



## Personalized advertising and cultural branding: Apragmatic analysis of language strategies used in brand advertisements

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**Abstract** - The importance of language in advertising is apparent in contemporary print, electronic, and internet-based visual media. How specific use of language in advertisements influences the consumer perception and influences their consumption behavior is a relevant socially-oriented investigation. This article focuses on a pragmatic analysis of the use of persuasive language in advertising. It analyses the impact of such language on the consumers and examines assignment of gender roles in brand advertisements in Pakistan. A clothes brand ("J.") and a food product brand NFL are analyzed to investigate their customer communication strategies as used in advertisements. Data findings show that the brands personalize their business messages through the use of interpersonal language although brand advertisement is an impersonal form of communication. They use local cultural and gender features to lend authenticity and local embeddedness to their brands. These findings suggest that linguistic forms, semiotic features, and cultural elements play an important role in the business world. Through strategic use of these pragmatic features of language use, brands effectively influence individual behavior, increase sales and maximize profit.

**Keywords:** pragmatics, commercial advertisements, culture, linguistic deviation, brand identity, customer perception

### I. INTRODUCTION

Advertisements are a powerful form of social communication that aims to persuade consumers to take an action. The purpose of this article is to analyze the intention behind using manipulating and persuasive language in advertisements from a pragmatics perspective focusing specifically on the role of language medium in advertisements. To grab the attention of the audiences (i.e., potential customers), persuasive vocabulary and phrases and novel linguistic forms are used in brand advertisements. Audiences' responses to the same advertisement can be different as they make choices on how and where to invest their money. Attractive wording used in advertisements plays a key role to influence the decision of potential customers. Language use for advertisement is part of a dynamic system in which two connected processes of communication and persuasion are fluidly interacting in language use (Donnell & Todd, 1980). Advertisements are commercial non-personal marketing strategies promoting sponsored ideas or products. Advertisements are non-personal because they are not meant to influence one individual but groups of people and large populations (Beerthuisen, et al., 2017).

"Advertisement" is derived from the Latin "advertere" which means "to turn to the direction of something or drawing attention to something", or "notifying or informing someone" (Goddard 1998:6). To achieve this, advertisers often use language in such a manner that deviates from the conventional use of language. Linguistic deviation often plays a key role in attention-grabbing in advertisements. In instances of advertisements, the semantic and morphological usage of languages sometimes cannot be clearly understood in terms of standard English usage (Widdowson, 1972).

Advertisements have a significant role in creating the image of a particular product in the minds of consumers. The majority of the ads use a tagline with the purpose to catch the attention of viewers. Given the availability of modern means of connectivity like the internet and electronic media, advertisements have been more influential than any other institution such as education, religion, and even the family (Pollay, 1986). With the potential of advertisements to generate both financial and social change and affect people's behavior, it is important for marketers, consumers, and researchers to investigate how it affects individuals and society.

Advertisements are not related just to an individual but to a group of people hence it is non-personal. It has a major role for a business to increase its sales and maximize profit. Advertisements are used to mold the mindset of groups of people rather than an individual. There are two types of consumers, those who could buy products for themselves only and those who buy products in large quantities of amount for business

to resale in their shops and stores. The modern era is considered as highly consumerist (Benson, 2005). In this era, media is the main source for influencing people's opinions and perception of products and of themselves as consumers.

Johnston (2014) argues that the main purpose of any business is to increase the number of its customers. To make this happen, advertisement plays a key role to make people and individuals conscious of their products and connect them with the brand as a distinct identity emblem. Specific pragmatic strategies of language use has an important role to play in effective marketing. The core of advertisements lies in their potential to influence and even manipulate purchasers' behavior to purchase a certain product as well as compel them to retain their devotion to the particular product and its brand.

The current article provides a brief review of existing literature dealing with linguistic and semiotic strategies used in brand advertisement, construction of brand identity, and how advertisements influence and mould individual's behavior for commercial gains. The conceptual framework of the article is then explained followed by analysis of data gathered from two Pakistani brands "J." and "NFL" working in clothes and food markets respectively. The discussion and conclusion section draw inferences from the data in terms of brand strategies use for personalizing their advertisements and for cultural authenticity.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Owners of various products, factories, and industries apply a language that is persuasive and tempts people towards a particular product. Clough (1995, p. 23) observes that seeing a language as a social practice implies that "language is a socially and historically situated mode of action that is in a dialectical relationship with other facets of the social world. Language is thus socially shaped and it also socially constitutes. Advertisement language arises desires of people to buy the product.

Rai (2013) argues that the role of advertisement in the United States is stronger than the rest of the world. He examined the depiction of worldwide consumers' culture in advertisements, interpreted global consumers' culture as a community of customer-related logos (types of products, brands, and customer practices) that are relevant to segment participants. Social media broadcasting, mainly from the United States, is having an important role in the development, learning, and distribution of certain product logos globally. Consequently, the symbols of international consumer culture are largely American symbols dominated that are perceived in the United States as local (Alden et al., 1999). The dominance of advertisements acts like a magic spell over the mind of individuals and they think the way advertisers want them to think. People see the ads of different products on different media and get influenced and buy the products advertised (Pope, 1991).

Qaddafi & Wahyudi (2014) investigated the language used in the advertisement of Cigarettes in Indonesia. It is a common understanding that cigarettes are unhealthy and dangerous to consume. But due to the immense economic advantage that tobacco industry offers the government in Indonesia encouraged tobacco to be openly promoted on different media. However, the picture of cigarettes would not be shown on television.

Eluwa (2005) analyzed the advertisements of Nigerian physicians (APCON). The analysis of data revealed that advertisement is a method of manipulating opinions about the products. However, companies which have paid for several ideas are represented by sponsors using media. Advertisement is public demonstration of products providing public notification or announcement as a word reference meaning. Advertising media act as a bridge for the advertisers' message to reach the intended audience. It is often the channel or platform by which prospective purchasers are told in an advertising message (Tyagi and Kumar, 2004).

Chowdhury (2011) advertisements for marketers has several preferences, such as displaying goods when people know the current products and services compel them to purchase. Therefore, deals are expanding; increasing the trade show excessive demand. Advertisements improve the job of the sales agent and help customers to connect with new items. The picture of advertising is the foundation and first step for brands; it reflects and influences consumer understanding of a brand. (Biel, 1993).

Aronoff & Fudeman (2011) observe that sometimes novel words are used in advertisements that do not mean anything. These nonsense words and expressions only act to capture the attention of the buyer. In the early 1920s, a music store called "Rebop" was opened that owes its inspiration to the jazz term rebop. The word rebop, however, was initially one of the many nonsense phrases tossed into their vocal improvisations by jazz musicians beginning in the early 1920s. The intention behind naming the store was to understand the term as consisting of the word bop and the prefix re- (again), to most people who walk by the store. So, for advertisers, it is not necessary to make sense of any word but advertisers name shops and products in novel ways to attract the attention of the consumers.

Ostrosi(2012)researched the advertisement of job explorers in the Batam dailypostand concluded that the language used in advertisements influences and persuades the viewers. For instance, Mc Donald’s plan to attract youthful audience through language use focused on linguistic features preferred by this age group such as love words and colocations. Advertising often defies the rules of ordinary language. Although these linguistic aberations used for catching attention of potential product consumers never make a part of the regular social language use, advertising visual content and configuration have a significant impact on the purchaser. Itisthelanguage that encourages individualstodistinguisheda product from other competing productsand to rememberit the next time they decide to shop. Linguistic strategies whether morphological, semantic, or graphological play a significant role in the business world, selling of products, and construction of distinct brand or product identity.

### III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What linguistic strategies commercial brands use for personalizing their advertisement messages?
2. What role cultural depiction play in the advertisement strategies of the two brands studies in this article?
3. How local gender norms and roles are used in advertisement?

### IV. METHODOLOGY

Data analyzed in the current article is obtained from the official websites and Facebook pages of two Pakistani brands “j.” and “National Food Limited”. The present research study adopted a discourse analysis approach to analyze data in the selected brand advertisements in the form of phrases or sentences. Following Tanaka (1994), the current research study analyzed recurrent linguistic and socio-cultural patterns used in the brand names representation in advertisements. The study examines explicit linguistic patterns such as those repeatedly used in the advertisements of the focal brands. Focusing on two well-known Pakistani brands, this study takes purposive samples and examines them as goal-directed research data (Cresswell, 2007 and Tashakkori as quoted in Litosseliti, 2010). The advertisement language is analyzed from an electronic source and has been used as a corpus (Conrad, 2002). To analyze the data, the study used Sperber and Wilson’s (1996; 2002) pragmatics’ inferential theory to draw reasonable conclusions based on pragmatic data gleaned from language use in advertisements (Tanaka, 1994). The inferential model of pragmatics emerged from the concept of Grecian cooperative principle and maxims of quality, quantity, relevance, and manner (Grice, 1975) that emphasizes only facets of interest (Sperber & Wilson, 2002, p. 250). The concept consists of two principles of relevance: cognitive principle and communicative principle. The first theory of relevance is “matched to the relevance of maximization” while the latter theory says that “utterances create effective relevance expectation”. These cognitive and communicative concepts are then narrowed down into sub-aspects. For analysis, this model uses (1) universal applicability and cognition, (2) relevance and conception, (3) universal applicability and communication, and (4) social and mental knowledge that refers to two relations in everyday interactions in which two or more speakers are interested in interaction (Sperber & Wilson, 2002, pp. 248-291). Using Oxford Digital Advanced Learner’s Dictionary 10<sup>th</sup> Edition (2020), only those words and phrases have been decoded that are essential for the central idea of a sentence. The data have been collected from Pakistani brands using social media channels and different websites that are a significant means by which Pakistani consumers are accessed by the focal brands. Such data act serves as database evidence (Silverman, 1994). Language samples from the actual commercial are typed in capital in double quote marks (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Throughout this article, the two brands of the items are mentioned in prominent and capitalized letters. As the data is from Pakistani brands, some of the ads are in Urdu language for which translations are given alongside the original text.

### V. RESULTS

This section reports empirical data from the two focal brands that demonstrate aspects of linguistic and cultural adaptation these brands use to influence customer behavior and coalesce specific socio-linguistic identity for their brands.

#### **Brand 1: J.**

To analyze J's strategic use of cultural imagery and linguistic adaptation, the following data was obtained from the official website and Facebook page the brand. A special focus has been given to the linguistic and semiotics characteristics used in the text. It is significant to mention that Junaid Jamshed, the founder of the brand was a well-known Pakistani rockband leader before his transformation into a religious scholar. Hence religious elements are often prominent in the textual features of promotions used by this commercial brand.



Figure (4.1.1)

Use of the pronoun 'you' in the caption above highlights the relationship between the advertisers and the viewers when viewers are invited on Facebook to talk about their preference in the comment section. The text in both the determined topic as well as in the caption follows the picture in (4.1.1) which says: 'Let us know!'. Repetition of the personal pronoun allude to audiences being in a position of influence and in charge of the brand. In the slogan 'Let us know!' the marketers offer association to the viewers by inviting their thoughts and passivizing themselves as subservient to the wishes and demands of the customers. The ad thus tempts people into thinking that they are also a part of the company having an important role to play in the decision making processes of the brand. As the Frankfurt School emphasizes, marketers gain significant influence over consumers' buying choices when they feel that their wishes and desires are given priority when a business makes decisions (Fairclough, 2014).

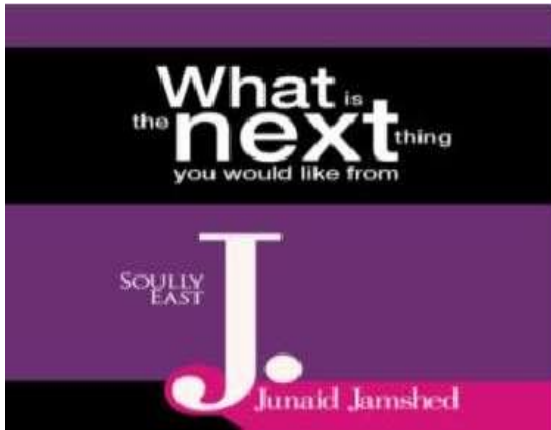
Fairclough (2014) examines the different rhetorical purposes achieved through the use of personal pronouns in advertisements. Relational values implicit in caption emphasize analyzing the choice of phrases that have an impact on how the audience react to the text. Through usage of pronouns like 'you', 'we', 'your', etc., a certain relational meaning is implied in the language of ads. These pronouns are used in the discourse of "J." advertisements to speak with clients directly, demonstrating engagement and offering company thus giving its customers a feeling of friendly or even familial relation. Consider the following figures as an example:



Figure(4.1.2)



Figure(4.1.3)



Figure(4.1.4)



Figure(4.1.5)

The above data illustrate rhetorical strategies ‘J’ uses to personalize its relation to costumers. To create a congenial bonding with the costumers, they are invited into the decision making processes of the brand. The following section illustrate other rhetorical strategies that National Foods Limited uses to achieve commercial objectives and establish brand identity.

**Brand 2: National Foods Limited**

National Foods Limited (NFL) is aPakistan food brand that suppliesspiciness, drinks,pickles, and jams. Launched in 1970,the company offers a variety of food products.It is regarded as a common household brand name in the context of Pakistan.Data analyzed in this sectionhas been collectedfromtheofficialwebsiteandFacebookpage of NFL



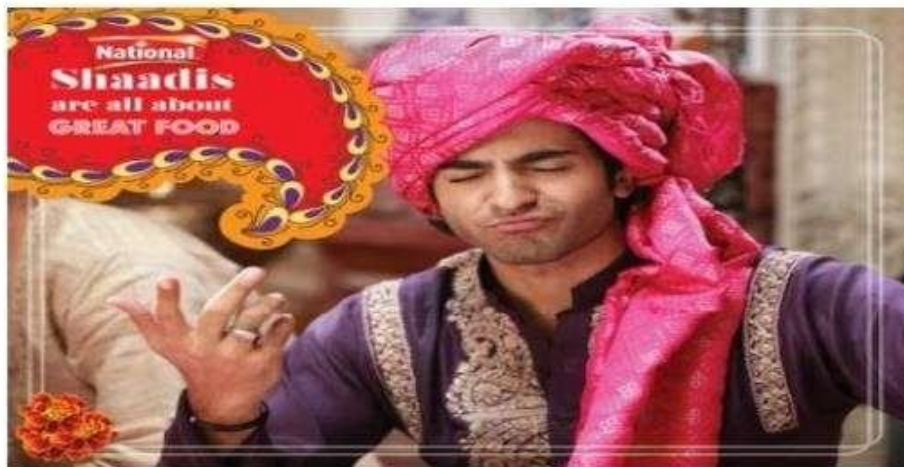
Figure (4.2.1)

Figure (4.2.1) "The Complete Pakistani Food Experience" shows an advertisement inscription in a prominent public location in Pakistan. The placement of the brand logo right above the captionreflects how the brands’marketers connect the brandwith traditional Pakistani food. The text indexes a relationship between the brand and the experience of Pakistani food, projecting a congenial relationship between the brand and the country where the business is located. The cultural imagery of the ad reflect a specific historical tradition in the Indian subcontinent. Iimages of Mughal art and clothing in the picture emphasize the connection between the brand andPakistan’s centuries-old traditional cuisine. It collapses time for advertisement purposes to suggest that the food offered is authentic local food. Mughals, the Muslim ruler reigned the subcontinent for almost 300 years and were known forhaving a rich food culture consisting of a large array of spicy foods, traditional drinks, and sweets.Byusing theMughal art, NFL frames its products in relation to the famous Mughal Indian cousinto lend authenticity, historical local connection, and cultural to its products.To illustrate the brand’s national and cultural affiliation, another picture on the website reflects the well-known Badshahi Masjid (Figure, 4.2.2).



Figure (4.2.2)

Badshahi Masjid is located in Lahore which is one of Pakistan's oldest cities. Although the picture does not have any script related to the picture of Badshahi Masjid, the intended audience of the picture may perceive a connection between the brand authenticity and the historical legacy of this ancient monument in an old city in the country. The masjid was built in the seventeenth century by the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb. By posting the picture of this particular masjid, the NFL website seems to promote the brand's identity by inscribing it in the historical culture of the Indian subcontinent.



***What is the first thing that comes to your mind when we say 'Shaadi'?***

Figure (4.2.3)

Figure (4.2.3), an NFL advertisement posted on the company's Facebook page, is a good illustration of the brand's promotional text. It shows how the company links its advertisement to local cultural norms of wedding ceremonies in Pakistan. "What is the first thing that comes to your mind when we say 'Shaadi'?" is illustrated with the picture of a man dressed in a traditional Punjabi dress consisting of a turban and kameez (traditional Pakistani/Indian long shirt). Punjab is Pakistan's largest province in terms of population and is the second-largest in terms of area. It is the most productive agricultural region of the country due to its extensive river system. Culturally, the Pakistan west Punjab shares a rich legacy of Indian culture and is a cousin with the Indian east Punjab. It used to be one big province before the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947. People who belong to this region are known as Punjabis, having Punjabi as their language. The above picture illustration is, however, not an isolated instance. NFL advertisements most frequently use cultural imagery of the Punjab to promote its brand authenticity and local embeddedness.

The male models in Figure 4.2.3 are wearing traditional Punjabi dress and their body language and facial expressions indicate that they are enjoying food at a wedding. The visual message is enhanced through its association with the inscription that follows, "What is the first thing that comes to your mind when we say 'Shaadi (wedding)'?" The query uses personal pronouns "your" and "we" to underscore the interpersonal stance of its while soliciting its target audience's opinion about Pakistani weddings. Responses to the above rhetorical question is provided by the advertisers themselves in the caption given on the picture that declares "Shaadi is all about GREAT FOOD". Consistent association between wedding ceremonies in Pakistan and festive occasions for enjoying a variety of food provides a circular structure to the message of

the ad that perpetuates itself. Use of repetitive messages for reinforcement and memorization is, however, not uncommon as a brand promotion strategy. The usage of the brand logo and declaration made in the caption help establish interpersonal values projecting NFL as a household family member rather than an impersonal company that does not have any personal connections with its customers. NFL thus primarily uses visual and textual references to Pakistani cultural norms and traditions to advertise itself as a brand food.

Other culture-specific elements used in NFL ads enhance its local connected and appeal as an authentic indigenous brand. For instance, gender projection in the company's ads is embedded in Pakistani cultural norms and traditional perceptions about male and female social genders. Pakistani is a patriarchal society that accepts strong gender-based segregation and social roles are assigned on the basis of strong sexist social norms. Consider figure (4.2.4) which is a picture of NFL brand posted on its Facebook page that illustrates another cultural aspect of "National Rasm-o-Riwaj (national rituals and traditions)".



Figure (4.2.4)

Figure (4.2.4) shows the picture of a sweet traditional dish in Pakistan served in small bowls. The caption on the picture reads: "The first time a bride enters the kitchen, she is expected to cook a sweet dish for her in-laws!". The caption explicitly foregrounds the Pakistani social norm of gender-based roles assigned to individuals as where a bride is expected to prepare a sweet dish for her in-laws after her wedding. In Pakistan, a bride typically has to take charge of the kitchen soon after she moves to the house of the groom. This is considered a normal practice and essential tradition although it is based on a specific configuration of social roles that is contingent upon the patriarchal structural of the sociocultural context of Pakistan. The ad reinforces an essentialized view of sex-based gendered role assignment in the society that obligates individual women to that once they get married they are expected to accept the role of being housewives and that to accept it as their duty to take charge of the kitchen and provide food to the rest of the family.

## VI. DISCUSSION

Over the years, the debate of advertisements has become a form of communal discourse. Eldaly (2011) declares advertisements as "a social discourse with rhetorical force" (p.26) which means that the rhetoric of advertisements is powerful, complex, and has strong social penetration. It is influential enough to influence human actions and choices within the context where it is created or shared. Advertisements captions are organized by the marketers for specific pragmatic purposes directed towards influencing costumers' behavior and patterns of buying stuff. Therefore, advertisements serve as a key instrument of identity creation for the brand or the goods being marketed. The analysis of the current research study proposes that advertisement functions as a medium for different brands to construct their social identities. The advertisers must persuade its audience by creating a desirable picture for the brand. Establishing a specific preferred identity for the brand is thus crucial in influencing the purchasing pattern of the customer and convincing them to purchase the promoted product.

Pervasive presence of advertisements in modern life has significant effects on peoples' purchasing pattern and frequency of consumption. A significant increase has been observed in purchasing habits of costumers in Pakistan with the proliferation of commercial brands in the country and their easy access to costumers through electronic and social media. With the growth of internet providers in Pakistan, the available

internet services are more accessible and getting cheaper. As it is now easy to access different online websites, people devote a considerable amount of time browsing the internet for shopping purposes. Building on a fast-growing internet culture, advertisers have focused on online modes of advertisement to access more costumers hoping that when viewers come across commercials they might be persuaded to buy the services or products that are promoted.

In the preceeding section, analysis of data focused on investigation of linguistic and semiotic features. Different brands in Pakistan construct specific identity through the usage of language and cultural artifacts as shown in the data from two well-known major brands. The data illustrated different strategies through which brands construct specific favorable perception among audience to promote their sales and encourage brand loyalty among costumers. The current study results reveal that a core emphasis of fashion brands relates to the usage of recurrent personal language to project an interpersonal connection with its costumers although brand projection and advertisement are by non-personal in nature and not directed to any specific individual(s). In the case of a food brand, the data reveals that healthy lifestyle, family life, cultural norms, and locally-relevant gender roles are used to reinforce authenticity of the brand and claim indigenous identity for the brand. This illustrates that advertisers strategies to project specific identity for the selected brand by utilizing various themes in advertising. Furthermore, particular branding themes and strategies are prominent in the advertisements of various brands regardless of the different business categories to which they belong.

Distinctive features of identity can be observed in every brand though they also share mutual features with other brands in shared business area. The distinctive feature of identity distinguishes the brand from other competitive brands in the same business area. For example, for "J." the clothing domain has been projected as a classical yet modern style of apparel. Correspondingly, in the food industry market shared feature include being health-conscious and providing quality food. However, distinct identity is constructed in the case of NFL by concentrating on Pakistani cultural history, the Mughal Empire, and by connecting the brand with gender roles traditionally assigned to different sexes in Pakistan. Thus a deeper comprehension of data provides a clearer picture of the strategies of brand identity construction in online advertisements.

Pakistan is a multicultural country where several distinct languages are spoken. Urdu is the national language and a symbol of national unity whereas English is the language of official correspondence, powerful institutions like the judiciary, army, bureaucracy, and higher education. The English language has high status value owing to the present linguistic landscape and the colonial past of the Indian subcontinent that remained under the British colonial occupation. Code-mixing and code-switching between English, Urdu, and local languages is widespread in the country. This practice is also illustrated in the textual instances in the data of this article. The data show that in both brands the usage of English language occurred as the basic language in advertisements. The captions on the images show the use of English language as the primary language in the context of Pakistan. In the ads, code-switching and mixing are adopted for specific strategic aims. For instance, code-switching is used to establish a national identity by adopting words and phrases from the native language where such native expressions are considered effective. For example, "Rasm-o-Rivai" has local connotative meanings that would be lost if translated into another language such as English. To retain these connotations, Urdu words are transliterated into English alphabets that preserve Urdu phonemic features using Roman transcription.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Each brand in Pakistan adopts different persuasive strategies to induce its customers to buy more of their products. The current study aimed to investigate the linguistic and semiotic features used in advertisement and how they garnered local embeddedness and authenticity. The study showed that clothing brand of "J." focused on using themes of blending modern and traditional dressing styles while food brands focused on health and family. Advertising is an activity found everywhere in social domains like the internet, social media, electronic and print media through which brands project their products. Every brand create its own identity through unique foci in which it does not give a chance for other brands to compete with them. The focal brands in this study reflected Pakistani cultural norms and practices to appropriate an indigenous identity for their brand.

English as a second language in Pakistan plays a key social role as the language of educated people, media, and advertising. Therefore, code-switching and code-mixing between English and the local indigenous languages occur a regular feature of advertisements that seeks to appeal to the local ways of speaking



through mixing of languages. Advertising discourse is neither static nor unitary but dynamic and adaptive with the culture where it is practiced. Advertising discourse is therefore responsive to any significant changes in the local linguistic and culture landscape and coopts these changes the present study showed that advent of the internet based social media and websites have increased the penetrative power of advertising brands. They have a richer, multimedia-based, and fast acting tool in the form of online access that brands can use to create specific local identity or blend modernity with cultural legacy in the linguistic and semiotic fabric of their advertisements.

## VIII. FUTURE SCOPE

The current study suggests that commercial messages are implicated in social and cultural changes due to their pervasive presence. Due to the scale and scope of advertisements they are not only limited to business and commerce but are a powerful social institution. Future studies can take further this sociocultural analysis of the multimodal messages of advertisements and analyze their impact on people's self-perception (their identity), increasing materialism in many social settings, and the intersection of gender, sexuality, and commercial advertisements.

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