



Pakistani Food TVCs: Hybridization of Cultural Symbols for Influencing Purchase Behaviors

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ABSTRACT

Food trends and eating behaviors are often neglected to be considered an essential product of reflecting socio-economic assets of a country. Food traditions are inheritance of demographics, regional, historical, agricultural and climate that exhibit social and cultural norms of civilizations. South Asia is acknowledged in food traditions over the globe; as the subcontinent is famous for exporting herbs and spices which are used in international cuisines. The British Colonial Era significantly influenced Pakistani cuisine, introducing foods like English tea, breakfast items, bakery products, and processed foods etc. The elements of cultural influence in the content of advertisement for outdoor, print and television platforms include color and language to fulfil the psychological requirement of local buyers. In the context of Pakistan, the standard advertisement uses English and Urdu slogans to achieve marketing goals.



Introduction

Increased consumption of electronic and digital media among youth has enhanced the process of amalgamation of several cultures with different ratios tilting to and from one to another culture. It provides more space for marketers to hybridize cultures and include those into commercial media messages intelligently. As a result of that, products have become international brands over few years.

The architecture of the brand personality is developed similar to that of the personality of humans. (Aaker, 1997). Tariq posits that brand images tend to persist getting owner entities to a position to watch consumer interaction minutely, and in few instances, this interaction could influence the dynamics of the marketplace for a brand by altering the social self-concepts. (Tariq, 2025). Development of marketing and advertising strategies for television commercials (TVCs) for the category of food in Pakistan requires to be analyzed with the lens of humanization of brands.

Food and eating habits of people reflect cultural and social identities other than as necessity of human survival (Mennell, 1996). Food trends and eating behaviors are often neglected to be considered essential products of reflecting socio-economic assets of a country. Food traditions are inheritance of demographics, regional, historical, agricultural and climate that exhibit social and cultural norms of civilizations. Cooking is often seen as a cultural process, separate from the natural consumption of raw food, and its status is often associated with cultural distancing. (Levy, 1994) (Levy, S.J, 1981). South Asia is acknowledged in food traditions over the globe as subcontinent is famous of exporting herbs and spices which are used in international cuisines. Lahore and Karachi, the largest cities of Pakistan are known for

being diverse in food culture. (Shah, 2005)

Scholars have studied that choices of food are influenced by socio-economic status of people, cultural and demographic concern and the psychology of individuals. People of different levels of status from lower to upper classes have different choices and access to food. (Drewnowski, 2009). Relating food choice with emotional states are psychological concerns of an individual to identify the eating pattern influenced by society and environment. (Fairburn, 2008). Fast food culture is easy to grab in the busy schedule of life that increases the consumption of unhealthy and junk food but transformed eating culture into modern and globalized trend over the globe. (Sobal, 1989).

Food is used as a purposeful medium to invoke sense of taste in people to develop relationships with specific cultures and societies. Food can be considered as one of the factors in studying history and culture. (Frank, 1993).

Rirkrit Tiravanija, a Thai artist presented his art in food presentation to relate with hospitality, and reflecting identities. Gita Meh and Larissa Sansour, Asian artists made food as their subject to present culture of their homeland during exile. This food art build connection between foreigners and locals to establish good international relations among nations. (Browner, 2003).

Modernization and urbanization have slightly modified African societies, such as the Nguni, regarding the custom of a wedding cake, sometimes leading to postponements in the feasting. (Wilson, 1972).

Studies revealed that food advertising has used language, images and semiotics to deliver the information about food through media and social media platforms which aimed to shape the national identity to the global world for cultural promotion and business. (Goddard, 1998). Advertising injects influence on eating trends in a society which are followed by peers and educational institutes, then children adopt their food attitudes through parents' regulation or availability of advertised food and they self-select the food. (Davis, 1939).

Advertising is most effective tool of marketing for promotions of various products that can be disseminated through media. Advertising broadcasted on televisions are called as TVC and further used on print media as PVCs to gratify the need of information of a customer. (Malthouse, 2018). Studies have explored role of advertising for brand satisfaction to build customers repurchase desire through emotional appeal. TVCs contain moving images that attract public to decide their purchase items with pleasure. (Han, 2019).

Multinational companies face pressures to increase demand of sale as it is directly concerned with the economic growth of the company, therefore these companies focus on their marketing and advertising strategies to expand their business to meet global competition challenges. The repetitive broadcasting of ads and visual presentation on billboards or newspapers increase the awareness of features of a product, and society is then influenced to adopt the product in their lifestyle. The companies put focus on providing wide range of variety to expand the business. (Ghauri, 2010).

The effective communication strategies for advertisement include sales offers and promotional prices considering the economic conditions of the consumers within a society. (Koku, 2005).

McAuley found that application of good marketing skills with creative potential for producing advertisements at global market can make a brand popular across the borders. These ads can vary from cultural and religious differences but the objectives to meet the domestic need of consumers can be the same. Thus, international brands produce iconic ads by using different language with same logo in different communities to provide marketing services in many countries with objectives of business development. Moreover, pricing, labeling, package designing, delivery and distribution services, jingles, music, slogan and colors are important elements of marketing activities. (McAuley, 2001) (McAuley, 2001).

Studies revealed that more than 60,000 multinational companies with over 800,000 subsidiaries are developing digital ads to promote their business in the world business market by improving visual communication through ads to achieve business targets by understanding the demand of society with its cultural and religious preferences. (Luo, 2002).

Food studies, a focus of scholarship on food consumption, exhibit considerable heterogeneity in discipline, approach, and topic, leading to a lack of unified theory and less theoretical ambition compared to more developed sociology of consumption. (Warde, 2007). The "Culturalist" perspective on consumption links individual cognition to cultural factors overlooking material aspects. Behavior is a systematic process involving bodily and mental activities, objects, knowledge, emotions, and motivation, interconnected through bodily, mental, and emotional states. (Reckwitz, 2002).

Language and images in the advertisements vary according to culture and society as Indian TV ads use mix languages to link with multilingual public. This offers the chance of promoting a product in a

multicultural setting to emphasize “unity in diversity”. (Gupta, 2017). To effectively function in a second-culture setting, individuals must acquire specific skills and knowledge about the target society's historical, philosophical, and socio-political foundations, and learn and practice associated behaviors. (Bochner, 2003).

Marketing and advertising strategies are improved with the utilization of technology and digital tools through internet. The global lens toward the products which is called as Global Consumer Culture Positioning (GCCP) has changed the decision behaviors of consumers by adopting products from East to West. Studies discussed the cultural values depicted in the advertisements watched on Television in China and the United States since 1998. Significant variations in the television ads of globalized products in unified ways are observed from 1998 to 2014 in China and US toward Global Consumer Culture Positioning. Moreover, a notable shift appeared in the presentation of same standards in different cultures. (Allen, 2016).

Globalization and hybridization of languages in advertisement is essential for business promotion and cultural representation in the diverse societies. (Albrow, 1990). The communication strategies of advertisements, especially in television, observe the linguistic map of the target audience to understand the social expressions of population. This disseminates the message of a product more effectively and increase the purchase ratio in society. (Bakhtin, 2010).

Literature Review

Bandura's 1960s study highlighted that children's behavior could be influenced through observation alone, without direct reinforcement. Caregivers introduce culturally suitable foods during weaning. Infants' natural neophobia often delays acceptance. Number of studies in late 19s revealed that visual literacy and visual addiction is increased with the frequent exposure of a content watched by children to observe negative outcomes in their behaviors. (Pliner, 1982) A researcher named Birch resulted in an experiment on selection of visual content among children that the repeated exposure of a specific content over a choice food plays significant role in developing their eating habit for choosing that food which they watched on video. Thus the relationship and link of less liked food with highly demanded food choice has rewards of watching food advertisements for example to earn TV time they have to choose a food shown in video, however the likeness toward that food is very low. It shows that the contexts of visual advertisement about the food have reshaped the emotional and behavioral approach of audiences and consumers. (Birch, 1980)

Another research in 1975 found that toddlers aged between 10 to 20 months tend to eat unfamiliar food item because their adults fetch the food items from grocery stores at home, these toddlers have temptation of eating that food due to choice of adults. (Harper, 1975) This aspect is associated directly with the preferences of culture and norms as well because every demographic area has its own preferences of food which is choice at the early age of children in breakfast, snack, lunch and dinner time every day. (Birch, 1990).

Globalization, media penetration, and tourism have significantly influenced consumers in developing countries, influencing their expectations regarding lifestyles. (Touzani, 2015). Ethnocentrism refers to the belief that purchasing foreign products is immoral due to its potential harm to the domestic economy, job losses, and perceived lack of patriotism. (Park, 2017). Consumers tend to purchase domestic products to save their country's economy. (Sharma, 2011). Social Networking (SNI) is defined as the social influence to conform to the expectations of another person or group. (Burnkrant, 1975). These groups in society recommend the products to others after using it as positive feedback and influence of peer group increase the demand of that product in society. World culture theory views the entire world as a single community or at least has the potential to become diverse. (Robertson, 1992).

Religious influence on marketing and advertisement is observed through research that reveal customer's affiliation of various religions can be a criterion to their purchase decisions which leaves great impact on purchasing behaviors. Thus, religion is a salient variable. (Hirschman, 1983). Scholars examined the behaviors of consumers of three different religious groups (Catholics, Hindus and Muslims) and observed that Catholic were more orthodox than Hindu and Muslim consumers. Muslim consumers were innovative than all. (Essoo, 2004). Muslim community perceive good moral values for the well-being of spiritual and physical health, and this is reflected in the consumption of materialistic products. (Richins, 1992).

The world is filled with decorated objects due to their psychological and practical functionality, making the distinction between decoration and function unwarranted, as decoration is intrinsically functional. (Gell, 1998). Pakistani truck decoration incorporates epigraphic formulae, poetry, and repetitive patterns, often reflecting religious identities. (Elias, 2005). Truck decoration varies regionally and within regions, featuring epigraphic formulae, poetry, repetitive patterns, and figural images. In the context of religion, the myths are associated with slogans and decorations to bring fortune and luck to protect the vehicle and asserts. (Goh, 1983).

This literature review establish the relationship of advertising with culture, ethnicity of customers

and demographic concern with in a society. It is helpful to understand the insights of marketers' objectives to achieve global excellence for competition in the less progressive countries like Bangladesh, India and Pakistan.

Relationship of Media food Advertisement and Consumer Behaviors

Media plays a vital role to market a product to influence the consumer as the mass audience watch the media content according to their uses. Uses and Gratification theory suggests that every media consumer picks the content as a requirement of the information. Thus, advertisers aim to run their marketing campaign through advertisements. These advertisements are followed by emotional appeal to meet objectives of the marketers and are diffused through print, electronic and internet media. It was observed in USA that in 1980s advertisements were designed using cartoon characters to influence children to promote the products which are used by children, some of the examples are Care Bears and My little Pony. (Seiter,1993)

The priority objective of the company to create a good advertisement is to increase the brand sales with entertainment and information to influence the target audience to motivate them to buy the specific brands. Children are quick learners and they get attracted toward every new ad which has used music, cartoons and colors. Thus, the marketing company targets young children to be influenced by advertisements and a term "advertising literacy" is related for the young children (Young, 1986). Moreover, these advertisements are used as a cultural tool for reflecting the regional norms as part of showing society and their lifestyles. (Young, 1986) Many international researchers have explained that children have a high cognition level to notice minor details in short duration of visual contents as compared to long-hour programs. Children less than age 5 and 8 years never understand the hidden economic motives of the company. That's why they quickly urge their parents to buy that food item which they have seen in an ad. However, children of the age nine to twelve somehow understand if they can afford it or not. (Ward, 1972) After sometime, the development in advertisement has reflected the broader economic concerns to globalize the product for increasing its demand after watching the messages of the advertisements. (Blosser, 1985). The fast cognition level and psychological learning of the young children enable them to adopt the use of a specific brand and develop the taste. This is the fast effective communication of the advertising agency to change the buying behavior of adults and children followed by cultural influences shown in the advertisements. (Boyland, 2013). Many studies on advertisements are conducted with the children as a population of research experiments to investigate choice and selection behaviors for the food cravings based on the context shown in the advertisements. The researchers have compared these ads with the health campaign ads but the influence level is more in the food ads. Thus, researchers concluded that the use of media and more exposure of ads to the children play significant role in changing their behaviors for the food choices. (Harris, 2009).

Recent studies have highlighted that 99% of the television advertisements are followed by emotional appeal with entertainment for attracting sensory pleasure of the children to promote snacks item to create high craving in the children. Studies conducted by Barcus and Cuozzo found that 82% of the ads are made on the edible and confectionaries for the kids not to address their hunger but to just for taste and fun food. The study found that 58% ads were about food and 24% were for sugary cereals. (Barcus, 1971). These ads have cartoons and animated characters with jingles and small stories reflecting fantasies to increase the cravings of the children (Gants, 2007).

In 1975, researchers found that 50% of commercials featured unrealistic stories with animated cartoons to indicate food items for children. (Atkin, 1975). A Content analysis of 60 Ads showed a CTTR of 0.37. (Doolittle, 1975)

Scholars of the advertising and public relation fields have studied the contexts of ads between the year 1975 and 2000 on the subject of cultural and social differences to study the gratifications of the customers. They found that the food is the essential subject to change the sociodemographic behaviors related to eating habits but these contents are structured with animated and unrealistic stories to facilitate the clients. (Cheng, 2007).

Marketing Communication Framework in Cultural Preferences

The Asian advertisers feature Ramdan in Muslim countries to make content for food products, whereas western marketers make women as a subject followed with liberal themes of friendship and adventures. (Muktadir, 2022). Coca Cola is one of the notable examples in advertisements as the ads of Coca Cola in Ramadan in Muslim countries are shown in the dinner and summer however western media shows a girl offering Coca Cola in the sun set on a trip or on Christmas eve. This is clear that Coca Cola is using cultural, religious and emotional appeal to influence the target audience of different countries. Most of the time their target class is youth (Mazumder, 2023). Researchers studied that the "Open That Coca-Cola" campaign followed music and dance to influence youth for sharing diverse cultures with the subject theme of

celebrating joy and events in multicultural societies. (Khan, 2023).

Another study revealed that the ad of Coca Cola with the title "The Letter" promoted family gathering and sharing fun during the Christmas in Covid-19. Similarly, in Asian culture it is common that famous celebrities are shown in the ad with a script or slogan for styling the youth for self-confidence like India's Pepsi ads # Har Ghoont mein Swad with Salman Khan acting encouraged to build lifestyle status quo among youth. Another Pepsi ad in 2020 during the football campaign was on aired with the slogan "Play never stops" featured Messi, Salah and Sterling to promote Pepsi as a drink. (Telukunta, 2016).

The Glo ad uses a female doctor's image to emphasize health coverage, underscoring medical services, daily costs, and accessibility in over 8,000 hospitals. The Chelsea® ad utilizes a bottle's symbolic representation and Nigerian Independence Day themes to emphasize cultural celebration, encouraging consumers to enjoy and reward themselves with Chelsea Gin. The Power Oil ad connects a plate of food and its cooking oil, emphasizing cultural and health benefits, celebrating World Food Day, and promoting family health. (Dalamu, 2016).

In simple words, advertising a product aims to connect direct clients in effective way. Television has been the most effective channel for providing visual literacy to the public and to change their purchase decision toward a product. Digitalization in advertisement has made the commercial world globalized with common values in cultures. (Frățilă, 2010). A study on cross-cultural differences in directness in speech revealed significant differences among native speakers of Hebrew, Canadian French, Argentinean Spanish, Australian English, and German. Argentinean Spanish speakers were found to be most direct, followed by Hebrew speakers. (Blum-Kulka, 1989).

While developing marketing strategies for advertisements, advertisers must have understood objective culture, which encompasses social, economic, political, and linguistic systems, is important. It doesn't guarantee competence in cross-cultural communication as even knowing a culture's history doesn't guarantee effective communication with real-life individuals (Bennett, 1998). Communication breakdown (CB) occurs when the speaker's intention is misunderstood, while communication conflict (CC) arises from misunderstandings and friction due to cultural differences and sociolinguistic transfer. (Wolfson, 1989).

The choice of audience belongs to their social identities and ability to understand languages. Keeping this in view, hybridization has a potential to provide multiple features like images, multi-language approaches and music to grab the attention of consumers of a specific region. It speeds up the process of transforming existing products with new packages to appeal different clients. (Wang, 2005).

The interpretation of a ritual symbol depends on its location within a specific context, which encompasses socio-cultural values, beliefs, attitudes, customs, and traditions, enabling the message to be conveyed. (Sekhukhune, 1990). The meaning of food and drink symbolism varies based on cultural values and beliefs. (Quin, 1964). Taboo symbolism in North Sotho philosophy restricts individuals from certain food types during rites of passage, unlike Hinduism's complete abstinence due to death. (Parry, 1993). Informant boys are forbidden from eating eggs before initiation ceremonies, and if they evade restrictions, they are warned about an abundance of eggs protruding in their heads. Hence the influence of culture-specific beliefs, values, norms, customs, and traditions on food and drink symbolism in North Sotho traditional societies emphasizes the complexity of ritual interpretation, the need for expert interpretation, and the role of cultural traits. (Sekhukhune, 1993).

UK ethnic food consumption surges over two decades, with restaurants generating over £1 billion annually. Consumers seek authentic dishes, with some anglicized Indian dishes requiring spicier options. (Jamal, 2003). Various scholars have discussed socialization in food behaviors that indicates how consumption shapes cultural categories and over acculturation as British consumers have acculturated to ethnic food consumption patterns. (McCracken, 1986).

Researchers used the term "assimilation" to describe changes in immigrants' consumption and behavioral patterns after moving from their country of origin to a new one. They assumed that this blend would shift towards the destination culture, leading to full assimilation. (Wallendorf, 1991). A study revealed the consumption of Asian curries by native English participants in Bradford, a city with a large number of British Pakistanis who arrived in the late 1950s. It also clarifies the extent to which Pakistanis have adopted English foods and the changes in their consumption patterns. Moreover, the influence of other ethnic foods, such as Italian, Chinese, Thai, and French was also visible. (Jamal, 1996). The target audience is usually concerned with the country but there are many situations where immigrants are concerned for the cultural diversity and their association with the food of their home region. Thus, few ads are based on the products which are used by specific commodities. (Kopytoff, 1986) In UK the vegetarian companies has created 40% of advertisements aiming for a healthier diet to reduce red meat to highlight the influence of Asian cultures. It has been observed that more youth have adopted Pakistani and Asian food in Britain preferring British

food. (Chapman, 1996) This change in behaviors of nation to adopt food habits from different culture shifts societies to diverse culture symbols among different groups of the society which develop friendly interaction between them. (Warde, 2017).

Advertisement influence for food adaptation in Pakistan

Pakistan is the central hub of Asia for food culture and is point of attraction for the tourists for the street food. The cultural and socio economic impacts in Pakistan are changing dynamics with the blends of western food and international cuisine due to food brand chains. In the start of 1930s, British tea became food fashion and status quo in the breakfast and evening tables. In 1971, Pakistan was considered as a larger importer of the tea and coffee. (Rehman, 2012). This is the great example of adopting foreign food item as a cultural key symbol.

The colonial era had an influence on Pakistani food culture through advertisement of processed food like cereal, jam and by products of fruits in the start of 1900s. It is studied that more than 150 licensed companies for the soft drinks were established in the sub-continent by 1913 (Usmani, 2021). Similarly, the British started a food culture of potatoes chips and snacks in the daily diet (Ahmad, 2012). British dining culture and manners reshaped the social norms in food culture in the sub-continent. Asian countries like Sri Lanka, Pakistan, India and Malaysia have adopted this West-influenced practice, it is not widely practiced in Pakistan. (Ali, 2013). In Pakistani context, Urdu speakers are culturally known for their directness of speech, which can be problematic for Pakistanis who are used to indirectness, which is a communicative norm in some cultures. (Khan, 2009).

The metaphorical translation of culture with meaningful representation through images and text is effective media strategy for producing ads. The objectives of making ads are directly connected with the economic conditions of both, the businessmen and the consumer. (ud Din, 2022).

Cultural differences are evident in verbal and non-verbal communication, with gestures playing a significant role in context. Low-context cultures like the UK, USA, and Canada, like Pakistan, do not emphasize gestures as much as high-context cultures. Globalization has boosted business growth, with the fast-food industry, originating in France, experiencing rapid growth. In Pakistan, the industry, which began with McDonald's, Pizza Hut, and KFC, has become the second-largest, serving 16.9 million customers and employing 16% of manufacturing workers. Its high values and modern techniques offer growth opportunities in developing countries. Asian countries, particularly Pakistan, India, China, and Korea, are witnessing a rise in teenagers adopting western culture and embracing individuality. (Neuliep, 2017).

The studies found that a known international food brand Nestlé has adopted the global digital marketing strategy in the developing countries like Pakistan, China, Turkey and Mexico by using standard logo, slogan and packaging with execution of relevant cultural influence for the local ads. The languages, images, color themes, religious influences and the habits of local buyers are considered while designing the effective marketing strategies for making visual ads. (Fredholm, 2015).

Television Advertisements about food in Pakistan are getting hype due to better visual communication used by educated graphic designers with aesthetic and cultural trends. The western styles in designs are taken as reference with the blend of English-Urdu languages to represent Pakistani food culture over the globe. Multinational food companies are putting focus on the advertisement and visual communication of advertisements of ingredients and food item with aesthetic product packaging by using modern digital tools to address the objectives of corporate and audience needs. (Rizvi, 2023).

Conclusion

The British Colonial Era significantly influenced Pakistani cuisine, introducing foods like English tea, breakfast items, bakery products, and processed foods. This era also instilled cultural and socio-economic divides, impacting local dining habits and societal norms. The elements of cultural influence in the content of advertisement for outdoor, print and television platform include color and language to fulfil the psychological requirement of local buyers. This plays significant role in elevating local brands to global brands. In the context of Pakistan, the standard advertisement uses English and Urdu slogans to achieve marketing goals.

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