Distorted Mirror of Advertising in a Muslim Society: A Study of Television Commercials by Global Companies in Pakistan *

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ABSTRACT

Social Advertising of global business corporations is extensively investigated in various cultural settings for its modifying effect on host cultures, particularly promoting Western capitalist values. The same has raised concerns for Muslim societies where majority cultural values being derived from Islam are at loggerheads with Western values, a situation which may have ramifications for these societies. This study explored the very notion in Pakistan, and investigated the depiction of culturally consistent as well as inconsistent values in global companies' television commercials running in the country. The content of prime time television ads by these companies from April 2017 to March 2018 (N=131) was analyzed for the use of advertising appeals, applying Hofstede's dimensional model for national cultures and advertising appeals by Pollay (1983) with modifications to include regionally standardized appeals, in the perspective of distorted mirror theorizing by Pollay (1986). The descriptive and statistical analysis of content found majority value appeals used in these ads reflecting values contrary to the cultural tendencies of Pakistani society, including appeals for regional standardization. It also found significant association of major inconsistent appeals with commercials of products used by youth and women. Appeal family was found the most frequently used among culturally consistent appeals. Findings provided a unique way of extrapolating Pollay's theorizing that mirror of advertising is distorted to the sellers' interest.

Keywords

Advertising, cultural values, global corporations, multinational companies, Muslim societies

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INTRODUCTION

Popular discourses assume that the global or multinational companies' advertisements are presenting cultural norms which are not consistent with the respective local cultural values in many developing and Eastern countries (Ahmad, 1995; Cheng, 1997; Zhang & Shavitt, 2003), and business corporations from the US and Europe are promoting values which are Western in essence like consumerism, modernity, individualism, indulgence etc. in societies they advertise their products in (Cheng, 1994; Lin, 2001; Sengupta & Frith, 1997).

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As a developing economy in a globalized world, Pakistan is also experiencing operations of transnational business corporations contributing in the country's economic growth since its inception, facilitating the globalization along with other factors and actors (Haque, 2002). Along with shaping country's economy, these corporations have also shown the ability to influence politics and cultural values (Asghar, 2018). Like many other parts of the world, national cultural patterns in Pakistan are influenced by the influx of global cultural productions; Globalization has caused growing influence of West, changes in traditional social structure, encouragement of secularization, and decline in social solidarity in parts of Pakistan (Naz et al., 2012).

The cultural makeup of Pakistani society is an amalgamation of religion and tradition, with a variety of ethnic features and historic influences. On multiple cultural indices Pakistani society is highly collectivistic with strong family system that defines many imperatives of socio-cultural beliefs and practices. Pakistan being "an agglomeration of ethnicities with little in common except adherence to Islam" (Katz, 2016, p. 108) and for Islam being defining and directing overall patterns of living (Jabbar, 2019), the importance of religion reflects in many cultural sensitivities including the role and status of women.

There is a strong notion in Pakistan about electronic media of spreading vulgarity, degenerating public tastes and objectifying women in the context of local cultural values, which reflects in public feed backs (Khan, 2012; Tahir, 2019). In this perspective the role of global marketing in causing public annoyance for not being sensitive to cultural sensibilities is susceptible. In Pakistan global companies aggressively advertise on television which is the most prominent mass medium in the country with maximum outreach, the most trusted medium for news (Tahir, 2018) with TV commercials being a popular genre of high viewership statistics ("Special report," 2018). The country has a high television penetration (72%) with 25% terrestrial and 65% cable viewers, and an average Pakistani spends 12% of his/her active time watching television (Tahir, 2018).

As the cultural aspect of advertising by global companies is a cause of concern in many countries, a need to explore the same phenomenon in Pakistan arises with a focus on its Muslim identity. Studies investigating the cultural depiction of global advertising with regards to local cultures have been conducted in different parts of the world (Cheng & Schweitzer, 1996; Khanh & Hau, 2007; Lin, 2001; Zhang & Harwood, 2004; Zhang & Shavitt, 2003) and also few studies on advertising in Muslim perspective (Ahmad, 1995; Hussin et al., 2015; Mokhtar, 2018; Waller & Shyan Fam, 2000). However, such an analysis for Pakistan is missing from literature at all leaving aside the angle of its Muslim identity.

This investigation fills this gap; it empirically studies for the first time what are the cultural messages these global companies are imparting to Pakistani audience through their advertising. It analyses that (a) to what extent these messages are congruent or incongruent with the cultural values of Pakistani society, (b) is there a prevalence of culturally incongruent messages in pursuit of regional standardization of television commercials, and (c) which audience segments are the major recipients of culturally inconsistent messages. The study aims to reason the dynamics of marketing strategy of these companies within peculiarities of Pakistani culture, which is at odds with their cultures of origin in many respects. Being first to explore the congruity of cultural values in global advertising in Pakistan, this study provides a reference point to such academic endeavors in future. Based upon the findings of this analysis, this paper presents policy recommendations.

Interplay of Advertising and Culture
Advertisements reflect and promote certain culture (Kalliny et al., 2011; Khairullah & Khairullah, 2013; Lin, 2001; Song et al., 2014; Yuzhakova et al., 2015). Investigations indicate that a congruity of advertising appeals with the national and local cultural values has a positive impact on consumer's

choice (De Mooij, 2018; Saleem, 2016). With regards to the cultural depiction, the framework of distorted mirror of advertising theorized by Richard Pollay (1986) has been frequently used to investigate the cultural consistency of global advertising especially in cross cultural studies.

In recent times, globalization is seen as extension of capitalist economy through spread of modernity (Boyd-Barrett, 1997; Giddens, 2013) and to be more specific, the dominance of Western particularly American culture in rest of the world (Pieterse, 2019) . As a process of international integration of countries through convergence of products, ideas, and other aspects of culture (Albrow & King, 1990), globalization is subdivided into economic, cultural and political globalization with multinational business corporations as an integral part of it (Babones, 2007). In addition to their role in economic globalization, these global corporations are part of cultural globalization through their advertising (Kraidy, 2002; Pieterse, 2019).

The dual roles of globalizing the cultures at one hand and profiteering by appealing to the consumers' values on the other can be problematic for these corporations while marketing their products and services in Muslim countries where many Western values are in sharp contrast with the host cultures. Literature finds that for offensive products, Muslim consumers show more offense than their Christian counterparts (Farah & El Samad, 2014) and level of religiosity in Muslims is a moderating factor for evaluation of controversial advertisements (De Run et al., 2010). Ads with high sex appeals were found significantly less favorable among Muslim subjects in comparison to non-Muslim subjects in Malaysia (Ismail & Melewar, 2014). The levels of religiosity among Muslim consumers were found moderating their purchase behaviors towards modest spending (Alam et al., 2011) which is a value contrasting with the capitalistic culture. Advertisements with religious messages were found to receive significantly higher purchase intention from consumers compared to those without religious messages for Muslim consumers (Ustaahmetoğlu, 2020; Zotos & Tsichla, 2014). The perceptions of Muslims about brands and advertisements, and eventual decision making is influenced by Islamic values (Mokhlis, 2009).

Studies on advertising response in Muslim populations are suggestive for multinational companies of capitalizing on the religious orientation of public especially the women; for instance the positive effect of Islamic representations in ads on consumers' behavior (Rice & Al-Mossawi, 2002), lesser inclination towards global advertisements (Srivastava, 2010) and a positive relationship between Islamic branding of products and the purchasing decisions of modern Muslim women (Hussin et al., 2015). An advertising framework is sought in a Muslim majority society that has a balance of moral and commercial goals rather than solely driven by materialism (Mokhtar, 2018). The television advertising regulatory framework has been developed in Malaysia, to create a balance between the moral and material dimensions of life representing Malay and Muslim values (Mukhtar, 2018). Kalliny et al. (2011) suggest that violating cultural values deeply rooted in religion may have negative consequences; marketing managers can market their products and services in a more effective way by understanding the role of religion.

In Pakistan, nudity and sexist images are found strongly correlated with religious intentions of the audience and their offensiveness towards ads, warning advertisers to avoid these elements for better business returns (Abbasi et al., 2011). Women in Pakistan are found disapproving culturally offensive ads more than men especially ads related to sexist images and products of private use for both genders (Abbasi et al., 2011). However, the studies specific to the cultural tendencies of Pakistan are too often ignored in the global advertising context.

METHOD

Content analysis, the method this study employed, is the most commonly employed research method in cross cultural advertising research (Okazaki & Mueller, 2007) taking into account the

issues of reliability, dealing with large sample sizes, and generalization of results. It is an "objective, systematic and quantitative" research technique to describe manifest content of communication ((Berelson, 1952, p. 15).

The cultural dimensions model by Geert Hofstede is the most widely adopted typology for providing a measurable form of cultural values in the form of indices (Rakova & Hee, 2013). This study selected two of the six cultural dimensions of Hofstede's model i-e. individualism vs collectivism and indulgence vs restraint on the basis of representing the most manifest aspects of Pakistani society according to the country score (14 and 0 respectively) on these dimensions. Pakistan's cultural typology is of highly collectivistic and restraint society.

In a collectivistic society, social system is determinant of one's identity more than one's own self. Privacy is compromised against the role of organizations and institutions which provide protection, loyalty and security to individuals. Indulgence is the extent to which societies allow free gratification of human impulses related to fun and leisure. In low-indulgence or restraint societies people control gratification of desire, perceive their actions as controlled by societal norms and feel that indulging themselves is somewhat wrong (Hofstede, 2006).

The sample consisted of 131 television commercials recorded from prime time transmission of six channels selected on the basis of high viewership statistics during one year (April 2017 to March 2018); these ads were coded for Richard Pollay's (1982) advertising appeals corresponding with all the six dimensions by Hofstede according to a modification of Albers-Miller and Gelb (1996) study. This was done to make results a true reflection of the whole prime time sample. However, the tabulation of data for descriptive as well as statistical analysis was carried out for 15 appeals which corresponded to the two selected dimensions (Table 1). Keeping in view the regional market dynamics where apparent similarities with Indian market lead to a regionally standardized advertising by global companies, two more appeals were added namely 'Indian Cultural Element' (Indian models, setting, accent, verbal expressions and gestures) and 'showbiz' (glorification and display of showbiz lifestyle and celebrities more prevalent in Indian media largely owing to the robust Indian cinema industry).

Each appeal was coded for its presence in a single ad (unit of analysis) in binaries of yes or no, and one ad was considered for presence of multiple appeals with no duplication of ads (Albers-Miller & Gelb, 1996; Amir, 2000; Rakova & Hee, 2013). Analyses were run for the number of ads having certain appeals. Two post-graduate students of media sciences were engaged as coders and given a detailed briefing of the coding imperatives in line with the study objectives followed by multiple pretesting. Coders coded independently for audio-visual content of the ads and reached consensus after several sessions of discussion (Ir =.95 for appeals matching with the indulgence dimension and Ir =.87 for coding of ads for appeals). Pearson Chi-square test was applied to explore association of appeals with product categories.

Table 1. Description of Advertising Appeals corresponding with Cultural Dimensions by Hofstede

	Individualism
Independence	Self-sufficiency, self-reliance, autonomy, unattached, to do-it-yourself, to do your own thing, nonconformist
Distinctiveness	Rare, unique, unusual, scarce, infrequent, exclusive, tasteful, elegant, subtle
Security	Confident, secure, possessing dignity, self-worth, self-esteem, self-respect, peace of mind
	Collectivism
Popular	Common place, customary, well known, conventional, regular, usual, ordinary, normal, standard, typical, universal, general
Affiliation	To be accepted, liked by peers, colleagues, and community at large, to associate or gather with, to be social, to join, unite or otherwise bond in friendship, companionship, cooperation, reciprocity, to conform to social customs
Family	Nurturance within the family, having a home, being at home, family privacy
Succorance	To receive expressions of love, (all expressions except sexuality), gratitude, pats on the back, to feel deserving
Community	Relating to community, group unity, national identity, society, patriotism, civic and community organizations
	Indulgence
Enjoyment	To have fun, laugh, be happy, celebrate, to enjoy games, parties, feasts and festivities, to participate
Sexuality	Erotic relations: holding hands, kissing, embracing between lovers, dating, intense sensuality, lust, earthiness, indecency, attractiveness of clearly sexual nature
Freedom	Spontaneous, carefree, abundant, indulgent, at liberty, uninhibited, passionate
	Restraint
Morality	Humane, just, fare, honest, ethical, reputable, principled, religious, devoted, spiritual
Modesty	Being modest, naive, demure, innocent, inhibited, bashful, reserved, timid, coy, virtuous, pure, shy, virginal
	Indianized appeals for regional standardization
Indian Cultural Element	Indian models, setting, accent, verbal expressions and gestures
Showbiz	Glorification and display of showbiz lifestyle more prevalent in Indian media

Source: Pollay 1983; Hofstede, 2011

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Cultural congruence of value appeals

The sample consisted of ads by 20 multinational companies listed in the order of high frequency share as Unilever, Procter & Gamble, Colgate Palmolive, Reckitt Benckiser, PepsiCo, Coca-Cola, Nestle, Huawei, Mobilink, Samsung, Telenor, Peak Freans, KFC, Mondelez, Abbot, LU, Gree, Haier, Kenwood, and GSK.

Descriptive statistics showed the relative frequency of each of the 15 appeals. Among most frequently used appeals, the 8 appeals ranking highest on a scale 1 to 6 were 'freedom', 'family', 'sexuality', 'enjoyment', 'independence', 'Indian element', 'showbiz', and 'security' (Table 2). Appeals 'distinctiveness', 'popular', 'affiliation', 'community', 'succorance', 'morality', and 'modesty' had a none to negligibly low percentage in the sample adverts. Out of 8 most frequently used appeals, only one appeal 'family' was culturally consistent while rest of the 7 including the Indianized appeals were culturally inconsistent. Also to note that 33% of ads using 'family' appeal showed an extended-family structure that is a vastly prevailing family setup in Pakistan.

Table 2. Dominant Advertising Appeals Used in Advertisements

Appeal	Frequency	%	Rank
Freedom	20	15	1
Family	18	14	2
Sexuality	17	13	3
Enjoyment	14	11	4
Independence	14	11	4
Indian-Cultural-Element	12	9	5
Showbiz	8	6	6
Security	8	6	6

The usage of appeals shows a sharp contrast with the country score on respective cultural dimensions. Against a very low score of individualism (14), appeals of collectivism and individualism are used almost equally (21%, 20%), whereas against a nil score on indulgence dimension, the use of indulgence appeals has a high figure of 39% against only 4% restraint appeals (Table 3).

Table 3. Percentage of Ads Having Appeals Corresponding with the two Cultural Dimensions

No.	Cultural dimension	Corresponding appeals	%	Total %
1	Individualism	Independence	11	20
		Distinctiveness	3	
	Collectivism	Security	6	21
		Popular	3	
		Affiliation	1	
		Family	14	
		Community	2	
		Succorance	1	
2	Indulgence	Sexuality	13	39
		Freedom	15	
		Enjoyment	11	
	Restraint	Morality	4	4
		Modesty	0	

a) Regionally standardized appeals

Both of the *Indianized* appeals were ranked in the list of most frequently used appeals (Table 2). *Unilever* was leading in use of 'showbiz' appeal, while 'Indian cultural element' was the most frequently found appeal in the ads of *Procter & Gamble* products followed by *Unilever* and *Colgate Palmolive* products.

b) Recipients of culturally inconsistent messages

In order to know which market segments are these appeals targeted for, the level of association of appeals (independent variable) with product categories (dependent variable) was tested. Pearson Chi square test of association was applied to explore significant association of dominant appeals (Table 2) with product categories namely Personal-care (32%), Beverages (19%), Food (19%), Home-care (15%), Communications (9%), and Electric appliances (6%). Results showed a significant association of Beverages with 'freedom' and 'enjoyment', Personal-care with 'Indian cultural element', and Food with 'family'. Association of 'freedom' with clubbed category of Personal-care-&-beverages also found significant. All associations had a moderate to high effect size (Table 4).

Appeal 'showbiz' did not show a significant association with any category due to minimum accepted sell frequency, but 92% of this appeal was found in the only one category i-e. Personal-care. In the same way 82% of 'sexuality' appeal was found as used in two categories of Personal-care and Beverages. The same two categories held the largest (79%) share of 'independence' appeal used in the total sample.

Table 4. Association between Dominant Appeals and Product Categories

Appeal	Product category	Exact	*p*	V
Freedom	Beverages	20.038	.000	.407
	Personal Care & beverages	16.355	.003	.353
Family	Food	16.115	.002	.398
Enjoyment	Beverages	19.455	.000	.404
Indian cultural element	Personal Care	15.715	.002	.409

N = 131, *df* = 5   *p* < .05

Personal care category in the sample was heavily dominated (60 %) by products used by women. It makes women particularly young women the foremost recipients of Indulgence and Indianized appeals. The target audience of Beverages ads with a dominating share of Coca-Cola and PepsiCo (90%) is unequivocally young generation as the advertising campaigns of these companies since the start of new millennium overwhelmingly revolve around youth (Paracha, 2017). Indulgence appeals having a significant association with Beverages ads and prevailing in high percentage (42%) in ads of Communication products make youth a target audience of the most inconsistent value appeals. Appeal 'family' and product category Food had a significant association with moderate effect size (.398) however a target market segment is hard to define on this basis.

Results show that although culturally consistent appeals are also used in television commercials of global companies in Pakistan, the majority values manifested in these appeals are not congruent with Pakistani cultural values, especially the commercials for products used by women and those targeted at young generation.

Discussion

Cultural messages of global business corporations in Pakistan dominantly presenting values of indulgence and individualism indicate that the mirror of advertising is distorted, however looking at it with Pollay's indication that the mirror of advertising is distorted to the seller's interest, these findings need further extrapolation. Literature suggests that the practice of presenting values not congruent with values of a society has two pronged implications. First one is quite obvious and direct; it can adversely affect the sales and marketing, as described by De Mooij (2018) "The success of a business depends in the end on how well its products reach customers whose behavior is affected by values that may vary in all kinds of unexpected ways from those of the business managers" (p. xiv). And, as Watson et al. (2002) put it, if ignored these differences can lead to failure of an advertising campaign; they conclude that differences between cultures do exist, and "a lack of recognition of this fact can unnecessarily expose companies to risks that could have easily been avoided, even in countries viewed as culturally very similar" (p. 13).

The second implication is quite contrary to the first that if the practice persists for a longer time, it gradually conditions society towards acceptance of the values it is exposed to, resulting into a change in the cultural patterns (Zimmerman & Dahlberg, 2008). This is what advertising does as its latent function of socializing individuals; endorse, glamorize and reinforce certain cultural values (Pollay & Gallagher, 1990). Keeping in view the ability of this genre to pick and choose from the world around us and create new reality, advertising practices have cultural implications. Thus "investing" in culturally incongruent values in ads, advertisers are likely to neutralize any negativity for their campaign at consumers' end and recover profitability margins after a while when a certain level of normativity for the newly introduced values in a society is reached, and a modified set of values is either accepted and adopted by general public or at least not resisted to the extent it originally was.

It is the same phenomenon mentioned by (O'Barr, 2011) of carefully and step by step pushing the limits of public's acceptance. Hedonistic characteristics like instant gratification, materialism and covetousness, vulgarity, pornography and nudity, uncontrolled expenditure, impulse buying etc. are favorably portrayed in advertising for countries which generally have a high indulgence score, more materialistic, and individualistic in societal values (Saleem, 2016). Introducing any of these characteristics almost anew in a highly restraint, collectivistic social reality of a Muslim population is for sure not a profit making strategy by these companies, but a pursuit of what Grau and Zotos (2016) have pointed to as development of individual behaviors that create the social reality.

On a similar note, advertisers have a liberty of choosing between the desired (prevalent) and the desirable (culturally opposite) values. In a highly restraint society, logically the hedonic and indulgent values are the ones which can be exploited most conveniently. Saleem (2016) finds Indulgence/restraint among those three dimensions of Hofstede model for which the use of appeals in advertising is also found as opposite to cultural values and he explains it through value-practice inconsistency on the part of consumers. Findings of this study allude to the possibility that this value-practice inconsistency is capitalized by advertisers in Pakistan quite substantially, despite a zero country score on this dimension. Thus seen from the angle of sales and marketing viability, culturally-inconsistent advertising has more likely relied upon the indirect route of conditioning of the audience by global companies investing in the more Westernized set of values. The dominant use of 'family' appeal is not an exception to this scenario; Mueller (1990) had indicated that advertising reflects cultural values only as long as it is profitable to do so. This can be further appropriated in the context of these findings that advertising reflects cultural values only as long as doing so is unavoidable for making a profit.

Global corporations having same marketing strategy in more than one country thus save the cost of transnational advertising (Thomas, 2006). This strategy has a risk of combining opposing values in one ad which may not be culturally fit for all cultures it is intended for (De Mooij, 2018). Indianized values depicted in Pakistani ads are a classic manifestation of the distorted mirror theorizing. Amidst cultural similarities in a number of manifest aspects, the fact that cultural differences were the basis for separating boundaries between the two nations is not to be ignored. These companies fail to realize many opposite latent values and subtleties of differences among the two cultures albeit which are instantly grasped by Pakistani audience, the reason why PEMRA recently put a ban on television ads produced in India carrying Indian actors, characters or talent to honor the public sentiment in Pakistan on the plight of Kashmiri people (Siddiqui, 2019).

In the same way, women being one of the major recipients of culturally incongruent values would mean making the social fabric of society vulnerable. In contemporary age, the ways of women symbolize a society's ideo-cultural distinction on bipolar continuums of liberal–conservative, modern–traditional, religious–secular and so on. In Pakistan, women's role and position in society, even their dress and mannerism is inseparably intertwined with not only the collectivistic nature of Pakistani culture, but a key area of cultural practices that is inspired by Islamic teachings (Bradley & Saigol, 2012).

Policy implications and limitations of study

This study provides a reference point to academic endeavors exploring the cultural impact of global advertising in Pakistan, enables policy makers to regulate cultural messages being imparted to the society, and highlights that value paradoxes present within the region are reflected in the television ads of global corporations operating in the country, of which Indianized advertising is a prominent trend that leads to influence originality of Pakistani culture, giving rise to a sort of hybridity which runs counter to the spirit of nation's genesis. Findings are also instructive for global advertising

strategy analysis for providing a reflection on the implications of cultural globalization in Muslim countries.

While generalizing results few limitations need to be considered. Due to constraints of time and manageability, out of all the media content used by global companies, the genre of advertising alone was studied under two of the cultural dimensions out of six in total. Although very widely used in studying advertising and culture, the Hofstede's and Pollay's frameworks have their own limitations.

Future research directions

This is the first detailed study of global advertising in Pakistan in cultural perspective. From this point onwards, it can generate research in multiple related aspects for instance: A comparison of advertising appeals used in the ads of MNCs with those of local companies is another useful way of looking at the question by juxtaposing both types of advertising preferences. The aspect of regional standardization of multinationals' advertising needs further exploration keeping in view the increasing trend of this strategy on behalf of multinationals. A comparison of cultural depiction can be drawn between ads of Indian media and Pakistani media for more insights on this.

Based on the ground provided by this analysis, a study of consumers' cultural preferences with regards to MNCs' advertising can further elucidate the dynamics of global advertising in Pakistan's cultural scape. The operations of multinational companies in developing and Muslim countries are apprehended for their role in altering consumer behaviors in terms of spending patterns and lifestyle which has cultural implications. This research may galvanize research ideas leading to still-awaited studies investigating the said phenomenon in Pakistan

CONCLUSION

In spite of the fact that global marketing is more successful when consistent with consumers' cultural values, transnational business corporations presenting values in Pakistan contrary to the values of host culture in majority ads is evident. This inconsistency has a prominent proclivity towards indulgent, individualistic, and Indianized values mostly targeted at women and youth. Globalization is a multidimensional process of standardizing cultures, corporate globalism, and development of global politics (Pieterse, 2019). However, failing to take into account the cultural contrarieties between Western and Muslim societies, and Muslim and non-Muslim societies suggests a disregard for indigenous cultural sensitivities on behalf of these companies which may have negative implications for host societies in addition to depriving them of the vibrancy of globalization process. However, the practice may sell the products equally well as a long term marketing strategy of global corporations.

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