more philosophical and historical, Fairclough concentrates more on language analysis. Both philosophies see speech and power seriously. The chosen commercials amply demonstrate these ideologies and depict societal implied and explicit issues.

## 5. Analysis and Findings: Deconstructing Three Commercial Archetypes

### 5.1 The Domestic Goddess

The selected advertisements for Dalda cooking oil provide a rich, though more subtle, text for a gendered critique using the two selected models. The analysis shows how traditional gender roles can be reinforced through the co-optation of scientific and health discourses. Using Fairclough and Foucault from the standpoint of gender inequality, the following is a breakdown:

#### 5.1.1 Norman Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model

##### A. Text Analysis (Description)

Vocabulary: "PRESERVES NATURAL GOODNESS," "HEALTH SHIELD," and other scientific and health-related phrases predominate in the language. "

"VITAMINS: A, D & E", "ANTIOXIDANTS," "OMEGA 3 & 6." In South Asia, Dalda is a well-known brand for cooking fats, and "COOKING OIL" identifies the product category. "Celebrating world's best moms" shows women that special days are even attached to their household chores.

Grammar & Structure: Declarative statements and noun phrases make up the text. It asserts the product's qualities authoritatively. The oil itself is the subject acting ("Preserves," acts as a "Shield"). Despite being absent from the text, the cook—the human actor—is subtly in charge of providing the family with these advantages.

Assumptions: The advertisement makes a strong assumption that the buyer's priority is their family's health. When preparing food, "preserving natural goodness" and offering a "health shield" are crucial objectives. The specified nutrients (Vitamins, Antioxidants, Omega-3 and Omega-6) are understood and valued by the reader.

##### B. Discourse Practice (Interpretation)

Production: The scientification and healthification of a consumer product is exemplified by this advertisement. The long-standing Dalda brand now markets its products as essential for family health rather than only for taste or cooking.

Consumption: The target audience is plainly the homemaker, who is largely considered to be female. As a "nutritional manager" for her family, she is interpellated. The word 'best moms' portrays that women who are best at cooking by using Dalda are more demanded and accepted in society.

Intertextuality: This connects directly to a vast genre of "health-conscious" advertising for household products (cleaners, food, appliances) targeted at women. It blends the discourse of women's magazines (health, family care) with the authoritative language of science and medicine.

##### C. Sociocultural Practice (Explanation)

Power and mentality: The advertisement supports the feminization of healthcare and the intensive mothering mentality. It places women in the position of being ultimately in charge of their spouses and children's physical health, which is a practical and emotional burden.

Social Structures: It maintains the conventional framework in which the woman is the "angel in the house," the protective figure whose main responsibility is to take care of others and whose main area of responsibility is the kitchen. Her "scientific" knowledge is for domestic labor optimization, not for a job.

## 5.1 2 Michel Foucault's Model

The selected advertisement effectively illustrates how biopower—the control of populations through controls over life, health, and the body—works, making a Foucauldian interpretation particularly illuminating in this case.

**Knowledge/Power:** The commercial leverages the persuasive arguments of nutritional science. This scientific knowledge, which is a tool of authority rather than a liberating force, dictates the norms for "correct" female behavior. The "good" housewife must be an amateur dietician now that she has assimilated and incorporated this scientific knowledge into her daily activities.

**Subjectivity and Technologies of the Self:** It praises the female reader as a "manager of the family's biological vitality." Her ability to maximize her dependents' health is linked to her subjectivity. This leads to the development of a new, more complex "technology of the self." In addition to cooking, she has to read labels, comprehend nutritional claims, and keep up with the most recent developments in health. Although it feels like liberation, this kind of self-discipline is really an extension of her emotional and domestic work.

**Synthesis from a Gender Inequality Perspective:** This Dalda commercial is a clever illustration of how contemporary marketing, by disguising conventional gender stereotypes in the authoritative language of science, both refreshes and supports them.

### 2-The Patriarchal Savior



## 5.2 1 Norman Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model

The Three-Dimensional Model (Text, Discourse Practice, Sociocultural Practice) developed by Norman Fairclough is ideal for this advertisement because it links the particular language employed to more general societal practices.

A. Description and Analysis of Text  
Words: The words are gendered and quite vivid.

The brand Shan is marketed as the answer.

خوشبو مہکا ہوا ("Khushboo Mehka Hua" - Fragrance, Scented) refers to the woman's aura. The phrase 'oath for her', shows imperative tone and demanding behavior.

بیٹی کو جینا سکھا دے ("Baini Ko Jeena Sikhade" - Teach the sister-in-law how to live") is the core directive.

Grammar & Structure: The text is an imperative command. The unnamed subject (presumably a wife) is ordered to perform an action that will educate another woman. The woman is the object of the command and the means to an end, not the subject of her own action. The phrase in the second ad again shows an imperative tone (oath for her).

Presumptions: The following are strongly implied in the statement: The wife's major responsibility is to keep the house smelling good. The wife's ability to carry out domestic, artistic responsibilities is linked to her social standing and respect in the family, particularly on the husband's side.

#### B. Discourse Practice (Interpretation)

Production: A company (Shan) created the advertisement, which is aimed at female consumers in a particular South Asian cultural setting.

It references and perpetuates a prevalent advertising cliché: women's fear of being accepted by others. Consumption: The message is meant to be interpreted by the audience as a normative standard or a helpful recommendation.

To justify the purchase of the goods, a woman reading this is interpellated (hailed) into the subject position of a housewife whose success is determined by her capacity to dazzle in-laws and keep a "fragrant" household.

Intertextuality: This commercial directly mimics innumerable others in the subcontinent that present women as primarily responsible for domestic harmony and male/ family contentment. It presents an "issue" and offers a consumer product as the "solution."

#### C. Sociocultural Practice (Explanation)

Ideology and Power: The advertisement is obviously a tool of patriarchal ideology. It normalizes the notion that a woman's worth is based on how well she performs in the home and how well she can negotiate intricate familial structures (such as the frequently unpleasant relationship with a bairi).

Social Structures: By limiting women to the private, domestic realm, where their primary struggles are for social status within the family and olfactory superiority rather than for political or economic dominance, it perpetuates traditional gender roles. The ad with a million views actually shows societal expectations from women, and just like TRP's, it got an increase day by day.

Hegemony: According to the message, this power dynamic is normal, sensible, and even aspirational. Through commerce and household skills, a woman is empowered to "teach her sister-in-law a lesson" rather than being dominated.

### 5.2.2 Michel Foucault's Model

A Foucauldian analysis is particularly potent here, as it reveals how power operates through discourse to create specific types of subjects.

Power/Knowledge: The ad is a site where a specific form of knowledge is produced: knowledge about what makes a "good" wife and a "respectable" home. This knowledge is not neutral; it is a form of power that disciplines female behavior. The power is not top-down and repressive but productive and diffuse. It doesn't say "you must do this or be punished." Instead, it creates the desire to become the ideal subject—the wife who is so skilled she can "teach" others.

Subjectivity and Technologies of the Self: The advertising invites the female reader to identify herself as a certain kind of subject. She is advised to embrace a "technology of the self"—a strategy for self-control and self-improvement, according to the discourse. She must utilize the appropriate consumer products, anticipate her in-

laws' opinions, and monitor the smell of her home to polish her performance. A woman who deliberately educates herself to adhere to the patriarchal family's laws and internalizes the monitoring (from society and the bairi) until she polices herself is left with a submissive body.

Synthesis from the Point of View of Gender Inequality: This commercial is a condensed expression of patriarchal mentality. In Fairclough, the word "fair" is conspicuously lacking; the discourse is inherently unjust. The advertisement forces women to actively participate in their own subjection, voluntarily disciplining themselves to become the perfect subjects that the patriarchal society seeks, as Foucault demonstrates in his final analysis.

### 3-The Fairness Ideal



This "Fair & Lovely" (now "Glow & Lovely") commercial is a classic for examining how gender and beauty standards are constructed. By using the selected two models, it becomes clear how the rhetoric of beauty is employed to maintain inequality and exercise power.

Here is the analysis from a gender inequality perspective:

#### 5.3 1 Norman Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model

##### A. Text Analysis (Description)

Vocabulary: There is a deliberate shift in word choice. Lovely and Fair's (a probable typo/error for "Fair &") carry the historical burden of associating pale skin with attractiveness and desirability. The terms NEW, NOW, and Glow denote a rebranding effort to shift from the contentious "fairness" pledge to a more "contemporary" definition of "glow." ADVANCED MULTIVITAMIN SERUM IN CREAM gives the product a sense of medical validity and effectiveness by using scientific and cosmetic terminology ("serum," "multivitamin"). The second commercial exactly shows the same thing that is hidden in the first ad. Words like (radiant skin, HD glow, skin clarity, skin brightness) show common stereotypes hidden in our culture. The famous actress of Pakistan has been symbolized as 'beautiful and perfect' to promote this, and TRPs are expected to come by using such actresses and models for commercials.

Grammar and Structure: The text is made up of announcements and noun phrases. It is authoritative and declarative. The inferred metamorphosis is the most potent grammatical device: The product's new name, "NOW Glow beautiful," reflects the user's skin's anticipated transformation.

##### B. Discourse Practice (Interpretation)

Production: The worldwide outcry against skin-lightening products is directly responsible for this advertisement. In an effort to preserve its market dominance, the firm is discursively moving away from the over-

rtly problematic discourse of "fairness" and toward the more agreeable but still ambiguous discourse of "glow" and "health."

Consumption: The audience is shown as a lady who is conscious of the fairness controversy but is yet motivated to meet a particular, socially acceptable ideal of beauty. Despite having the same basic function—selling a remedy for manufactured insecurity. She is urged to view this new offering as a more "empowered" and "conscientious" option.

Intertextuality: This advertisement is part of a complex network of intertexts that includes influencer culture, beauty magazines, and the larger "wellness" sector.

The selfcare terminology ("glow," "vitamins") is appropriated to rebrand a product with a colorist foundation.

### C. Sociocultural Practice (Explanation)

Power and Ideology: The advertisement upholds the fundamental tenet of the patriarchal beauty standard, which holds that a woman's worth is inextricably tied to how she looks. Despite removing the direct reference to fairness, the new brand name "Glow & Lovely" still promotes a limited, particular ideal that is frequently associated with skin that is light and even in tone.

Social Structures: It perpetuates colorism, which is a system of privilege and skin-tone-based prejudice that affects people of all races and ethnicities. Fair complexion is linked to social acceptance and marriageability in many cultures. Items such as this uphold patriarchal standards that evaluate women more based on their looks than their intelligence, morals, or accomplishments.

Lighter skin tones are associated with greater social, romantic, and financial capital, according to this product and the discourse it embodies. These goods are frequently promoted to middle-class and lower-class women as a means of "improving" their prospects, which can exacerbate social divisions and sustain inequality.

Hegemony: As it's a ploy, the firm is altering its message to appear more progressive and continue to profit off people's fear. People believe they want to appear a certain way because they want to, not because society is pressuring them, given the strength of the beauty standard. It's a means of maintaining the profitability of the beauty industry and influencing people's opinions.

### 5.3.2 Michel Foucault's Model (Power/Knowledge, Discourse, Subjectivity)

In this case, a Foucauldian analysis works quite well because the beauty industry is a traditional location for the creation of "docile bodies."

Power/Knowledge:

The advertisement makes use of the discussion of beauty chemistry and dermatological science ("Multivitamin Serum").

The criteria for "good" or "healthy" skin are set by this "knowledge" of skincare. The power operates by persuading women that this scientific information is necessary to correct their "deficient" bodies.

Truth and Discourse: The advertisement contributes to the widespread conversation about female enhancement and beauty. The "truth" that emerges from this discourse is that a woman's skin is a project that requires ongoing maintenance, attention, and investment. This rebranding creates a new "truth": the goal is no longer "fairness" but a more elusive "glow," which can only be attained with progressively more expensive and complex items.

Technology of the Self and Subjectivity: The female reader is praised as a "beauty project manager." The constant upkeep and enhancement of her looks are linked to her subjectivity. The

second ad shows that Mawra Hussain has clear and bright skin because of Fair and Lovely usage. This leads to the creation of a demanding "technology of the self." She needs to follow a strict skincare routine to discipline her body. She has to develop into an astute consumer of beauty science, continuously checking her skin for imperfections and purchasing solutions to address them. These goods are frequently promoted to middle-class and lower-class women as a means of "improving" their prospects, which can exacerbate social divisions and sustain inequality.

## 6. Discussion and Results

### 6.1 Findings:

1. Patriarchal control through discursive strategies: By transforming systemic gender inequalities into personal responsibilities for women, Pakistani advertisements (Dalda, Shan, Glow & Lovely) advocate a variety of discursive techniques to uphold patriarchal control.

2. **Modifying discursive techniques:**  
Dalda ad: Using the authoritative language of nutritional science, healthism is used to exert control.

Shan ad: There is a clear need to address established familial structures. A misleading rebranding that substitutes "glow" and wellness-focused objectives for "fairness" is the Glow & Lovely advertisement.

3. Gendered exploration: By personalizing structural injustice and presenting consumption as the only solution, advertisements construct narratives about social rejection, familial illness, or physical inferiority. Commercials with high TRPs further enhance it.

4. Self-policing female subjects: Ads produce subjectivities that call for constant self-control, like: Social Manager, Biological Guardian for the Family, and Beauty Project Manager.

5. Internalized oppression: When women absorb patriarchal rules and ideals, they actively participate in their own captivity, and high TRP's commercials further promote this concept.

6. Perpetuation of gender inequality: Advertisements contribute to gender inequality, impelling women to believe that their value depends on achieving a limited, consumer-driven presentation of femininity.

7. Biopower and submissive bodies: Subtle techniques are used to exert power, influencing women's subjectivities and fostering self-control, which results in submissive bodies.

8. Increased brand recognition and recall: Because viewers are more likely to remember and connect advertisements with famous people, they can increase brand awareness and recall (Jugan Kazmi, Mawra Hussain, Saba Faisal)

## 7. CONCLUSION

These three advertisements advertise more than simply cream, soap, and oil. They are advocating for a caregiving paradigm of femininity that is totally private, home-based, and aesthetically idealized in Pakistani society. Instead of using physical force to enforce gender inequality, they demonstrate how it is woven into daily life through persuasive discourses that appeal to a woman's sense of duty, love, and self-worth. This study has successfully demonstrated that Pakistani television advertisements are potent instruments in the social production of gender inequality through their guiding questions and intentions. This evolution shows how patriarchal ideology changes, not disappears. Additionally, when well-known celebrities appear in the

commercials, their renown (TRP) increases. International days are more likely to be accepted when these adverts are included. It becomes more corrosive and makes its demands harder to identify and reject by utilizing wellness, science, and even faux feminism as its vocabulary.

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