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FABRICATING FREEDOM: POSTFEMINISM, CONSUMERISM, AND FEMALE AGENCY IN PAKISTANI FASHION ADVERTISING

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Abstract
This study, Fabricating Freedom: Postfeminism, Consumerism, and Female Agency in Pakistani Fashion Advertising, analyzes the utilization of feminist discourse within a consumerist context in contemporary Pakistani fashion advertising. The study examines a campaign by Generation, investigating how phrases like "meri marzi" and allusions to the nikahnama create narratives of female autonomy while being rooted in market-driven aesthetics. Utilizing an interdisciplinary framework that amalgamates postfeminist theory, feminist critical discourse analysis, consumer culture theory, and visual semiotics, the study conceptualizes advertising as a multimodal cultural text wherein meaning is generated through the interplay of language, imagery, and culturally inscribed symbols. Postfeminist perspectives shape the analysis of empowerment as individualized and market-oriented, whereas feminist critical discourse analysis enables the exploration of how gendered power relations are entrenched and navigated through textual and linguistic selections. Consumer culture theory provides insight into how feminist ideals are appropriated and transformed into consumable meanings, and semiotic analysis enables the decoding of visual symbols such as bridal aesthetics, adornment, and marriage-related imagery. The findings indicate that the campaign reinterprets traditional markers of femininity to articulate a discourse of empowerment centered on choice and individuality. However, this representation simultaneously reflects postfeminist sensibilities that foreground personal agency while obscuring structural inequalities. By juxtaposing empowerment slogans with references to persistent gender constraints, the campaign produces a tension between lived realities and idealized freedom. The study argues that such representations both enhance the visibility of feminist concerns and commodify them, transforming resistance into a consumable aesthetic. It concludes that Pakistani fashion advertising operates as a critical cultural site where gender, power, and consumerism intersect, raising important questions about the limits of commercialized feminism in achieving meaningful social change.

Keywords: postfeminism; consumer culture; feminist discourse; female agency; fashion advertising; Pakistan; multimodality

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

In today's global culture, feminist discourse has gradually transitioned from activist and academic arenas into mainstream media, especially within the advertising and fashion sectors. Academics refer to this change as part of postfeminism, which is a cultural attitude that focuses on individual choice, empowerment, and self-expression within neoliberal frameworks (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009). Postfeminism does not reject feminism; instead, it reinterprets it in ways that fit with consumer culture, where empowerment is seen as a personal, lifestyle-oriented goal.

Fashion advertising is a big part of this change because it creates meanings about gender, identity, and power (Crane, 2012). Advertising not only reflects but also actively shapes social

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norms through language and pictures. In recent years, both global and local brands have used feminist language more often, showing women as strong and independent people. Nevertheless, scholars contend that these representations frequently commodify feminist ideals, converting them into marketable aesthetics (Banet-Weiser, 2018).

In Pakistan, this phenomenon becomes more complicated because of the clash between tradition, religion, and modernity. Cultural norms still strongly support social practices like marriage, family authority, and gender roles. In this setting, fashion brands have started to use feminist ideas in their ads. Generation's campaign is a good example. It uses slogans like "meri marzi (my choice" and references the nikahnama to put women's freedom front and center. By mixing traditional aesthetics with modern feminist messages, the campaign creates a hybrid discourse that works on both cultural and commercial levels.

Still, this use of feminist language in ads is worrisome. Consumer culture theory posits that cultural significations, including notions of resistance, are frequently appropriated and converted into commodities (McCracken, 1986). Consequently, empowerment may be depicted as attainable through consumption rather than through structural transformation. This study's main focus is the conflict between empowerment and commodification.

1.2 Research Questions and Objectives

Research Questions

How does Pakistani fashion advertising construct female agency through feminist discourse?
How are cultural symbols reinterpreted to convey empowerment?
How does consumer culture shape and commodify feminist narratives?
Do such campaigns challenge or reinforce patriarchal norms?

Research Objectives

To analyze representations of female agency in Pakistani fashion advertising
To examine feminist discourse through visual and textual analysis
To explore the role of consumer culture in shaping empowerment narratives
To critically evaluate the relationship between feminism and commercialization

1.3 Research Gap

A considerable body of research on post feminism and advertising predominantly focuses on Western contexts (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009; Banet-Weiser, 2018). There has been insufficient focus on the functioning of these dynamics within South Asian, particularly Pakistani, contexts. Current Pakistani research frequently emphasizes representation or modesty, yet inadequately examines the commodification of feminist discourse in fashion advertising.

There is also a lack of multimodal analysis that looks at text, images, and symbols all at once. Because advertising uses many different ways to create meaning, this gap makes it harder to fully understand how agency is built. This study fills these gaps by providing a culturally informed and theoretically cohesive examination of feminist discourse within Pakistani fashion media.

1.4 Research Significance

This study enhances feminist literary and cultural studies by incorporating post feminist and consumer culture discussions within a non-Western framework. It shows how Pakistani fashion ads are a place where global feminist ideas meet local cultural traditions.

Methodologically, the research enhances multimodal analysis by incorporating discourse analysis and semiotics to investigate both language and imagery. This method gives us a better idea of how advertising makes meaning.

Socially, the study poses significant inquiries regarding the influence of commercial media on perceptions of gender and empowerment. Advertising might make feminist issues more visible,

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but it also runs the risk of turning them into aesthetic goods. By analyzing this tension, the study promotes a more critical interaction with media representations in modern society.

This study examines the construction and commodification of female agency in Pakistani fashion advertising through a post feminist lens. It shows the conflict between empowerment and consumerism by looking at how language, imagery, and cultural symbols work together. The study contends that although these campaigns enhance feminist visibility, they function within market dynamics that may constrain their transformative capacity.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The intersection of feminism, media, and consumer culture has become a central concern in contemporary literary and cultural studies. With the increasing visibility of feminist discourse in advertising and fashion industries, scholars have turned their attention to how such representations construct meanings of gender, agency, and power. This literature review examines key scholarly debates surrounding post feminism, feminist discourse in media, consumer culture, visual representation, and the South Asian context, with particular emphasis on Pakistan. By synthesizing these strands, the review establishes a theoretical and contextual foundation for analyzing how Pakistani fashion advertising constructs and commodifies female agency.

2.2 Post feminism: Conceptual Foundations

These theoretical perspectives are crucial for understanding how feminist discourse operates within advertising. They suggest that representations of empowerment are not neutral but are shaped by broader socio-economic structures that influence how agency is constructed and perceived.

2.3 Feminism and Media Representation

People generally think of post feminism not as a time after feminism, but as a cultural attitude that reinterprets feminist ideas in modern media and consumer culture (Gill, 2007). Gill (2007) asserts that post-feminism emphasizes individualism, choice, and empowerment, portraying women as autonomous agents accountable for their own success and welfare. This focus on personal choice often hides structural inequalities and takes attention away from the struggles of feminists as a group.

In the same way, McRobbie (2009) says that post feminism works through a process of "double entanglement," where feminist gains are both recognized and undermined at the same time. Women are encouraged to be independent and express themselves, but traditional gender roles are still reinforced by expectations about how they should look, act, and do their jobs at home. This paradox creates a space where people can feel empowered and limited at the same time.

Banet-Weiser (2018) broadens this discourse by presenting the notion of popular feminism, which denotes the widespread dissemination of feminist ideas via media, branding, and celebrity culture. Banet-Weiser calls this "economies of visibility," where empowerment is turned into a product and sold as a desirable identity. This is because popular feminism is often linked to market logics.

The relationship between feminism and the media has been the focus of critical study for a long time. Early feminist media studies concentrated on the underrepresentation and stereotyping of women, emphasizing how media reiterated patriarchal norms (Tuchman, 1978). However, modern research has moved toward looking at representations that are more complicated and contradictory.

Gill (2007) observes that contemporary media frequently depict women as active, desiring subjects instead of passive objects. Many people see this change as a sign of progress, but it also shows how postfeminist discourse has shaped the idea of empowerment as self-

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surveillance and bodily discipline. Women are urged to exercise agency; however, their choices are frequently limited by prevailing standards of beauty and femininity.

Lazar (2006) presents Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) as a methodological framework for investigating the incorporation of gendered power dynamics within language and discourse. FCDA stresses the need to look at not only what is said but also how it is said, taking into account the larger social and cultural context. This method is especially useful for advertising, where words and pictures work together to create meaning.

Goldman, Heath, and Smith (1991) suggest that advertisements serve as "ideological texts" that create and disseminate interpretations regarding gender and identity. They assert that advertising does not merely mirror reality but actively constructs it by endorsing specific values and norms. This perspective corresponds with the perception of advertising as a cultural text, amenable to analysis through literary and theoretical frameworks.

2.4 Consumer Culture and Commodification

The theory about consumer culture gives us a critical way to look at how cultural meanings are made and changed through consumption. McCracken (1986) contends that consumer goods possess symbolic meanings that are conveyed from the cultural realm to the individual via advertising and consumption processes. In this regard, products possess not only functionality but also cultural significance.

Featherstone (2007) expands on this notion by characterizing consumer culture as a framework wherein identity is shaped by lifestyle decisions and consumption behaviors. People are encouraged to show who they are through the things they buy, which leads to a kind of "aestheticization of everyday life." This process is closely related to post-feminism, which often talks about empowerment in terms of how you look and what you buy.

Banet-Weiser (2018) points out that feminism has become a product in consumer culture. She contends that feminist messages are frequently devoid of their political context and are reconstituted as empowering slogans that are readily digestible. This change makes us think about how real and useful these kinds of representations are.

These dynamics are especially strong in fashion advertising. Clothing is a way to show who you are and what you believe, and many campaigns use feminist language to make their products more appealing. But this also means that feminist discourse is affected by the same market forces that affect other types of consumption.

2.5 Visual Culture and Semiotics

Visual culture plays a central role in contemporary advertising, where meaning is constructed through the interplay of images, symbols, and text. Barthes (1977) provides a foundational framework for analyzing visual signs, distinguishing between denotation (literal meaning) and connotation (associated cultural meanings). This approach allows for a deeper understanding of how images communicate complex ideas.

In fashion advertising, visual elements such as clothing, color, and body language function as signifiers that convey meanings about gender and identity. Barnard (2014) argues that fashion is a form of communication that reflects and shapes cultural values. By analyzing these visual elements, researchers can uncover the underlying ideologies embedded in advertising.

Rose (2016) emphasizes the importance of considering the context of production and reception in visual analysis. Images do not exist in isolation but are part of broader cultural and social processes. This perspective is particularly relevant for analyzing campaigns that draw on culturally specific symbols, such as bridal attire or marriage rituals in Pakistan.

The integration of visual and textual analysis is essential for understanding how advertising constructs meaning. Multimodal analysis, which examines multiple forms of communication simultaneously, provides a comprehensive approach for studying such texts (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

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2.6 Feminism, Fashion, and Advertising

The connection between feminism and fashion has always been complicated and often contradictory. Fashion has been criticized for upholding gender norms and objectifying women, but it has also been viewed as a means of self-expression and resistance (Crane, 2012). Modern research shows that fashion can both limit and give power, depending on how it is shown and understood.

Gill (2008) contends that advertising increasingly depicts women as "empowered consumers," implying that purchasing decisions constitute a form of agency. This type of empowerment is often only about individual choice and doesn't deal with bigger structural problems. Lazar (2009) also says that feminist themes are often used in advertising to make people feel like they can relate to the message, even when the main message is still in line with business interests.

Fashion campaigns that use feminist language often use aesthetic techniques that mix old and new styles. This is especially true in non-Western cultures, where cultural symbols have a big impact on how things are understood. Advertising can make stories that connect with local audiences and also fit with global trends by giving new meanings to these symbols.

2.7 South Asian and Pakistani Context

Studies on feminism in South Asia underscore the significance of cultural specificity in comprehending gender dynamics. Scholars like Mohanty (1988) criticize the inclination to generalize Western feminist frameworks, highlighting the necessity of acknowledging local contexts and experiences. In Pakistan, feminism is influenced by a multifaceted interaction of religious, cultural, and socio-political elements.

Research on Pakistani media has investigated topics including representation, modesty, and gender roles (Shaikh, 2010). Nonetheless, there exists a paucity of research regarding the integration of feminist discourse into commercial advertising. Recent research indicates that Pakistani brands are progressively incorporating themes of empowerment, especially within urban and digital contexts.

Using culturally specific symbols like the nikahnama in ads shows an effort to connect feminist ideas to local customs. But this also makes us wonder how much these kinds of representations push back against or support the norms that are already in place. Advertising may make feminist messages easier to understand by putting them in familiar cultural contexts, but it may also limit their ability to change things.

2.8 Synthesis and Research Direction

The literature reviewed above brings up a number of important ideas that are relevant to this study. First, post-feminism offers a framework for comprehending the construction of empowerment as an individual, market-oriented concept. Second, feminist media studies focus on how language and images shape ideas about gender. Third, consumer culture theory explains how advertising turns cultural meanings, like feminist ideals, into products that people buy and use. Fourth, visual and multimodal analysis provides methodologies for investigating the construction of meaning through images and symbols.

Even with these insights, further research is necessary to amalgamate these perspectives within a non-Western framework, especially concerning Pakistani fashion advertising. This study fills this gap by looking at how feminist discourse is made and sold in a specific cultural setting. It does this by using a multimodal approach that includes textual, visual, and symbolic analysis.

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter delineates the research design and methodological framework employed in the study, Fabricating Freedom: Postfeminism, Consumerism, and Female Agency in Pakistani Fashion Advertising. The study seeks to analyze the construction and commercialization of feminist discourse in Pakistani fashion advertising, particularly focusing on a campaign by

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Generation. Due to the nature of the research questions, which aim to investigate meanings, representations, and ideological constructs, a qualitative, interpretive methodology is utilized. This method lets us look closely at both the words and the pictures in ads, treating them as a type of cultural text that uses more than one mode.

3.2 Research Design

The study utilizes a qualitative research design, which is especially effective for examining intricate social and cultural phenomena (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research prioritizes interpretation, context, and meaning-making, in contrast to quantitative methods that concentrate on measurement and generalization. This is crucial for the analysis of advertising, wherein meanings are frequently implicit and formulated through symbolic and discursive practices.

The study is grounded in an interpretivist framework, asserting that reality is socially constructed and that meanings are shaped by cultural and contextual factors. Within this framework, the researcher actively participates in data interpretation, acknowledging that analysis is influenced by theoretical frameworks and contextual awareness.

The study utilizes a case study methodology, concentrating on a singular campaign as a representative illustration of overarching trends in Pakistani fashion advertising. The case study method facilitates a comprehensive and contextualized analysis, permitting the researcher to investigate the subtleties of representation and discourse.

3.3 Research Approach: Multimodal Analysis

Since the chosen campaign includes both text and images, the study uses a multimodal analytical method. Multimodality acknowledges that meaning is generated through various modes of communication, such as language, imagery, color, and layout (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). In this research, multimodal analysis entails scrutinizing:

Textual elements include slogans, statements, and references to statistics.

Things you can see: clothes, body language, colors, and cultural symbols

The relationship between text and image: how these two things work together to make sense

This method helps us fully understand how feminist ideas are shared and understood in the campaign.

3.4 Theoretical and Analytical Framework

The analysis is guided by an interdisciplinary framework that integrates the following approaches:

3.4.1 Postfeminist Theory

Postfeminism provides the primary lens for understanding how empowerment is constructed as an individual and consumer-oriented concept (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009). It informs the analysis of how agency is framed in terms of personal choice and self-expression.

3.4.2 Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA)

FCDA, as proposed by Lazar (2006), is used to examine how gendered power relations are embedded in language and discourse. This approach focuses on:

The use of language to construct agency

The representation of power and inequality

The ideological implications of discourse

3.4.3 Consumer Culture Theory (CCT)

Consumer culture theory (McCracken, 1986) provides a framework for analyzing how cultural meanings are commodified and circulated through advertising. It helps in understanding how feminist discourse is transformed into a marketable narrative.

3.4.4 Semiotic Analysis

Semiotics, based on Barthes (1977), is employed to decode the symbolic meanings of visual elements. This includes analyzing:

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Cultural symbols (e.g., bridal attire, nikahnama)
Color and design
Body language and gestures

3.5 Data Collection

The main data for this study is a fashion campaign by Generation. The campaign has a number of pictures and words that deal with marriage, independence, and women's power.

3.5.1 Sampling Strategy

A purposive sampling method was used to select relevant material from the campaign. This method involves selecting data that is most relevant to the research objectives (Patton, 2002).
The following criteria were used:
Presence of feminist language (e.g., “meri marzi”)
Inclusion of cultural symbols (e.g., nikahnama, bridal imagery)
Representation of social issues (e.g., marriage rights, gender constraints)
Based on these criteria, key sections (pages 11–19) were selected for detailed analysis.

3.6 Data Analysis Procedure

The data analysis was conducted in three stages:

3.6.1 Open Coding

In the initial stage, the data was examined to identify key phrases, symbols, and visual elements. Codes were assigned to recurring features such as:
Agency (choice, autonomy)
Tradition (marriage symbols)
Constraint (social limitations)
Empowerment (assertive language)

3.6.2 Axial Coding

The codes were then grouped into broader categories to identify relationships between themes. For example:
Agency and choice
Cultural symbolism
Social constraints
Commercial framing

3.6.3 Selective Coding

Finally, core themes were identified that represent the central patterns in the data:
Construction of agency
Reinterpretation of tradition
Tension between reality and representation
Commodification of feminism

3.7 Analytical Strategy

The analysis combines multiple approaches:
Discourse analysis: examining how language constructs meaning
Visual analysis: interpreting images and symbols
Contextual analysis: situating the campaign within Pakistani socio-cultural context
This integrated strategy ensures a comprehensive understanding of how meanings are produced and communicated.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

As this study uses publicly available advertising material, it does not involve human participants and therefore does not require formal ethical approval. However, ethical considerations were maintained by:
Accurately representing the data
Avoiding misinterpretation or bias

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Acknowledging the source of the campaign

3.9 Limitations of the Study

While the study provides valuable insights, it has certain limitations:

Single case study: The focus on one campaign limits generalizability

Interpretive nature: Findings are subject to researcher interpretation

Lack of audience perspective: The research does not encompass audience reception.

In spite of these constraints, the study provides a comprehensive and theoretically informed analysis that enhances the comprehension of feminist discourse in Pakistani advertising.

This chapter has delineated the methodological framework of the study, emphasizing the application of qualitative, multimodal analysis within an interpretivist paradigm. The study employs a comprehensive methodology that combines discourse analysis, semiotics, and consumer culture theory to investigate the construction and commodification of feminist discourse in fashion advertising. The following chapter delineates the findings of this analysis, concentrating on the principal themes and patterns discerned in the data.

4. Analysis

4.1 Aesthetic Empowerment, Structural Silence: The Politics of Feminine Aspiration



The image presents a young woman in traditional attire adorned with flowers, with a beam of light cutting across her face, creating a striking contrast between illumination and shadow, which, when analyzed through semiotics (Barthes, 1977), signifies a duality between aspiration (light) and constraint (shadow), while the floral elements connote culturally idealized femininity and softness; the Urdu text "(Chand taron ko choony ki aasha)" ("the desire to touch the moon and stars") further constructs ambition in poetic, affective terms rather than assertive language, which, from a Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis perspective (Lazar, 2006), reveals how female desire is discursively framed as acceptable longing rather than direct agency, thereby containing ambition within culturally permissible boundaries; this aligns with postfeminist theory (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009), where the woman is positioned as an autonomous, aspirational subject, yet her empowerment remains individualized and internalized, lacking engagement with structural constraints, as indicated by her introspective

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gaze and passive composure; multimodally (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), the close framing, soft color palette, and non-confrontational gaze construct a subject defined by interiority rather than action, reinforcing a narrative of emotional rather than political empowerment; simultaneously, from a consumer culture perspective (McCracken, 1986; Banet-Weiser, 2018), the aesthetic styling—clothing, flowers, and visual composition—transforms aspiration into a consumable identity, where empowerment is not only represented but also marketed through fashion; thus, the image ultimately produces a postfeminist subject who is encouraged to dream and aspire, yet remains visually and ideologically contained within traditional and market-friendly frameworks, illustrating the broader tension between empowerment and commodification central to the campaign.

4.2 Threads of Power: Tradition, Femininity, and the Illusion of Agency

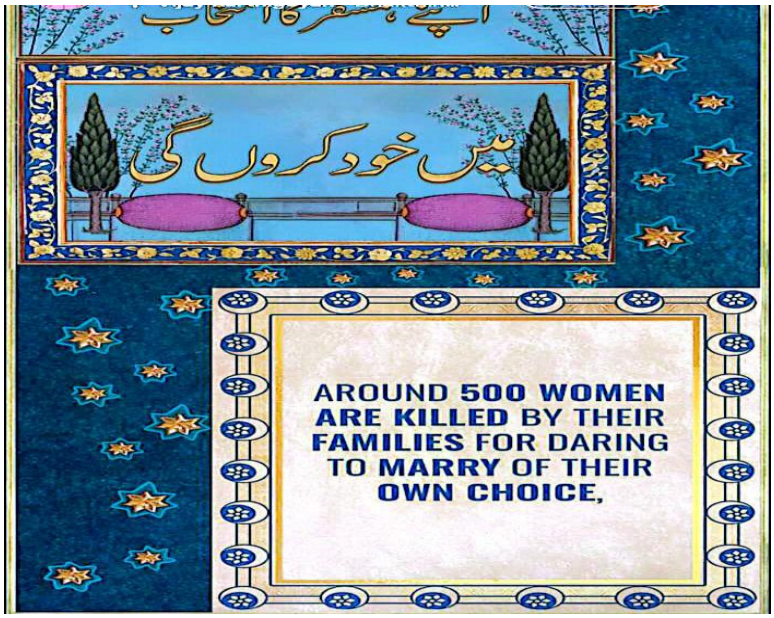


The image depicts a woman's hand adorned with traditional bangles and rings, delicately holding a richly embroidered red dupatta, which, when analyzed through semiotics (Barthes, 1977), signifies layered meanings where the red fabric denotes marriage, tradition, and femininity, while the intricate gold embroidery connotes cultural richness and ritualistic value; the hand itself, positioned in a controlled yet graceful gesture, becomes a key signifier of contained agency, suggesting that the woman interacts with tradition but does not fully transcend it; from a postfeminist perspective (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009), this representation aligns with the construction of the empowered subject who navigates cultural norms through aesthetic self-expression rather than overt resistance, as agency is implied through possession and handling of the fabric rather than through action or disruption; Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (Lazar, 2006) reveals the absence of explicit textual assertion, meaning that power is communicated visually rather than linguistically, thereby softening the idea of autonomy into a culturally acceptable form of femininity; multimodally (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), the close framing on the hand removes the face and identity, reducing the subject to a symbolic body part, which reflects how femininity is often fragmented and aestheticized in visual culture; from a consumer culture perspective (McCracken, 1986; Banet-Weiser, 2018), the dupatta functions as a carrier of cultural and ideological meaning, transforming tradition into a marketable aesthetic object, where empowerment is subtly linked to ownership and display of culturally rich clothing; thus, the image constructs a postfeminist narrative in which tradition

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is not rejected but curated and stylized, presenting empowerment as a controlled engagement with cultural norms that is both visually appealing and commercially consumable, ultimately reinforcing the tension between agency and commodification central to the campaign.

4.3 Decorative Dissonance: Visual Culture, Gendered Violence, and Postfeminist Containment

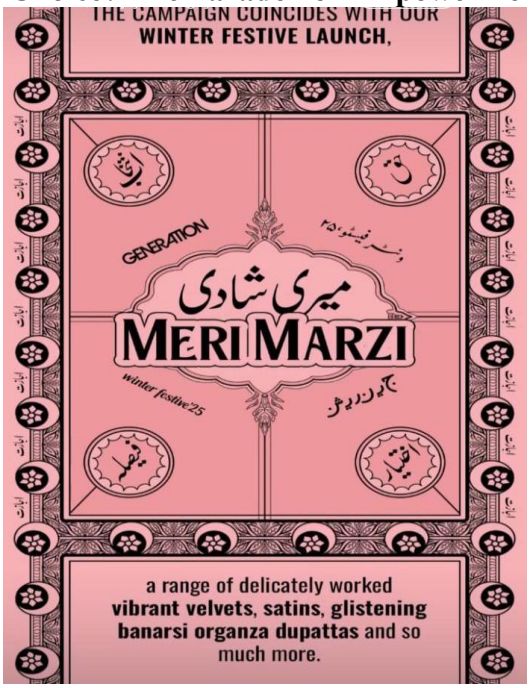


The image juxtaposes ornate, traditionally inspired visual motifs with a stark statistical statement—"around 500 women are killed by their families for daring to marry of their own choice"—and this contrast can be read through semiotics (Barthes, 1977) as a collision between aestheticized cultural heritage (floral borders, symmetrical design, miniature-style framing) and violent social reality, where the decorative frame connotes beauty, tradition, and continuity while the text disrupts this harmony by introducing the signified of honor-based violence; from a Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis perspective (Lazar, 2006), the use of declarative, factual English language constructs authority and urgency, positioning the statement as an objective truth rather than an emotional claim, thereby foregrounding structural gendered violence, yet its placement within a visually pleasing frame softens its impact and integrates it into the campaign's aesthetic logic; through a postfeminist lens (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009), this tension reflects the paradox of contemporary feminist representation, where serious issues are acknowledged but reframed within a discourse that ultimately returns to individualized notions of choice rather than systemic critique, as the emphasis remains on the act of "daring to marry of their own choice" rather than dismantling patriarchal structures; multimodality (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), the composition separates the Urdu cultural header from the English statistical body, creating a layered communicative strategy that merges cultural familiarity with globalized authority, enhancing both emotional resonance and credibility; from a consumer culture perspective (McCracken, 1986; Banet-Weiser, 2018), the embedding of such a grave social issue within a fashion campaign demonstrates how feminist discourse and even narratives of violence are incorporated into branding, transforming social critique into a form of affective engagement that supports market visibility, rather than direct activism; thus, the image produces a powerful yet ambivalent meaning, where the reality of gender-based violence is made visible but simultaneously aestheticized and contained within a consumable visual

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framework, reinforcing the central tension between awareness and commodification in postfeminist advertising.

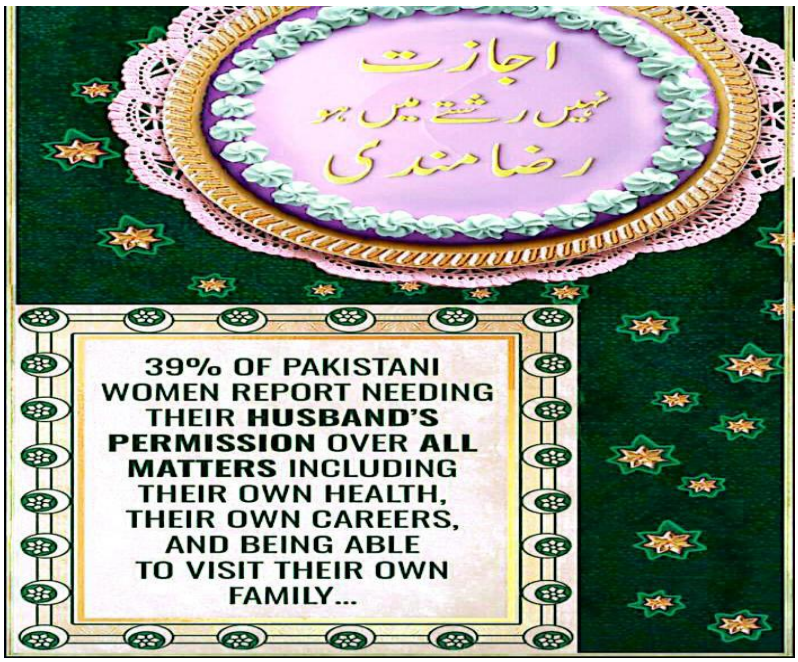
4.4 My Marriage, My Choice? The Paradox of Empowerment in Tradition



The image presents a stylized composition resembling a traditional nikahnama or ceremonial document, with the central phrase “Meri Shaadi, Meri Marzi” prominently positioned, and when analyzed through semiotics (Barthes, 1977), the ornate borders, symmetrical layout, and pastel pink palette function as signifiers of cultural authenticity, femininity, and ritual, while the central text signifies autonomy and personal choice, producing a layered meaning in which tradition and agency are visually fused rather than opposed; from a Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis perspective (Lazar, 2006), the shift from Urdu (“meri shaadi”) to bold English typography (“MERI MARZI”) creates a discursive hierarchy where the assertion of choice is amplified and foregrounded, transforming a culturally embedded institution (marriage) into a site of individual claim-making, yet this assertion remains framed within the language of marriage rather than broader liberation, indicating that agency is still context-bound; through a postfeminist lens (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009), the image exemplifies the construction of empowerment as individualized choice within existing structures, where the woman is positioned as having control over her decisions, but only within socially sanctioned domains such as marriage, reflecting the “double entanglement” of empowerment and constraint; multimodally (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), the design mimics official documentation, lending authority and legitimacy to the message, while the decorative aesthetic softens its political edge, making it culturally acceptable and visually appealing; from a consumer culture perspective (McCracken, 1986; Banet-Weiser, 2018), the integration of product descriptions (velvets, satins, organza dupattas) directly beneath the empowerment slogan reveals how feminist discourse is embedded within commercial promotion, transforming autonomy into a branded experience that can be consumed through fashion; thus, the image encapsulates the central contradiction of the campaign, where feminist agency is asserted yet simultaneously contained and commodified, illustrating how empowerment is reconfigured into an aesthetically pleasing, market-friendly narrative rather than a structurally transformative one.

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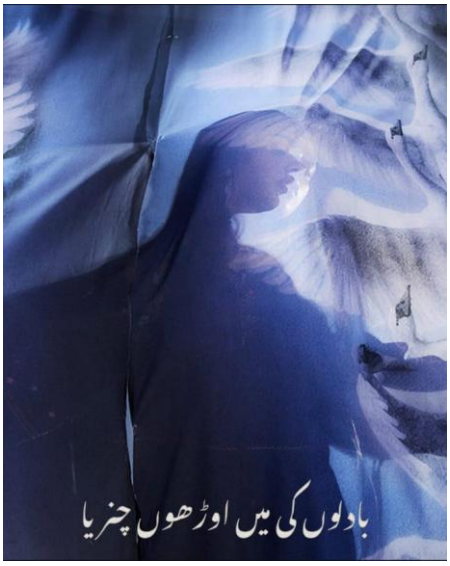
4.5 Aestheticizing Inequality: Postfeminist Representations of Gendered Restriction



The image juxtaposes a decorative, culturally stylized frame with a stark statistical statement about women needing their husband's permission, and when analyzed through semiotics (Barthes, 1977), the ornate circular motif, pastel floral borders, and star-patterned background function as signifiers of tradition, celebration, and femininity, while the central English text introduces a contrasting signified of restriction and control, creating a visual contradiction between aesthetic beauty and lived inequality; from a Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis perspective (Lazar, 2006), the use of quantified data ("39% of Pakistani women") constructs authority and objectivity, foregrounding systemic gendered power relations, yet the absence of direct resistance language means that the critique is presented descriptively rather than confrontationally, thereby containing its disruptive potential; through a postfeminist lens (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009), this image exemplifies the tension between acknowledging structural constraints and promoting individualized empowerment, as the statistic highlights limited autonomy while the broader campaign context shifts focus toward personal choice narratives, reinforcing the idea that empowerment is something to be navigated individually rather than collectively transformed; multimodally (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), the separation of Urdu decorative text above and English statistical content below creates a layered communicative strategy that merges cultural familiarity with informational authority, enhancing both emotional and rational engagement; from a consumer culture perspective (McCracken, 1986; Banet-Weiser, 2018), the embedding of such a serious social issue within a visually appealing, brand-driven design demonstrates how feminist critique is incorporated into commercial aesthetics, turning structural inequality into an element of affective branding, where awareness contributes to market appeal; thus, the image encapsulates a key contradiction of the campaign, presenting gender-based restriction as a visible problem while simultaneously aestheticizing and commodifying it, reinforcing a postfeminist narrative in which systemic issues are acknowledged but ultimately reframed within a consumable and non-disruptive visual discourse.

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4.6 Wings Without Flight: The Illusion of Freedom in Feminine Representation



The image presents a silhouetted female figure enveloped in flowing blue tones, surrounded by birds in motion, accompanied by the Urdu text "Badlon ki main odhon chunriya(n)" (suggesting a search for freedom or transcendence), and when analyzed through semiotics (Barthes, 1977), the birds function as universal signifiers of freedom, escape, and aspiration, while the woman's shadowed form signifies invisibility, containment, or suppressed identity, creating a symbolic tension between desired liberation (birds, sky, movement) and embodied restriction (silhouette, veiling, stillness); from a postfeminist perspective (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009), the image constructs a subject who is internally aspirational yet externally constrained, aligning with the idea of empowerment as an individual, affective state rather than a structural condition, as the woman does not act upon the birds but merely coexists with them visually; through Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (Lazar, 2006), the poetic Urdu line reframes agency as longing or searching rather than asserting, which softens resistance into culturally acceptable emotional expression, thereby containing feminist potential within aestheticized desire; multimodality (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), the composition emphasizes fluidity and movement in the environment (birds, light, fabric-like textures) while the human subject remains static, reinforcing a contrast between imagined mobility and lived immobility; from a consumer culture perspective (McCracken, 1986; Banet-Weiser, 2018), the stylized, dreamlike aesthetic transforms the idea of freedom into a visual experience tied to fashion imagery, where aspiration is not enacted but visually consumed; thus, the image encapsulates a postfeminist narrative in which freedom is imagined, aestheticized, and internalized rather than materially achieved, reinforcing the broader campaign logic where empowerment is rendered as a beautiful, emotive, and market-compatible longing rather than a disruptive social force.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the manner in which Pakistani fashion advertising formulates and disseminates feminist discourse within a consumerist context, utilizing Generation's campaign as a case study. Utilizing postfeminist theory, Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, consumer culture theory, and semiotic analysis on a collection of visual-textual images, the study has illustrated that modern fashion advertising in Pakistan functions as a multifaceted cultural arena where empowerment is simultaneously expressed and limited. Instead of telling a simple story of freedom, the campaign creates a complex picture of women's power that is aspirational, aestheticized, and deeply rooted in cultural and commercial logics.

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A clear pattern emerges across the images that were looked at: the language of choice, desire, and aspiration builds female agency, most clearly in slogans like "meri marzi." However, this agency is often put in the context of socially acceptable institutions like marriage and femininity. The employment of conventional symbols—wedding garments, the nikahnama, adornments, and ornamental designs—does not repudiate patriarchy but rather reconfigures it, converting mechanisms of control into avenues of stylized empowerment. This exemplifies a postfeminist perspective (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009) wherein empowerment is personalized and negotiated within established frameworks rather than aimed at structural change.

In order to create a visible acknowledgement of structural problems, the campaign simultaneously offers data allusions to socioeconomic inequity, limitations on autonomy, and gender-based violence. But this recognition is contrasted with personal narratives of choice, creating a conflict between idealized empowerment and lived realities. This conflict is consistent with Banet-Weiser's (2018) idea of popular feminism, which aims for visibility without necessarily questioning structural power structures. Because of this, the campaign works in a discursive area where aesthetics and awareness coexist yet there is no change. From a multimodal standpoint, the combination of accurate English facts, poetic Urdu language, and carefully chosen visual images increases credibility and emotional resonance. However, the aestheticization of feminist discourse is also facilitated by this very integration. The contrast between visual containment—silhouettes, broken corpses, constrained gestures—and symbols of freedom—birds, light, and movement—highlights the conflict between ambition and limitation. Thus, agency is constructed as feeling rather than action and as desire rather than opposition.

Importantly, the study reveals that the campaign's feminist message is intricately linked to consumer culture. Empowerment is transformed into a consumable identity through the use of clothing and visual aesthetics as vehicles of ideological meaning. According to McCracken (1986), fashion items carry cultural connotations, enabling customers to "wear" empowerment as a way to express themselves. However, by redefining feminism as a lifestyle option that can be purchased, this commodification also restricts its political potential by marginalizing people who are not part of the market and turning structural criticism into symbolic representation. In the end, this study contends that Pakistani fashion advertising intentionally reconfigures feminism into a narrative that is marketable, where empowerment is aesthetically pleasing, personalized, and profitable. The campaign's strength is its capacity to make feminist issues visible and culturally relevant, especially in an environment where conversations about women's autonomy are frequently restricted. Its dependence on postfeminist reasoning, which values individual preference above group change and aesthetic appeal over political upheaval, is its drawback, too.

By bringing postfeminism and consumer culture into a non-Western setting and illustrating how global feminist discourses are localized and negotiated within Pakistani media, this work advances feminist literature and cultural studies. It also emphasizes how crucial it is to examine advertising as a multimodal cultural text, where language, imagery, and symbolism interact to create meaning.

Future studies could broaden this analysis by comparing various companies to find more general trends in South Asian fashion media or by include audience reception studies to look at how women perceive and interact with such advertisements. Furthermore, intersectional perspectives that take access, class, and geography into account may shed more light on the shortcomings of consumer-based empowerment. To sum up the campaign, it is a prime example of the dichotomy of modern feminist representation; it both allows for the expression of female agency and confines it within aesthetic and commercial bounds. In this situation,

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empowerment is present, but it is meticulously crafted, mediated, and ultimately manufactured inside the framework of consumer society.

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