



Ghettoising the Elite: Analysing Class Divide and Social Status in DHA YouTube Adverts

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Abstract

In growing consumerist societies, advertising is one of the strongest tools the postmodern age has produced for controlling and manipulating the masses. This study aims at revealing the ideologies embedded in a purposively-selected sample of two YouTube adverts of the Defence Housing Authority in Multan and Bahawalpur. Employing as groundwork Foucault's theory of discourse contributing to social change and actively interpellating its consumer, this study conducts a multimodal critical discourse analysis of the selected ads. The textual and visual analysis showed that the selected adverts are fraught with cultural and social ideologies prevalent in South Punjab and Pakistan. By using various semiotic resources, the adverts purposely perpetuate a traditional patriarchal family structure, a system of class division and status privilege by excluding people from the lower classes, naturalising an elitist narrative, and associating happiness with wealth and riches. By putting forth the idealised and glamorised images of wealth, they instil in the audience an urge to achieve such a life. In doing so, the adverts construct their potential customers and contribute to maintaining the status-quo.

Keywords: class division; social change; South Punjab; critical discourse analysis; multimodality, culture, social media

1. Introduction

"It did what all ads are supposed to do:
create an anxiety relievable by purchase." –

David Foster Wallace, *Infinite Jest*

In today's world, cultural values are interlaced with materialism. Because society's traditions constitute our identity, such narratives positioned around traditional values serve as fodder for propaganda in the advertising industry. Smiling faces, luxurious automobiles, extravagant houses; what else is needed in this short life? Material possessions are depicted as panacea for all the ills of life. The meaning of life lies in owning a house where you can park a big car, your children could go to an expensive and elite school in a uniform, while none of it is affordable for a working-class family. The fierce competition of the modern world and an onslaught of consumerist culture urges people to find means to climb the social ladder. One way to achieve this aim is to relocate to the vicinity of people from the same social class. Posh urban housing societies provide residential space for the elite class away from the squalor and noise of busy cities. In this way, they create a polarisation in urban space based on class and status. Moreover, it manipulates less privileged people into aspiring to a life of affluence and consumerism.

1.1. Advertisement as Constitutive Discourse

Fairclough (1984; 1992) presents discourse as a form of action, rather than being dependent on activities of subjects or external situations. He (1992) cites Foucault's works for developing a constitutive view of discourse. Borrowing Althusser's (1970/2006) term, he claims that discourse 'interpellates' society. The function of ideology is 'constituting concrete individuals as subjects' (Althusser, 1970/2006). In addition to being representative of reality, discourse also 'actively constitut[es] and construct[s]' reality by reproducing 'objects of knowledge, social subjects,' social structures, social identities, and conceptual frameworks. In this way, access to discourse endows the subject with power to construct and alter society for her own interest. It is with discourse as constitutive

and constructive of society that this study is concerned. The same role is played by advertising discourse.

Advertisements have pervaded the modern world and are seen everywhere. Much research has been conducted to understand the effects of advertisements on the consumer psyche. They persuade their audience to become active consumers by indirectly suggesting ways to satisfy their desires and urges. The message they convey mould society in various ways (Danesi, 2018). Fairclough (1992) notes the tendency of advertisements and media discourse towards constructing their audience or consumers. Media acts as mediator between the principal (the person or group whose position is reflected through the text) and the audience/consumer. As in a consumerist society with a plethora of products available, deciding power resides with the consumer rather than the manufacturer of a product. Resultantly, the discourse producers are obliged to create a target audience. Thus, the text producers, in order to grow their market, 'recruit' and 'construct' their consumers by presenting texts and images that are 'maximised [to] fit' the consumers' lifestyle aspirations. The fierce conditions of the contemporary market demand that producers create a separate identity for their product and consumer amidst a profusion of similar products and their consumers. This task is assigned to advertisements. Danesi (2018) has enumerated some strategies that advertisements use. In order to appeal to public sentiment, advertisements place their product in cultural and communal history. An important strategy that advertisements use is to 'create a history' for their product which links the product to people's cultural and communal sense. Endorsement of products by celebrities, propagation of products using 'erotic, sensual and...psychologically powerful mythic themes', targeting the fears and insecurities of their audience by providing escape from them in the product are a few strategies.

Advertisements also contribute towards power structure in society intact. Since advertisements cost capital, their high prices keep the monopoly of discourse control in the hands of the few (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2020). Adorno and Horkheimer (ibid.) have called the consumer a capitalist subject, whose mind and will are controlled by the lopsided power structure. The whole system is a colossal capitalist controlled 'culture industry', intended to manufacture a docile consumer. Repetition of words and phrases rob

words of their original value. People buy empty objects, only for their monetary value. Similarly, Jhally (2000) has commented on the Marxist concept of 'commodity fetishism' as holding true to the modern consumerist culture. Advertisements act as a means of 'refilling the emptied commodity with meaning'. Althusser's notion of interpellation has also been used by Williamson (1979) as direct entrance into the consumer's psyche. The consumer feels to be the addressee of the ad as it 'hails' her directly, and thus allowing herself to be manipulated by the ad because it treats her as a concrete subject having individual identity. Goddard (2002) explains how using different verbal, visual, and cultural resources, advertisements construct society as well as consumer identities. For better appeal, they use shared cultural meanings and symbols, which are then encoded into language as connotations.

Pajnik, and Lesjak-Tušek (2002) highlight loud repetition as an important tool for advertising to arouse consumer interest. Mobitel, for example, looks for people's 'common desire, some widespread unconscious fear or anxiety, thinks of a way to relate the wish or fear to the product, and builds verbal or pictorial symbols through which customers can pass from dream to the belief (illusion) that the phone bought will make the dream come true' (p. 278). They also point out that advertising culture has replaced 'traditional socialistic values' of 'collectively, solidarity, and unity' with individuality, freedom, and possession of goods' that the advertisers promote (ibid.).

1.2. Multimodality in Critical Discourse Analysis

While critical discourse analysis seeks to analyse political and ideological investments in texts (Fairclough, 1992; Van Dijk, 1993), multimodal critical discourse analysis tries to discover the breaking making process through modalities of visuals and sound. The advances in technology brought to the fore visuals and audio as part of discourse, highlighting the inadequacy of linguistic analysis in understanding news and media. To fill this void, analysts like Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) and O'Toole (1994) applied principles of linguistic analysis from Halliday's systemic functional theory to study choices in visual communication. O'Halloran, (2011) has observed that without taking visuals and audio into account, linguistic analysis of texts will be deficient in

understanding the working of discourse. Advertisements use a confluence of various resources, including text, image, and audio. Thus, advertisements hit their audience from multiple sides, creating a stronger and more sweeping impact. Visual advertisements 'simulate' a lifestyle which strikes more effectively than the written text. The strength of an image is its ability to create a world in which potential consumer, producer and product can cohabit (Fairclough, 1992). Machin and Mayr (2012) are of the view that images convey meanings that cannot be conveyed through texts. Authors make conscious choices to background or foreground elements, which can communicate as natural ideological biases of the author or the principal. Multimodal critical discourse analysis seeks to denaturalise such representations and their hidden meanings.

1.3. Contextualising DHA Advertisements

In Pakistan, a drive of urbanisation has been observed in recent decades. Shaikh (2018) has cited an advertising agency authority saying that since rapid urbanisation is taking place in Pakistan, an unprecedented number of people are moving from rural to urban areas. This influx of less sophisticated people towards cities has created a demand for segregated areas for the select population. Real estate agencies, to cater to the demands of the consumers, have shifted their attention and capital to 'vertical urban clusters' offering cloistered living as 'sprawling gated communities'. People from the higher strata prefer living in well-maintained secure areas—offering 'privacy, protection, and prestige' and all the facilities of life without compromising on location—rather than in the city. Resultantly, according to the Pakistan Economy Survey of 2016, the increase in apartment prices at urban housing societies was 120%, compared to the 80% increase in the prices of houses (Shaikh, 2018). Defence Housing Authority (DHA, henceforth) is a well-known urban residential area in Pakistan. Initially established in Karachi, it has expanded its branches in various cities of the country. In their recent venture, they have launched housing projects with luxurious facilities in Multan and Bahawalpur, two main cities of South Punjab.

South Punjab is one of the most impoverished and under-privileged regions in Pakistan. A recent report published by United Nations Development Programme declared this region as 'the most

deprived’ in the Punjab, with only 56.2 per cent people having access to ‘improved sanitation’. 55 per cent of the population is spending less than the median per capita consumption in the rural areas of South Punjab, which is a mark of ‘inequality’ and ‘relative poverty’ in the region. However, as Shaikh (2018) has pointed out, housing companies have moved their focus towards smaller cities, despite their relative poverty and unequal wealth distribution, the elite classes have no dearth of money, owing mostly to a flourishing agrarian economy. On the contrary, the vast majority of people are living in extreme poverty. The charm of constructing a housing society as DHA in these cities lies in allowing the upper class to have the same comfort and luxury as they expect in a metropolitan. Their potential customer belongs to the higher stratum, as targeted by the advertisements.

As has been mentioned in the discussion above, South Punjab is relatively a deprived region in terms of economic equality and justice. Khalid et al. (2020) have commented that the area of housing society advertisements has remained unexplored in the Pakistani domain of multimodal studies. Also, there has been little work on video advertisements in Pakistan. Therefore, this study holds twofold significance. Firstly, it will fill the gap by conducting a multimodal critical discourse analysis of video advertisements. Secondly, it will highlight the role of the media in deepening the chasm between the rich and the poor in an underprivileged region like South Punjab, Pakistan.

2. Methodology

The research is qualitative in nature as it will interpret the images and text of the two advertisements for the embedded ideologies.

Applying Foucauldian idea of discourse as constitutive of society as the underlying theory, the research will use multimodal critical discourse analysis as a toolkit of the selected advertisements by employing Machin (2007) and Machin and Mayr (2012) framework. For the purpose of this study, no single model of MCDA was found adequate. Therefore, the study will incorporate elements from the frameworks given by Machin (2007), Machin and Mayr (2012) and Danesi (2018). Machin, Mayr, and Danesi have written extensively on the implications of multimodality in media and

advertising discourse. The elements selected from the given models will be used to analyse ideological meanings of both text (song and talk) and visuals of the ads. The adapted framework has been briefly described below. The elements taken from Danesi (ibid.) have been underlined, while those from Machin (2007) and Machin and Mayr (2012) are not underlined.

Iconography (meaning making):

- denotation: how the word or image documents reality and participants.
- Connotation: cultural symbols encoded in text (this study will focus on participants, objects, setting, iconographic symbolism, and cultural symbols)
- overlexicalization: meaning the use of near synonyms or repetition for the same element
- suppression/absence: which words or images are excluded

Social actors and participants:

- (im)personalisation
- Representation: exclusion or inclusion of social actors
- Agency and action
- foreground
- Positioning: refers to how a kind of image of the product is created based on the personality and status of its potential buyer. The people in the ad and setting show who the intended target is.

Abstraction

- rhetoric
- Mythologisation: how the advertisement is imbued with a culturally shared mythic meaning or theme or the social actors in the ad are idolised and deified.

Advertising textuality means the ascription of certain signification systems intentionally into the ads (Danesi, 2018). Two elements which suited the purpose of the study have been selected.

- getting the endorsement of famous celebrities
- using special kind of signification like narrative or descriptive to convey the message

2.1. Research Objectives

The objective of this study is to explore the construction of social and cultural meanings by the DHA advertisements, the

strategies used to target a specific audience and to constitute the consumer identity, and the contribution of such advertisements in maintaining, cementing, and fortifying class differences in a society already torn into numerous factions.

The study will be guided by the following research questions drawn from the discussion above:

1. What techniques does DHA advertisements use to interpellate their audiences and propagate their message?
2. How do these advertisements disseminate ideologies related to social structure, class and status?

2.2. Sampling and Data Collection

Purposive sampling was done of the source of data of YouTube advertisements. As the specific focus of the study is the recent DHA projects in South Punjab, the advertisements of DHA Multan¹ (henceforth Ad 1) and DHA Bahawalpur² (henceforth Ad 2) were selected from the official accounts of DHA Multan and DHA Bahawalpur on YouTube. Two types of advertisements were available on both accounts: narrative and descriptive. The narrative type used completely or partially fictional accounts of people buying houses in DHA. The descriptive type, on the other hand, only presented details of the kinds of houses and facilities available in the society. Both accounts had one narrative ad each. For the purpose of the study, the narrative type of ads from both accounts were selected, as they appealed to people's socio-cultural and socio-economic values using elements of character and plot. An additional feature of the ads is the background song and voiceover, which allowed the researcher ample material for analysis.

3. Discussion

An analysis of the visual and linguistic choices of the narration and background song in the two selected advertisements and a discussion on themes emerging from the analysis follows below. The ads use the technique of advertising textuality by drawing on narration with description integrated into the narrative.

¹ URL: <https://youtu.be/93MnwnvULjU> , published on 31 August, 2018

² URL: <https://youtu.be/p1ZeCf017BU> , published on 15 October, 2021

3.1. Creating the rich consumer

Both the advertisements target a well-to-do, affluent consumer, and in doing so, they create them. The establishing shot of Ad 1 is a still of CN Tower in Toronto. The reason for beginning with this particular shot is to set up the viewers' expectations, where they could sense that something bigger and luxurious is to be revealed. The image clearly denotes financial well-being and stability. Right after the image of the tallest structure in Canada, the viewer seems to swoop into the tower from above. The next shot is on face-level. Two men are shown interacting in an accomplished, business-like manner in a corporate-styled office. A character named Ali, concluding a meeting or presentation at work is praised by his boss for excellent work. The boss announces that Ali's next task is to initiate this project in Multan, at which news Ali smiles complaisantly. In the next scene, Ali is shown looking back at his table where a framed photograph of a woman, supposedly his wife, lies. The background song begins with lyrics on realising one's life's dreams. and Ali is shown looking for housing facilities in Multan. Moving to Multan from Canada must be a matter of consternation for him, but fortunately he has found DHA. The next few shots build up the mood for his final decision. The moment of decision is symbolised with Ali putting the ball in the hole. The camera is blurred before but then shifts into focus, indicating that he sees his future in clear focus. The score also stands for a moment of victory, which buying a plot in DHA will bring.

He breaks the news of their relocation to his wife. This character is played by Syra Yousuf, a well-known media celebrity. Upon hearing the news, the wife's expression changes to a combination of irony, mild surprise and unconcealed confusion, which could mean that she doubts Ali's earnestness, puzzled as to how he came to take such a sudden and big decision or is concerned about shifting to such a poor area in Pakistan. She is still undecided after reassurance from her husband but seems to relent, however unwilling. The next scene is the two moving out of their room with baggage (see Figure 1). Ali's face and the wife's back is visible to the viewer, while her reflection is shown in the mirror. This indicates her trepidation and uncertainty about entering a new life. A direct view would mean that she is confident and sure, but this shot reflects her divided self. Ali nods at her reassuringly and bids her to follow.

Figure 1



The following scenes have no spoken lines; only the background song continues. The couple land into the city, again, to negate Syra's insecure and ironical gestures, viewers come to know that the city has an airport as well. This two-second clip sets the standard of its own: a luxurious place to thrive, to build an *aashiyān* (a sanctuary symbolising home and security); a place where only the rich are able to build such an *aashiyān*. They drive towards DHA in a Bantley. The car is a conscious semiotic choice to display luxury. The reason behind foregrounding such a big and expensive car as a prop is that you can park that in your house without any danger or risk of security. However, this is a car seldom seen on the roads of Multan. Syra is convinced at seeing an efficient and ostentatious place. Gradually, the couple is seen to settle in their new home, filling their house with furniture and household items.

Figure 2



The scenes from beginning to end are suffused with a misty light, giving the video a dreamlike quality (see Figure 3). It relates to the overall theme of the ad is fulfilment of dreams in the form of having a family in a sumptuous living apartment. In the scene where the couple is playing with their son, beams of sunlight are entering

through the window, symbolising life, happiness, positivity, and hope. The family scenes are shot from afar. Most of the ad has medium shots of the characters, with a few closeups. The viewer seems to be prying into the family's life, only entering it as a distant viewer, not as a close participant.

Figure 3



Ad 2 starts with two fresh, smiling faces and fine appearance. Samina Pirzada is seen holding a cup of tea for Salman Pirzada. Whereas Salman Pirzada is on the phone with a friend who has established himself abroad. Salman Pirzada is seen persuading him to come back to his own country because now his hometown, Bahawalpur, has created the same standard of a rich and modern state, all thanks to the Defence Housing Authority. The shot follows Salman Pirzada jogging around and clicking pictures of flowers, a hobby of the rich, old patriarch of the modern era. As he reaches home, an Audi, again a car expensive enough for a working and middle class family, is ready to take children to school. The children are ready in a bright uniform and are seen going to a big school, Roots International School. Then the viewers are told and shown the characteristics of the new housing society in the city where there will be villas big enough to accommodate their big rich dreams, askari society where there will be no security issues, sports ground where their children can go and play anytime unlike working class children where most of the talent remains undiscovered because they do not have access to the playgrounds and because their priorities are to survive first by filling their empty stomachs. A voiceover about destiny plays when a car is shown being driven at high speed. The ad ends with a gesture of Salman Bhai with an Iphone, who is now convinced enough to return to the city that has developed enough to accommodate him.

The opening shot of the ad straightaway establishes two facts: class division and patriarchy. The whole ad circulates around this fact depicting it as traditional values of the state and society. With every developing shot, there is a clear manifestation of class division. Both advertisements show the characters engaged in activities mostly associated with the leisurely rich. Sports highlighted in the ads are rich sports: golf and shooting. The plan and ongoing construction of Rumanza Golf Course, the biggest 18-hole golf course in Asia, is included and we can see Ali playing. A society that has been struggling with building a narrative on a common political identity is told that this housing society is to give it a new social identity based on a hoax of shared traditional values.

Salman Pirzada, his wife Samina Pirzada, and Mohsin Gillani, a Bahawalpur based TV and radio actor, appear in cameos. Danesi (2018) explained the strategy of mythologisation, which has famous actors and celebrities endorse their product to persuade the public to buy their product. The desirability of the product increases with the net worth and limelight of the endorser.

3.2. Home sweet home

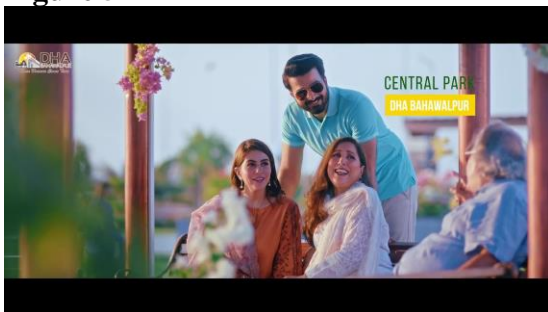
Ad 2 focuses more on depicting an image of a traditional Asian family through the typical theme of home and hearth. The ad presents DHA ad as the custodian of cultural and traditional values. A significant shot that needs our attention in this regard is of evening time, where the family is nestled together to have its 'traditional' evening tea time. Daughter in law of the house is shown serving tea. According to Salman Pirzada, each morning begins with love, (*har subh mohabbaton se shuru hoti hai*). Samina greets Salman Pirzada with a smile on his return from work. The images of the bahu of the house bidding her children goodbye, the son dutifully looking after the family business, Samina Pirzada smiling serenely, women serving tea, and the jovial mood at the tea table, reiterate the myth of a happy home. The underlying perception is that happy families are static, smiling entities without any internal conflict or discord. However, these images help to reinforce a typical patriarchal family setup. Pirzada says: our values have not changed (*hamari iqdaar aj bhee naheen badleen*).

Figure 4



Ad 1 propagates the same ideas, but in a toned down manner. As the story revolves around a young couple instead of a family with parents, the family traditions are not a focus. However, the family is growing based on the same notions. The husband works and earns while the wife sits at home to rear children. Men have been given more agency. The speaker of the background song in Ad 1 is the male, who is striving to make a happy home for his family. It is the husband's job to fulfil the wife's dreams of a happy and wealthy home. He takes an active part in the world outside, while she is confined to a space he bought for her with his wealth. Hence, both the house and the wife become the property of the man to showcase and own.

Figure 5



Another noticeable thing in Ad 1 is the gradual filling of the home with expensive furniture and other household items (Figure 6) and the couple's satisfied smiles to each other. It implies that dreams can be realised only through material possessions. There is overlexicalization of words relating to dream, wish, security, home, and happiness. (*khaab; khushi; ghar*), which reinforces the idea of security and happiness linked to a lavish lifestyle. Through the strategy of mythologisation the adverts sell the idea of a happy

home, rather than the product. They also cash the faces of famous celebrities—Yousuf, Gilani, and the Pirzadas—to win popular appeal for their enterprise. Because the positioning of the advertisement is with an upper class consumer, rather than the general public, celebrities with high net worth are cast and their characters belong to the same class.

Figure 6



3.3. A microcosm of the city

An important theme that emerged from the ads is the idea of an autonomous, individual family unit with no ties to the larger community. Ad 2 presents DHA as a microcosm of a city. Not only all the facilities for which a city's residents may have to travel from one part of the city to another are gathered in the housing societies but the city's cultural and traditional values are also replicated inside the villas. Mohsin Gilani, who already belongs to the same city but has shifted to another because, as Pirzada mentions, he was worried that the city had a bleak future. But since DHA, Bahawalpur has achieved landmark progress. The city has not changed; it has only found 'a new identity' (*aik nayi pehchaan*). It implies that the city was devoid of any real value before the arrival of DHA. That may be the reason that Mohsin Gilani, who is apparently sitting in a foreign country as can be told by the view from his window, is having second thoughts about never returning to Bahawalpur.

As in many adverts, these adverts also focus on a single family. However, Ad 1 shows a family in absolute isolation by excluding other people in public spaces. The families have no connection with the world outside. They are completely solitary in their ideal, perfect lives with no need of anyone or anything else. They are happy and smiling, while every facility of life is provided to them. They have dispensed with the community. Ali says: *Ye*

dekho, DHA Multan. Yahaan sub kuch hai (Look here. It's DHA Multan. It has everything in it.) While there are a few selected aerial shots of the cities in both the adverts—the tomb of Hazrat Bahauddin, Noor Mahal, and the Metro bus of Multan, for instance—the larger character of the city is excluded. Also, both the cities and their squalid places are not shown in any scenes. When the couple land at Multan airport and when they visit the shrine of Hazrat Bahauddin, there are no people in the surroundings. It is suggested that for the convenience of the buyer, the whole city will be evacuated of the intrusive, unwanted elements. The ads are focussed on the idea of the future, entirely severed from the past. Connecting the idea of utter segregation with the representation of culture is a paradox. Culture does not exist in isolation from the populace and the past. It is the old, antiquated, and sometimes withered, and dilapidated buildings that connect the city to a past. A vision for the future must contain a link with the past.

Figure 7



4. Conclusion

Advertisements hold great potential for multimodal critical discourse analysis as they offer the analyst with interdiscursive elements of text, visual, and sound. Urban housing societies have used media for their purpose by turning affluent housing into a value in itself. The study found out that the main target of the adverts are the elite of Pakistan, considering the cars and other backgrounded surrounding items. However, by highlighting these possessions as a means of peace and contentment in life, they are consciously constructing a class of viewers who make these things the purpose of their lives. The adverts revolve around the themes of traditional family values, with happy children playing in the garden and women

serving tea. As Danesi (2018) mentioned that advertisements directly aim at people's fear, dreams, and aspirations, the ads under discussion use the same strategy to target these insecurities of the masses. It follows the principle that 'the quality and usefulness of their goods are subordinate to the artifice of their display,' (Postman, 1985/2005). Some of the fears and desires, which are the subject of these adverts, are fear of homelessness and stability, insecurity about loving family, fear of poverty, and insecurities about class and status. Defence Housing Authority proffers its customers alleviation of all these worries and anxieties. With this blatant display of wealth, the gaping chasm between the rich and the poor in a country like Pakistan is further intensified. This mediocre consumerist culture begets agony that leads to violence because of the pharaonic schism between the rich and the poor.

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