

CONSTRUCTING DOMESTIC FEMININITY IN PAKISTANI TELEVISION ADVERTISEMENTS: A STUDY OF HOUSEHOLD CHORES IN FOOD AND CLEANING PRODUCT ADS (2025)

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Abstract

Grounded upon the sociological theories of feminism and gender performativity, the paper discusses how household chores were discursively constructed as gendered chores owned by women. Linguistic, visual and narrative strategies linking femininity with domestic labour were unveiled in a purposive sample of television advertisements. The analysis presented in this paper examines Pakistani femininity construction in television advertising, primarily in food and cleaning product advertisements found in the first half of 2025. Based on the findings, women are always relegated to the domestic realm, particularly in kitchens, where preparing food, washing, and mothering are portrayed as rewards for love, care, and ethical duty. In addition, the paper mentions a general tendency: a modern image of empowered women remains confined to conventional family roles and therefore creates an illusion of power rather than weakening the conventions of gender relations. The article recognizes the significance of advertising as a useful cultural system not only for reflecting but also for reproducing patriarchal norms and gendered bodies within Pakistani society. The study contributes to the emerging debate on media, gender and discourse by effectively critiquing these images to provide insight into how the normalization of everyday practices of domesticity is executed by contemporary advertising.

INTRODUCTION

Advertising has so deeply embedded itself in modern society that it is dominated by the media, which not only instil consumer behaviour but also social meanings and identities as a cultural mechanism (Rasool, 2014; Ali, 2018). Beyond product promotion, television ads help a great deal in establishing a reality filled with cultural values through their scripts. The question of gender representation is burning among them, as media texts are likely to shape views on how men and women should behave (Iftikhar & Islam, 2017). Television advertisements have been a powerful means through which gendered representations

can be played and recreated in Pakistan. Despite the social alterations and increasing role of women in the open, stereotypical femininity is still recreated by the media images. In particular, the picture of women in the context of household functions raises critical questions regarding the construction and cognition of femininity within the frames of contemporary advertising (Fatima & Mehboob, 2024; Syed et al., 2025). The study examines the construction of domestic femininity in Pakistani TV commercials for food and cleaning products in 2025. It attempts to analyse the problem of defining household tasks as

gendered activities and the resultant representations that shape women as they are now in society. The study is not looking at advertisements as mere reflections of realities but as actual positions and meanings that are brought into being, bargained and mainstreamed. The study aims to demystify the relationship between femininity and domestic and care work through an analysis of the linguistic, visual, and narrative strategies in selected ads. In this way, it helps replicate the broader picture of media talk's role in the reproduction of gendered identity in a specific socio-cultural context.

Though there is growing interest amongst scholars in the issue of gender representation in the media in Pakistan, there is little research in-depth that has critically analysed the discursive construction of domestic femininity through domestic work in the context of television advertisements. Current research about women's stereotypes mainly concerns how women are portrayed and categorized, while much less research exists on the linguistic, visual, and ideological mechanisms that normalize and legitimate domestic work. Moreover, the current advertising campaigns frequently bundle the ideas of empowerment and the traditional family together, which translates into double messages and multiple perceptions of femininity. Hence, this study is an analysis of how Pakistani television advertisements create domestic femininity via advertisements of food and cleaning products. In particular, the study tackles the following questions: What representation of chores as gendered responsibilities for household tasks is being made in male and female Pakistani ads aired on television? How is "femininity" domesticized, and what strategies are employed linguistically and visually? How do these ads reinforce or challenge the patriarchy of Pakistani society?

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Despite a booming media industry and shifting advertisement scripts around the world, Pakistani television adverts still perpetuate the Western notion of gender as they constantly remind women of home roles and the kitchen and other

female chores. The women are often shown doing domestic tasks, including cooking, cleaning, laundry and taking care of the house, which figuratively imprisons them in the home. Such representations are the manifestation of a long-standing patriarchy that constructs femininity in the image of service and obedience, care, and domestic efficiency (Ali, 2018; Rasool, 2014). Instead of passively representing social reality, these representations are involved in the creation and normalization of gender roles by demonstrating them as natural, desirable and culturally acceptable.

Current literature suggests that commercials produced in Pakistan tend to portray an ideal woman as the main caretaker and housewife, with men positioned either outside household work or as figures of authority and decision-makers (Iftikhar & Islam, 2017; Fahim, 2018). This separation reinforces the gendered nature of the household labour division, in which household duties are not considered a collective social responsibility but instead a natural role for women. Such representations are also embedded in most advertisements, with cultural and religious accounts legitimizing relationships between women and the home and family (Iftikhar et al., 2020). Consequently, the discourse of advertising is not merely a reflection of current gender relations but reproduces the unequal power dynamics prevailing between men and women.

Recent research has also revealed that even modern-day advertisements, which seem to empower women, still tend to uphold conventional gender expectations in subtle ways. The image of women can be empowered and independent, even contemporary, but the role of the woman in the family (as the one who organizes the home, takes care of family members and does household duties, etc.) is often still measured (Fatima & Mehboob, 2024; Syed et al., 2025). It brings out a paradox where women seem to be empowered outwardly but are still limitlessly trapped in traditional housewifery. Equally, regarding the role of gender stereotyping in Pakistani ads, Ejaz et al. (2024) and Iram et al. (2023) argue that this stereotyping has not

vanished but instead evolved, maintaining its core of making domestic femininity central to female identity.

Although the literature on the topic of gender representation in Pakistani media is steadily continuing to proliferate, a major gap in the comprehension of the intent to construct and naturalize domestic femininity occurs within the discourse of household chores based on television advertisements. Most available literature tends to focus on representation patterns. Still, there is a lack of studies that scrutinize the linguistic, visual, and ideological processes underpinning the generation and maintenance of such meanings (Sumaira et al., 2023; Batool & Huma, 2025). To address this gap, this study aims to analyse the discursive construction of domestic femininity in Pakistani television advertisements (2025), unpack the element of household duties as a gender-specific task, and examine the linguistic and visual resources that support traditional gender roles. Moreover, the paper will consider how these representations perpetuate and reproduce the ideologies of patriarchy within the socio-cultural realities of Pakistan, thereby offering deeper insight into how the discourse of advertising has a concerted effect on the construction of gendered identities.

The study is both academic and socially significant as it is included in the discourse on the problematic portrayal of gender in the media of Pakistan. Academically, the study builds on previous research on gender and media by offering a focal-point examination of domestic femininity from a feminist perspective of critical discourse. Although the general tendencies of gender stereotyping have previously been explored in Pakistani advertisements (Nasir, 2018; Ali & Ali, 2022), this research focuses on household chores as a prime site where femininity is produced and reinforced. In this way, it offers a subtle insight into the discursive construction and ideological entrenchment of practices of everyday domesticity in advertising discourses.

On a social scale, the research points out how television advertising has had a strong platform effect on people in how they perceive male and

female roles and strengthens societal expectations. In a media-saturated society like Pakistan, such as Pakistan where television is still a dominant media outlet, these representations help in the internalization of unequal gender roles by making them both culturally acceptable and appreciated (Said & Ullah, 2025; Huma, 2025). Through critically analysing these representations, this study aims to create awareness of how gender inequality is reproduced in the media discourse elaborately yet subtly.

In addition, this research has significant implications for media practitioners, advertisers and scholars as it proposes a more critical approach towards the issue of depictions of women in advertising. Instead of giving explicit prescriptions, the research provides options for reconsidering the way in which gender identities are produced and served through the media discourse. It also preconditions further studies in the future to expand the current understandings of changing femininity representations and possibilities of more inclusive and fairer media practices within Pakistani society. Based on the identified gap in the literature and the objectives of the study, the following research questions guide this research:

1. To analyse how domestic femininity is constructed in Pakistani advertisements.
2. To unpack the portrayal of household chores as a gendered responsibility assigned to women.
3. To highlight the linguistic and visual discourses used to reinforce traditional gender roles.
4. To explore the ideological implications of these portrayals within a feminist framework.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The historical analysis of the advertising portrayal of the Pakistani woman, available in previous studies, shows that, as a mandate of femininity, caring, home duties, and subservience have remained a consistent portrayal of the Pakistani woman in the advertising Industry. A considerable amount of literature can be cited showing that ads in Pakistan do not just mirror societal rules. Still,

they are also involved in the reproduction and legitimization of gender inequalities via repeated, normalized material. These works all portray the role of media discourse in shaping public understanding of gender and in enforcing culturally held roles.

However, the recent scholarly work conducted on gender representation suggests that women are largely placed in the domestic realm, whereas men are associated with power and decision-making and with lives outside the home (Shahwar, 2011; Rasool, 2014). According to Rasool (2014), media discourse is instrumental in rebuilding gender ideologies, whereby the discourse reaffirms past norms, thereby defining how society expects gender to behave. On the same note, Ali (2018) stresses that the consumer culture in Pakistan is also highly based on gender stereotypes, which consist of depicting women as housewives who are engaged in cooking, cleaning, and looking after their families. These images render the gendered division of labour natural and offer domesticity as a natural part of femininity.

The femininity construction is also evident in the semiotic analysis of television advertisements, through the play of visual and symbolic representations. As Iftikhar and Islam (2017) indicate, Pakistani advertisements often use domestic environments, featuring kitchens and symbols like food preparation and cleaning to create a central identity of women in the home. These images are usually romanticized, with women portrayed as happy and satisfied in their roles in the home, thus sounding out the imbalance of labour and enshrining femininity in the home as natural. Recurring discursive patterns in advertisements are another important finding of Nasir (2018), as they associate femininity with care, beauty, and domestic competence, thereby strengthening these associations within the mass consciousness.

Recent studies have also used Critical Discourse Analysis CDA to reveal the ideological aspects of such representations. According to Fatima and Mehboob (2024), ad discourse also constructs femininity by attending to linguistic and visual techniques of subtly authorizing patriarchal

values, even in ostensibly progressive discourses. Sumaira et al. (2023) introduce the idea of feminine idealism, in which women become morally superior and self-sacrificing in family chores, thereby making their low status seem natural. In the same vein, Batool and Huma (2025) emphasize the existence of linguistic and cultural norms within advertisements, which leads to the construction of those gender identity images as culturally more suitable and socially more desirable.

Besides the traditional representations, latest studies have also undertaken new performances like that of mesmerising, which tries to question gender stereotypes and empower women. According to Aftab et al. (2023), although these types of advertisements strive to rebuild the gender roles, they tend to be minimal in transformative description. They cannot break the patriarchal discourse completely. Similarly, Syed et al. (2025) state that images of women's empowerment in Pakistani advertisements often remain symbolic rather than substantive, coexisting with traditional depictions of domestic femininity.

Moreover, advertising culture and gender representations in Pakistani advertisements are closely connected with culture and religion. As Iftikhar et al. (2020) underline, Islamic and cultural narratives are frequently used in advertisements to support the conventional gender roles, thus strengthening the identification of women with household duties. The fact that media talk is intersected with cultural and religious discourse is another problem begging the question of how gender norms can be confronted and changed.

Despite the abundance of literature concerning gender representation in Pakistani media, a major gap in the analysis of household chores as one of the key processes in the development of domestic femininity still exists. Although there are current studies which recognize the existence of domestic roles, what is frequently missing is the analysis of the ways the said roles are discursively held in place using language, imagery and narrative in which the maintenance of gender hierarchies occurs. This research addresses this gap by using a Feminist

critical discourse analysis to discuss the construction, normalization and reproduction of domestic femininity in Pakistani TV advertisements depicting household chores.

CONCEPTUAL/Theoretical FRAMEWORK

The feminist sociological theory, Judith Butler theory of gender performativity, intersectional feminism and Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) forms the basis of this study. These theoretical frameworks offer concrete methods of comprehending the construction and normalisation of domesticity through TV adverts in Pakistan by describing the class, occupation, and representation of housewives. These theoretical frameworks give a comprehensive insight about how domestic femininity is constructed and normalised in Pakistan via portrayals of house labour in TV advertisements. The essentialist view that women are to be expected the role of beadmakers is contested by feminist sociological perspectives. Rather feminist scholars contend that gender roles are created through a "social construction" based on institutions like the family, religion, education and the media (Hooks, 2000). Domestic duties like cooking, cleaning, caring and emotional work, within a patriarchal situation can be considered women's work, and experience as a feminine responsibility rather than a societal function. In the Pakistani setting, numerous TV ads perpetuate such a patriarchy-draped image, repeatedly pairing women with home duties and the role of caretaker (Ali, 2018; Rasool, 2014).

Judith Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity will be used in this research to further clarify and explain how these gendered identities are created and normalized. Butler maintains that gender is not a static biological given, but an identity constituted as it is performed by repeated acts, behaviours, language, gestures and cultural representations. These performances are repeated in a social setting and thus make gender "natural". Therefore, the television adverts are important cultural spaces for the continual representation and reinforcement of femininity. Cooking/cleaning/ caring for children and

emotionally supporting family members are such central activities in the roles of the woman that as he/she is seen doing these things repeatedly over time, this role is being labelled 'the domestic role' – a role that is viewed as being an innate part of womanhood. In this repeated and regularised actings, such performativity's can regularise the notion that housework is women's work in Pakistani ads.

The study also considers intersectional feminism as inspired by A Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) who emphasized that women's experiences could not be experienced as only gender but must be studied in conjunction with culture, class, religion, and the social structure. Patriarchy is not the only influence on the construction and construction of femininity in Pakistani mass media, but a range of cultural and religious beliefs as well as middle-class ideals of families also have their hand in this. The "ideal woman" is created in TV commercials as caring, giving, moral and family oriented. An intersectional approach enables the study to critically examine the cultural legitimation of the domestic femininity in Pakistani society by the discourse of media.

The theoretical approach is translated into the tools and techniques used in this study, which is Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) proposed by Lazar (2005, 2007). FCDA considers the role discourse plays in the process of gendered power and the patriarchy. FCDA is specific because it examines the basis and the unobvious aspects of gender inequalities found in language, visuals, stories and media representations, thus different from the traditional discourse analysis. It empowers researchers to probe into the 'everydayness' of unequal social relations between men and women as being normalized in seemingly banal media texts.

Fairclough's (1995, 2006) three-dimensional approach to Critical Discourse Analysis is also employed in this study to analyse the advertisements from three interrelated dimensions. Textual Analysis focuses on the language features, slogans, conversational elements, visual elements, symbols, body language and film techniques in advertisements. Discursive

Practice emphasizes the production, circulation, and interpretation of the advertisements in the context of media culture, specifically the targeting of women as the primary consumers of domestics in advertising industry. Social Practice explores the larger socio-cultural and ideological frameworks that influence this ad, such as patriarchy, societal gender norms and expectations of femininity and home duties in the Pakistani society.

For FCDA, the importance of television is that it is a space in which negotiations and reconfigurations of gender identity and power dynamics and social expectations occur. Ads aren't just a snapshot of reality, but a way to help shape the reality of femininity, care work, motherhood and women's social role. Repeatedly portraying scenes of a woman engaged in domestic tasks extracted from her home and showing that she is doing the work with emotional satisfaction and moral fulfilment, narrativizes domestic work as a necessary aspect of a woman's existence. This interdisciplinary approach equips critical insights into discursive representation of domestic femininity, cultural legitimization of domestic femininity and re-production of ideologies of domestic femininity in Pakistani television advertisements.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Focus and content of the study is a qualitative research study that critically analyses 'construction of domestic femineity' with the help of discourse prism in Pakistani TV commercials. Qualitative research would be suitable for research that focuses on meanings, representations, ideology, and interpretation, rather than the measurement of numbers (Creswell, 2014). As this investigation is into the representation of femininity and domestic labour through the medium of language, imagery and narratives, a qualitative approach proves helpful in uncovering ideological meanings embedded in the mediated discourse.

This study follows a social constructivist ontology, as it believes that gender identities and social realities are not bio-prescribed, rather are social and culturally produced via discourse and

representation (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). An interpretivist epistemological approach recognizes meanings as socially constructed and negotiated as a process of interaction, culture, and ideology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). In this way, television commercials do not simply mirror reality; rather, they function as a discourse-making place which centres and produces gendered meanings and patriarchal ideas.

For this, the use of the Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) analytical framework is chosen as the principal analytical framework which is used aims at critically analysing these constructions. FCDA emphasizes the connections among discourse, gender, ideology and power and how media discourse reproduces patriarchy (Lazar, 2005). Additionally, the study adopts the three-dimensional model of discourse analysis proposed by Fairclough (1995, 2006) where discourse is studied on the level of textual analysis, the level of discursive practice and the level of social practice. Through this model, the study aims to examine the role of normalization of domestic femininity in Pakistani media culture through the lens of languages, image and narration.

Purposive sampling was used to select the advertisements used in the study that is relevant to the research objectives. When the research domain is in the qualitative paradigm, and the researcher desires to find texts that would contain rich information related to the phenomenon studied, the sampling to be used is purposive sampling due to its characteristics (Patton, 2002). In total, twelve Pakistani television advertisements, representing different food and cleaning products were chosen between January 2025 and June 2025. TV advertisements and official commercial brand YouTube pages were scraped to gather ads from Pakistani Television channels. Brands of advertisements that were chosen included Surf Excel, Shan Masala, National Foods, Bonus Tristar and other ads for household products.

The following criteria were used to choose the advertisements:

Selection Criteria	Description
Product Category	Food and cleaning products
Time Period	January-June 2025
Gender Representation	Presence of women performing household chores
Discursive Relevance	Inclusion of linguistic, visual, and narrative elements related to domestic femininity
Accessibility	Advertisements publicly available on television and official YouTube channels

The analysis process used is latent content analysis and Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA). The qualitative latent content analysis approach was employed to uncover ideologies and gender stereotypes within the advertisements to identify underlying meanings (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). While latent analysis looks at the deeper symbolic or ideological meaning within discourse,

manifest content is analysis of visible content only. The advertisements were then transcribed and subsequently inductively coded in a systematic manner. The beginning codes were formulated by the representation and the way the information was communicated in these repeated ads.

Table: Initial Coding Process

Raw Data	Initial Code
Woman cooking while smiling	Domestic satisfaction
Mother washing dirty clothes	Maternal sacrifice
Male family members waiting for food	Gendered division of labour
Kitchen-centered visuals	Feminized domestic space
Emotional slogans about care	Emotional labour
Woman balancing work and home	Double burden
Empowerment language tied to domestic choices	Symbolic empowerment

Table: Transformation of Codes into Themes

Codes	Discursive Category	Final Theme
Cooking, serving food, kitchen visuals	Domestic association spatial	Kitchen as a Gendered Space
Caregiving, sacrifice, emotional slogans	Emotional idealization of labour	Romanticization of Household Labour
Confidence, multitasking, modernity,	Controlled empowerment	Illusion of Empowerment within Domestic Boundaries

After the thematic categorization, the findings were interpreted through Fairclough’s three-dimensional FCDA framework.

Table: Application of FCDA Framework

FCDA Dimension	Analytical Focus	Example from Advertisements
Textual Analysis	Language, visuals, slogans, gestures	Use of words such as “pyar,” “khayal,” and smiling domestic imagery
Discursive Practice	Production and circulation of advertisements	Targeting women as primary domestic consumers
Social Practice	Broader patriarchal and cultural ideologies	Normalization of women’s unpaid domestic labour

The FCDA framework allowed the student to analyse how femininity is linked to the representation of caring, sacrifice, domesticity and emotional work in advertisements, in a critical manner. The study also examined the naturalisation of the gender roles of women using the discourse as the domestic work is considered as good, moral work and good cultural practice for women.

The process of viewing the advertisements more than once was adopted to have analytical rigor to find the same discursive pattern in the advertisement and the theme consistency in each one of them. Multiple coding and comparison strengthened interpretive reliability. The study was also theoretically consistent since all along the process it considered the feminist sociology, gender performativity, and FCDA as it considers this relevant to the context of the study.

Discursive Construction of Domestic Femininity in Pakistani Television Advertisements

This study selected Pakistani advertisements from TV to reinforce the common threads of feminine vs. domestic work, caring, and emotionality on the part of females. The woman's presence was anticipated and portrayed throughout the use of linguistic, visual, and narrative tactics as if it were a natural fit to house duties repeatedly. The adverts portrayed unpaid domestic work of 'meaning' or 'emotional value', thereby reflecting the normalization of this practice. The adverts normalised the unpaid domestic work, as they presented it as emotionally fulfilling and morally valuable. Out of this analysis, three overarching themes emerged, which showed that home femininity is being constructed and masculinized in the advertising discourse of Pakistan.

Theme 1: The Kitchen as a Gendered Space of Femininity

The advertisements of Pakistani television, as identified in the analysis, always set the kitchen as a gendered central place where femininity is not only reflected but also acted out and confirmed through this place. It is particularly evident in food advertisements like those for Shan Masala and National Foods, where women are repeatedly shown preparing food at home, but there are no male characters taking part in the actual cooking. In a typical advertisement for Shan Masala, a woman is shown cooking in a well-maintained kitchen, smiling. The voiceover repeats phrases like *Khushiyon ka zaiqa, har ghar mein, and Apnon ke liye pakana hi* to highlight emotional and moral connections to cooking. These lines implicitly connect cooking with love and emotional fulfillment, making it an inherent part of feminine self-identity. Similarly, the adverts of National Foods frequently feature women preparing food. However, their relatives, especially the men, claimed that it tasted better prepared by Ammi, thus affirming the connection between household nurture and women.

The texts of these adverts build up on care, devotion and emotional labour. Cooking is not regarded as a responsibility; rather, it is a moral duty a woman owes to her family.

Such words as *pyar, khayal, and apnapan* are also employed recurrently. Apparently, a woman's

worth is closely tied to her skills in caring for others and doing household chores.

The kitchen is visually clean, aesthetically pleasing, and emotionally fulfilling. Women are depicted as neatly dressed, composed and happy while cooking. The lighting and close-up shots of food being cooked heighten the senses. Their body language, subtle movements, smiling faces, and attentive gestures, along with it, make cooking an experience as natural and enjoyable as possible. In comparison, male characters, when they appear, are set as customers to this work, often at the dining table, awaiting service.

On the discursive level, such advertisements are primarily directed at women, supporting their role as homemakers and caregivers. It is also normalized by the recurrent use of women in kitchens across a series of advertisements, and one may believe it is natural and unquestionable. At the social practice level, this discourse mirrors and reproduces the larger patriarchal models of the Pakistani society wherein domestic work is gendered, and the women are judged according to their performance at home.

The kitchen is, therefore, not only a physical location according to a feminist view but also a symbolic location of gender control. Advertisements help reinforce a mental image of what is normal about domestic femininity by repetition of visual and textual representations that integrate the kitchen as the right and expected place of women.



The picture above shows a woman standing near the stove, wearing culturally appropriate clothing, smiling as she cooks. Her pose is natural and friendly, and the kitchen is well-organized and tidy. This visual framing establishes cooking as a labour, but not a labour, but an aspect of female activity which is natural and gratifying. The absence of the male gender in such a space also reinforces the sectioning of the kitchen itself as a feminine space exclusive to the female gender.

Theme 2: Romanticization of Household labour

The romanticization of housework is the second theme that dominates the analysis, as extremely difficult and taxing duties are presented as icons of love, care and emotional fulfilment. It is especially evident in popular laundry liquid advertisements such as Surf Excel, which transform household chores into an act of virtue and feeling rather than a liability.

One of the most popular Surf Excel commercials features a dirty image of a mother washing her child's dirty clothes after he has been playing. The tale is harmonized by the iconic slogan "Daag aachay hain," which positions dirt as a problem, but it's part of childhood innocence and maturing. The motherly attention is provided as selfless care. The thing that one must suffer is mandatory in

child care, as in *Bachay seekhtay hain gir kar, maa unka saath deti hai.*

From a textual perspective, the words used in these adverts have consistently pegged domestic work to emotional aspects of sacrificially, devoutness and purity. Cleaning also represented a love rather than a necessity, and the voice-overs are inclined toward motifs like *Maa ka pyaar har daag mita deta hai.* This discourse redefines domestic work as a moral duty and makes it seem as if a person who chooses to do all this work is fulfilling a sense of self-fulfillment..

It is also through this visual representation that this story is reinforced. When women are engaged in responsibilities such as cleaning clothes or washing, they are depicted smiling, active and full of emotion. The combination of bright lighting, warm colours, and background cheerful music helps create a positive atmosphere that masks the physical strain of such chores. The fact that there is no fatigue, neither discouragement nor opposition, is yet another testimony of the fact that domestic work is inherently rewarding to women.

These advertisements establish a feminine, dreamy image of self-sacrifice and emotional labour at the discursive level. Women characters are represented as home workers and servants, and

their personalities are closely associated with their ability to care for others. This repetition of these roles across multiple adverts makes them seem normal and desirable.

At the social practice level, this romanticization can be applied to eliminate the structural inequalities of the gendered division of labour. The advertisements present domestic work as a

form of love, thereby leaving no room to question or condemn unpaid labour and making it routine. It is a small yet powerful exercise of conquest and influence. In the sense of feminism, women are being encouraged to follow their positions; however, they are not being prompted to recognize them as social constructions and as unfair.



Theme 3: The Illusion of Empowerment within Domestic Boundaries

The third theme highlights the paradoxical portrayal of women in Pakistani TV adverts, in which aspects of modernity and empowerment are foregrounded but remain bound within conventional domestic contexts. It gives an illusion of empowerment, which seems progressive at best, but it reinforces current gender inequalities.

In some modern advertisements, especially those for lifestyle or home products, women are depicted as self-assured, free and contemporary. They are depicted wearing modern clothes, with modern appliances or with several duties. Nevertheless, apparently, such depictions often return to domestic areas, where women continue to work mostly in household chores like cooking, cleaning, and caring.

Linguistically, the texts of such adverts often integrate words characterized by empowerment, such as choice, confidence, and independence.

Indicatively, voiceover can be used to say, as aaj ki aurat har faisla khud karti hai, implying agency and independence. But empowerment is usually restricted to making homemade decisions, like deciding amongst family which detergent or cooking product to buy. By doing so, empowerment is recast in the frames of the conventional gender positions.

These kinds of advertisements create a visual hybrid, blending the signs of modernity and domesticity. A woman can be depicted either working on a laptop or pursuing professional interests and then cut to shots of her cooking or doing housework. Such a two-fold depiction reinforces anticipated societal expectations that women can do well in both the political and familial arenas without a redrawing of responsibilities. It has been embodied at the discursive practice level due to changing marketing plans, especially the emergence of femvertising. Advertisers strive to align with modern gender equality discourses while retaining familiarity with

culture. It creates a balancing feature, as progressive imagery is introduced without questioning ingrained patriarchal standards. At the societal level, this theme is a sign of broader societal conflicts and mobilizations in Pakistan, where the role of women in education and the workforce is growing. At the same time, cultural norms around household duties remain unchanged. The feminine portrayal of women as able to handle both worlds supports the perspective of the double burden, in which women are supposed to represent more than one

thing at a time. Rooted in feminist critique, such a fantasy of empowerment underscores the constraints of media discourse to oppose structural disparities. Advertisements may not seem regressive; however, they most often reproduce traditional roles in more subtle ways. Consequently, empowerment turns into a symbolic but not transformative act and serves to strengthen and not to break down patriarchal order.



DISCUSSION

This study aimed at investigating & challenging the images of household work in food products and cleaning adverts that package femininity at a local genre and... Continue reading How Domestic Femininity is Constructed & Normalized via Pakistani Television Adverts on Housework elaboration in Pakistani Food & Cleaning Products Adverts? The Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA), a useful tool for Feminist Studies, was used to examine the linguistic but also the visual and ideological approaches that naturalise and attribute masculinity and femininity to domestic labour. The results indicate that Pakistani ads nonetheless retain the same portrait of women as being essentially confined to domestic domains, and the

women's roles are portrayed as emotional outlets, moral and cultural good and expressions deemed agreeable in society. In this way, advertisements reflect patriarchal gender ideology in a normalized and subtle way in the media.

The first research question sought an understanding of the portrayal of chores as a gendered task in Pakistani TV advertisements. The results indicate that the concept of domestic labour has been consistently feminized in terms of repetitive visual and linguistic practices. Women are often portrayed as overseeing tasks such as cooking, cleaning, laundry and childcare, while men are seldom seen doing these chores or ones that demand the same type of care. This discovery lends weight to Butler's (1990) claim that gender is a performative process and/or representation.

Repeatedly, ads weave the connection between female and household Labor into the fabric of society and make it look socially accepted, normal, and natural.

The analysis also illustrates that the kitchen is not only a physical space, but a symbolic space that represents femininity and is mediated and controlled culturally by the feminine gender. It clearly echoes feminist sociological claims that traditionally men are viewed as agents of power and participation in public space, while women are restricted to the private domestic sphere (Hooks, 2000). Domestic competence is a yardstick for female value in the Pakistani ads which again confirms the patriarchy notion that the value of women lies in taking care and being a good housekeeper.

The second research question addressed the domesticity as constructed by the linguistic and visual strategies. The results show that a lot of emotional speech is used in advertisements, affectionate words, prettified appearance of the pictures and all the idealized accounts of the caregiving position. Domestic labour gets repeatedly linked with emotional devotion, moral responsibility, with words like pyar, khayal, apnapan and sacrifice. But, as the graphic example shows, packages of facial expressions, neat domestic settings, warm illumination and pleasingly arranged kitchens also romanticize unpaid home economies. To come up with the idea that Labor is pleasurable and women's is treated equally with the replacement of the idea that it is tiring and socially inferior. The idea of changing domestic work from tiring and unequal into pleasurable and equal experience in advertising is presented.

This resonates with the notion of 'feminine idealism' mentioned by Sumaira et al (2023) as women are idealized as selfless caretakers who are expected to work hard and Labor through their emotions which are normalised and glorified. On a gendered men's work division, from an FCDA perspective, these discursive tactics mask the structural inequalities between people of different gender. Domestic work has been depoliticized and individualized as a display of love and not seen as

unpaid labour that is inappropriately allocated to women. Thus, discourse works ideologically as it obscures gender inequality under cover of glamorous images.

Another significant finding from the study is regarding the sense of empowerment that is portrayed in the Pakistani advertisements today. Some ads feature depictions of confidence, independence, and modernity but these are still within the familiar confines of the domestic sphere. Women can be depicted as educated, working or modern in technology but their final target area of interest is always caregiving as well as within home management. This is true to postfeminist writers' interpretation of symbolic empowerment, as women can only superficially seem to be empowered, whilst still reinforcing deep-rooted patriarchal gendered structures.

The findings validate pre-existing research on femvertising in Pakistan where Aftab et al. (2023) emphasize that ads are increasingly using newer language without breaking away from the existing gender division, and Syed et al. (2025) conclude that there is a strong case for a more nuanced understanding of the shifting portrayal of women in advertisements in Pakistan due to their progressive language. Thus, empowerment is negotiated in culturally appropriate ways. Women are given guidance on how to behave only as long as they do not violate preexisting familial norms. This is known as the 'double burden' by feminist scholars, who see women performing well in both the personal and professional fields, but without any redistribution of domestic Labor.

The application of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis was found to be very useful in identifying these concealed ideological mechanisms. Fairclough's (1995, 2006) three-dimensional model showed that discourse takes place in a tripartite structure, at three different levels - the textual, the discursive and the social. The ad at the textual level ascribes to the emotionally charged and idealized notions of femininity and caring to normalize such traits. The level of discursive practices implies that advertisements are aimed at women as the main buyer of domestic products and assumes the market against a gender

perspective. These advertisements at the level of the wider social practice reflect the norms of patriarchy that are already present in the Pakistani society.

Overall, the study adds to the current body of literature on gender and media by not only incorporating a representation analysis, it also aims to delve deeper into the study of discourse, ideology and power in Pakistan. The present research findings reveal the stereotypical representation of women in advertisements of Pakistan but in the present study it was specific to reveal how “domestic woman” is consistently constructed through viable repetitions of salient discourses. With this research the study consequently troubles feminist study of media, which focuses on the role of media in shaping gendered social structure as an active phenomenon in the text. The study thus propels feminist study about media by providing illustration on the active phenomenon of media in sustaining gendered social structure phenomenon in ordinary media texts.

There are some limitations with the study, however. The analysis included analysis of only food and cleaning product ads in a narrow window of time in 2025. Other forms of ads may depict different and/or changing conceptions of femininity, such as digital media campaigns and social media ads. Furthermore, the study does not look at the audience's viewership or consumer engagement with the media representations, reflecting the fact that it deals with texts of the media and not the responses of their users.

The entire discussion suggests that TV advertisements are still effective cultural tools of maintaining domestic femininity and gender-oriented stereotypes in Pakistan. The persuasive appeals in advertising for repeated rhetorical devices, emotion-laden storytelling, and carefully staged imagery construct the unpaid nature of women's work at home as natural, normal and therefore cathartic and desirable. The present findings are thus valuable and could be significantly deepened by the critical analysis of media discourses with respect to perpetuation of

gender inequalities in contemporary Pakistani society.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this paper reveal that Pakistani television advertisements are active agents in constructing and normalizing domestic femininity, which appeals to recurring patterns of discursive insight. These adverts not only follow societal principles, but they also operate at an ideological level as gender expectations are reproduced and reinforced through them. The analysis of these three themes, kitchen as gendered space, romanticization of domestic work and illusion of empowerment, has shown how femininity is always constant in its association with domesticity and taking care of.

Among the critical findings is the fact that women have always been associated with the domestic space, especially the kitchen. It feeds the argument of feminists that gender is not innate but socially constructed through constant representations and practices. The textual and visual focus on women in the act of domestic work solidifies the message of domestic work as a natural part of femininity. It is in line with Rasool (2014) and Ali (2018), who state that Pakistani media is the key point of reproducing traditional gender ideologies. The current paper builds upon this knowledge by showing that these representations are not neutral but are produced using discourse in a strategic manner.

The paper also underscores the use of emotional and aesthetic practices to idealize domestic labour through advertisements. Even chores like cleaning or nursing are viewed as acts of love, sacrifice, and as a moral duty, but not as labour-intensive. This observation is echoed by the notion of feminine idealism coined by Sumaira et al. (2023), according to which women are romanticized as self-sacrificing and nurturing. Advertisements distort the unequal allocation of labour by relating the process of domestic work to emotional gratification, which helps to popularize it.

Using the Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis approach, this speaks of the non-neutrality of language and reflection as strongly pointed out by

Fairclough (2006). Advertisement discourse functions based on existing power structures and is used to support and reify these existing power structures by claiming gendered roles as natural and desirable. The domestic work that excludes or makes men peripheral to it helps to strengthen this formulaic separation of labour that seems to be a socially accepted norm and above challenge.

The other important finding is the paradoxical construction of women's empowerment. Although the elements of modernity and independence are used in some advertisements, these images are limited to domestic settings. It is corroborated by the claims of Aftab et al. (2023) and Syed et al. (2025), who indicate that the symbolic change created by femvertising in Pakistan tends to be transformative. The current paper shows that empowerment is portrayed in a discourse in a manner that endorses rather than disrupts the conventional gender roles.

It is seen as a type of postfeminist discourse, in which empowerment is depoliticized and individualized within feminism. Women are portrayed as competent and self-sufficient, but their identity lies in their family life. It creates what will be perceived as a double burden, where women are expected to perform better in both the public and private worlds without being redistributed labour. The representations fail to undermine patriarchal structures but rather repackage these structures in a more recent and socially acceptable way.

In general, the results indicate the influential character of the discursive power of advertisement in forming gender identities and the reproduction of patriarchal standards in Pakistani society. Advertisements reinforce gender inequality through a series of associations of women with domesticity and the normalization of domesticity as such and desirable. The discussion, then, justifies the essentiality of critically examining medical representations to gain a clear understanding of how discourse is passed on to maintain the creation of social power relations.

It is suggested that further research needs to explore representations and shared home responsibilities regarding changing notions of

masculinity in Pakistani media. Analyses of comparative ads on various digital platforms and social media ads could also shed light on new understandings of gender talk within more contemporary consumer audiences. In addition, there is scope for further research on the reception response of the audience to understand the effect the representation has on the audience and on the domestic worker's role within the Pakistani society.

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