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THE SEMIOTICS OF BEAUTY: AN ANALYSIS OF CULTURAL AND SOCIAL SEMIOTIC CODES IN BEAUTY ADVERTISEMENT

Kainat
MPhil Scholar, Department of English, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan
Email: kainat71098@gmail.com
Liaqat Iqbal
Associate Professor, Department of English, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan

Abstract
This study explores the cultural and social semiotic codes embedded in contemporary beauty commercials and examines how these codes shape the interpretation and perception of beauty. For this purpose, two beauty video ads, the Lux beauty soap ad and the Golden Pearl Max Light Man Face Wash, were selected purposely from the YouTube platform. Utilising Charles Sanders Peirce's Theory of Signs (1991), the study identifies key codes such as skin colour, flawless appearance, dress norms, gender roles, commodification of beauty, celebrity endorsement, and shifting social values. The findings reveal that beauty is no longer a fixed, but a dynamic construct continuously negotiated, performed, and commoditised through advertisements. Traditional cultural codes are being redefined through semiotic shifts that align beauty with empowerment, success, and public recognition. The study concludes by highlighting the significant influence of advertising in forming and redefining modern standards of beauty in the sociocultural context of Pakistan.
Keywords: *Advertisement, beauty, cultural semiotic code, social semiotic code, signs.*

Introduction

Semiotic analysis is primarily concerned with viewing language as a sign system, with each sign consisting of the signifier and the signified. Signs are inherently polysemous; they allow for a wide range of interpretations. It's also important to note that in a social semiotic multimodal account, Kress (2010) claims that all signs contain intrinsic meaning, which is consistent with the idea of a sign as a storehouse of meaning. Signs can be divided into two categories: visual and verbal signs. According to Dyer (2009), the sign receiver's mental process is influenced by both verbal (linguistic) and visual (semiotic) cues. He uses the advertisement copy's verbal sign "beautiful in and out" as an example, claiming that the phrase leaves an impression on the target demographic by depicting the product as a means of achieving glamour. A text that consists of a word, phrase, or sentence is a verbal indicator for the advertisement. Conversely, an image or picture that typically shows the kind of goods, the business logo, and the colours is a visual signal of advertising (Prawangsa, 2018). Dyer (2009) provides insight into visual indications by arguing that they have more power in commercials because they make them engaging, eye-catching, and simple to comprehend. Signs, both verbal and visual, function as a critical medium through which individuals convey ideas, emotions, and intentions, enabling a shared understanding within social contexts. This shared meaning is fundamental to navigating the intricacies of human interaction and societal structures. Communication extends far beyond direct interpersonal dialogue. It increasingly manifests through mediated forms, particularly mass media, which play a pivotal role in shaping perceptions, ideologies, and cultural narratives in the digital era.

Advertising plays a critical role in shaping contemporary social and cultural landscapes. It functions as a powerful vehicle for disseminating messages, values, and ideologies to broad and diverse audiences through various channels of mass media. With the globalisation of commerce and culture, advertisements have become an omnipresent aspect of daily life, appearing in print media such as magazines and newspapers, as well as across billboards,

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television, radio, online platforms, flyers, newsletters, and posters (Mason et al., 2021). These advertisements are not random creations; they are strategically designed to capture attention, stimulate desire, and ultimately influence consumer behaviour. Beyond their commercial intent, advertisements also convey complex and often subtle messages that mirror societal norms, aspirations, and constructed identities, as Dyer (1982) claims that advertising alerts, informs, or attracts people's attention to certain things. They influence individual decisions, emotions, and ideas. Advertisements typically use both verbal and visual cues.

Many different kinds of commercials are readily available on the internet, among which Beauty advertisements hold a powerful position in shaping and circulating ideals of attractiveness, desirability, and identity. These ads are more than mere promotional tools; they serve as rich sites of meaning-making, embedding within them a range of cultural and social semiotic codes that subtly or overtly influence how beauty is understood and pursued. Through images, gestures, language, and symbolic elements, beauty advertisements construct narratives that reflect, reinforce, or even challenge prevailing societal norms and values. Therefore, the purpose of our study is to investigate the cultural and social semiotic codes employed in beauty commercials and to understand how these codes shape the interpretation and perception of beauty.

Literature review

The study of semiotics has become an essential analytical framework for deciphering the complex systems of meaning embedded in diverse modes of communication. According to Chandler (2017), semiotics is the study of signs and symbols that are employed in society for communication. A sign, according to the Peircean semiotic framework, is "something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity" (Peirce 1955, cited in Gurdin 1994).

Advertisements play a key role in shaping and maintaining the concept of beauty. Beauty advertisements in particular do more than sell products; they construct meaning, shape societal perceptions, establish cultural norms, and reinforce beauty ideals. Using various techniques, beauty ads manipulate public perception, telling us what's considered attractive, desirable, or socially acceptable. They establish ideals of superiority and inferiority based on physical appearance that influence both men and women and also represent, influence, and frequently uphold social and cultural views. Using the lens of semiotics, researchers such as Barthes (1977) and Peirce (1931) have analyzed how signs, including facial expressions, body language, clothing, and color schemes, function as cultural codes that convey deeper meanings in media texts. Several studies have emphasised how viewers interpret these signs based on their social positioning and cultural background. For instance, Ahmad et al. (2024) examined ads for a well-known beauty product in Pakistan and found that these advertisements promoted the idea that fairness and beauty are related. The study emphasises how print ads' language and imagery promote the idea of colourism and influence society's standards of beauty.

Beauty norms have traditionally been largely shaped and maintained by print media, especially women's magazines. In a critical discourse examination of beauty product ads in Malaysian women's magazines, Kaur, Arumugam, and Yunus (2013) found that marketers use deliberate language and images to create an idealised view of beauty. Discrimination based on skin tone, or colourism, is another example of how beauty standards reinforce social hierarchies. According to studies, those with lighter complexion tend to be more visible in the media, have more opportunities for marriage, and have more social mobility (Hunter, 2007). Similarly, Kilbourne's (1999) and Jhally's (2007) studies emphasise how media portrayals of women in particular are shaped to support an idealised definition of beauty, which is usually young, slender, and Eurocentric. These portrayals are not neutral; they intentionally manipulate the

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public's idea of what is "beautiful" and influence people's opinions of themselves and their social desirability (Perloff, 2014). Beauty ads frequently have a significant influence on how society defines and upholds standards of physical attractiveness. These commercials frequently promote limited definitions of beauty, which are usually young, slender, fair-skinned, and heteronormative. These portrayals can lead to a range of socio-cultural repercussions, involving the upholding of limited ideals of beauty that exclude many forms of identity expression, affecting identity, self-perception, and societal norms. Sandlin and Maudlin (2012), in a comparative study on women's consumption patterns, highlight that beauty advertising has negatively impacted how society views women and beauty. Mendes and Carter (2008) support this claim and stated that the hypnotic and deceptive language used in commercials creates an atmosphere of insecurity in society.

The globalisation of media has further exacerbated the imposition of Western-centric beauty ideals onto non-Western societies. Klein (2000) and Banet-Weiser (2012) contend that Western-centric beauty standards are taking precedence over regional cultural aesthetics as a result of media globalisation. Beauty ads in non-Western cultures like Pakistan reinforce the need for white skin, hence sustaining colourism and colonial legacies (Parameswaran & Cardoza, 2009). Similarly, Said (1978) argues that the prevalence of Western cultural products, like beauty ads, has reinforced a colonial heritage by putting Eurocentric beauty standards on various nations.

The exclusion and underrepresentation of minority groups in beauty advertisements have also been extensively critiqued. Studies like Frith, Shaw, and Cheng (2005) and Hooks (1992) argue that advertisements frequently stereotype or ignore individuals who do not conform to the dominant beauty ideal. According to research by Williams (2001), beauty or the perceived closeness to beauty standards can be seen as a type of social capital. Social advantages like better job opportunities, increased access to social networks, and higher social standing are frequently enjoyed by those who adhere to these ideals. Moreover, the studies conducted by Borgerson and Schroeder (2023) have shown that skin functions as a marketing and cultural emblem, transforming individual identity into a commodity. They contend that skin is portrayed in consumer society as a visual and symbolic sign that conveys ideas of identity, beauty, and social acceptability rather than only being a biological surface.

Research Questions

1. What cultural and social semiotic codes are used in beauty commercials?
2. How is beauty interpreted and perceived in beauty advertisements?

Methodology:

This study conducts a semiotic analysis of advertisements, utilising Charles Sanders Peirce's Theory of Signs to examine the cultural and social semiotic codes in beauty advertisements to understand the hidden ideologies that shape and influence the interpretation and perception of beauty. To achieve the research objectives, two advertisements in the form of videos were purposely collected from the YouTube platform and are given below:

1. **Lux beauty soap advertisement**. A female beauty ad of 30 seconds features Maya Ali emerging from a luxurious setting, applying the soap with a warm smile while promoting its new ingredients—Vitamin C and glycerin—for hydration and a radiant glow. The ad blends soft music, close-up visuals, and the award show scenes where Maya receives the "*Lux Face of the Year*" award. Her confident presence and direct address to the audience reinforce the product's message, ending with the slogan, e.g., "*new lux hamara best soap, dey chand sa roshan chehra*" (Lux—our best soap for a moonlit, radiant glow).

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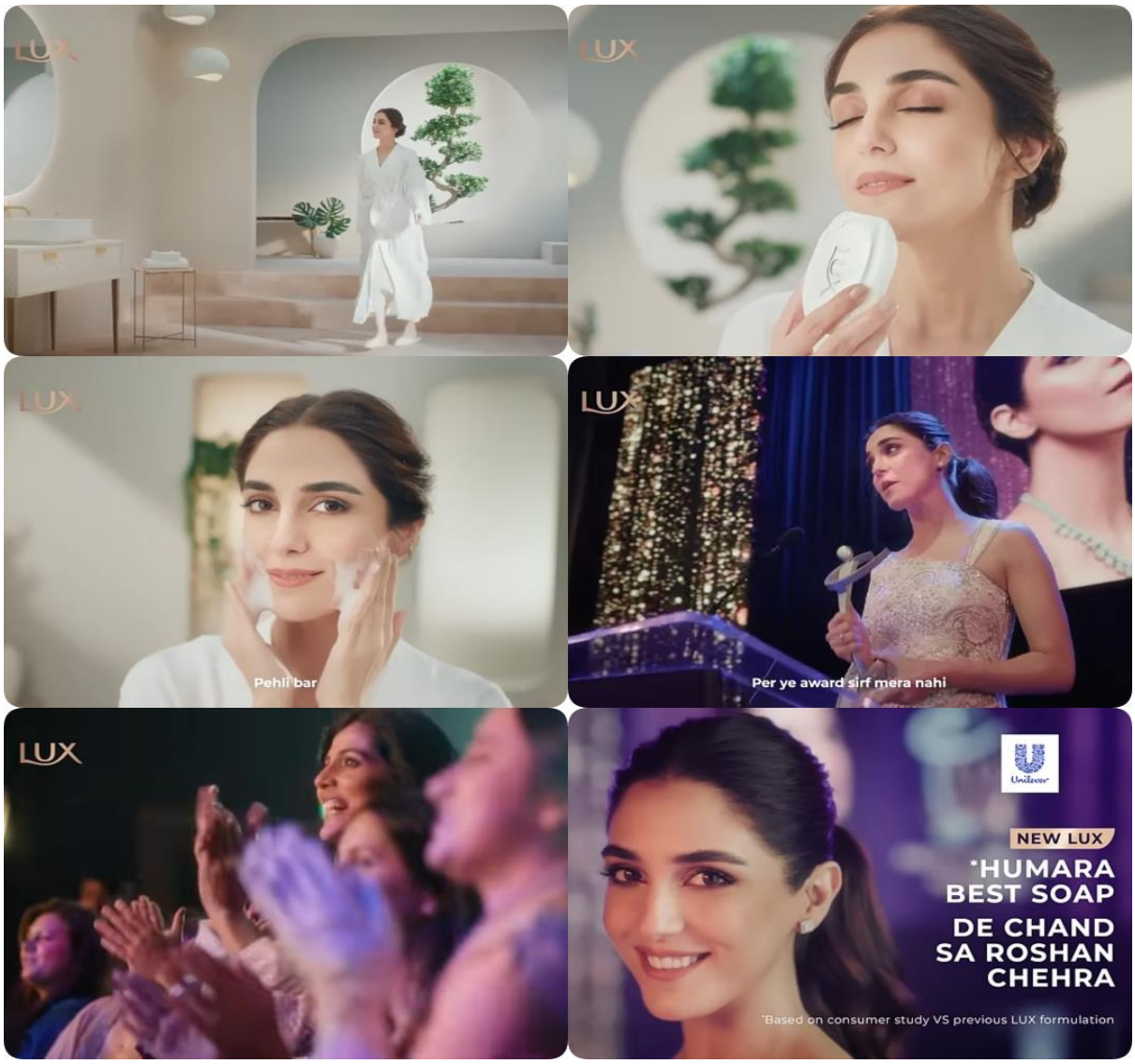

Figure 1: Lux Beauty Soap Advertisement

2. **Golden Pearl Max Light Men's Face Wash.** A male beauty ad of 45 seconds features cricketer Naseem Shah facing harsh elements like the sun, oil, dirt, and pollution. Through dynamic visuals and narration, it presents the product as a solution to dull, dark skin, emphasising deep cleansing with exfoliating beads and Vitamin B3 that results in fair, bright, clean skin. The ad contrasts ordinary soap with the face wash and ends with Naseem confidently arriving at an event, reinforcing the slogan: *"Let your face glow."*

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Figure 2: Golden Pearl Max Light Men's Face Wash Advertisement

Charles Sanders Peirce's Theory of Signs

The triadic model of signs, created by American pragmatist philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce, is used in this study to examine signs and their relationship to meaning and signification. Peirce says that signs are made up of three interconnected components: representamen, an object and an interpretant. Representamen (R) is the physical form of the sign (e.g., image, sound, word). Object (O) is the actual thing or concept the sign refers to. Interpretant (I) is the meaning or interpretation the viewer forms from the sign. Peirce also categorises signs into three types:

1. Iconic Signs: Resemble what they represent (e.g., photos, drawings).
2. Indexical Signs: Show a direct or causal link to the object (e.g., smoke indicates fire).
3. Symbolic Signs: Have an arbitrary, culturally learned connection (e.g., language, traffic signs).

Analysis

Lux advertising utilises Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic framework to analyse how cultural and social semiotic codes interact to shape the interpretation and perception of beauty. Umberto Eco (1976) defines semiotics as anything that can be taken as sign. As Chandler explains, we can utilise various words, sounds, pictures, and gestures since each of these elements has a specific meaning based on how it is conveyed. Furthermore, more Voloshinov (1973) stated that every time a sign is presented, the ideology is also presented.

Iconic Sign

Iconic signs work by mirroring the things they stand for. In this advertisement, the glitzy portrayal of Maya Ali in a white bathrobe is considered the main iconic sign that represents wealth, sophistication, and purity. She visually embodies the cultural ideal of beauty with her glowing complexion and composed manner, especially in the Pakistani context where such qualities are highly valued. Viewers are encouraged to connect Maya's physical characteristics with the product's effects via this visual signal. The desired results of using Lux soap are iconically represented by the repeated close-ups of Maya's face and shoulders, which are heightened by lighting and makeup. The product's promises are materialised by the faultless skin that is displayed. The "Best Lux Face" award Maya Ali received visually represents

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achievement and acknowledgement. Visual imagery creates an aspirational narrative in which societal acclaim is the result of physical attractiveness, supposedly attained through the product.

Indexical Sign

The nature of the relationship between the sign and its object is a causal relationship (Peirce, as cited in Indriani, 2008, pp. 31–35). In this ad, the tactile and sensory aspects of the product are directly indexed when Maya Ali smells and applies the soap. Her actions provide the impression that Lux is the cause of the glowing skin she exhibits, leading onlookers to assume that Lux may produce comparable effects. The integration of scientific references to ingredients like glycerin and Vitamin C provides an index of nutrition and good health. These components indexically link the product to skincare advantages, bringing it into line with modern consumers' demands for beauty products that are both practical and effective. The background music produces a sensory experience that is associated with indulgence, luxury, and relaxation. This sound component supports the visual depiction of Maya Ali's composed and assured manner and strengthens the link between Lux soap and an upscale self-care routine.

Symbolic Signs

According to Charles S. Peirce (as cited in Indriani, 2008, pp. 31–35), the symbol can stand for both external (objects and actions) and internal (feelings, thoughts, or ideas). The advertisement's creative use of symbolic signs plays a vital role in reinforcing societal perceptions of what constitutes beauty and desirability. In this ad, Celebrity endorsements like South Asian icon Maya Ali represent contemporary femininity, achievement, and societal acceptance. Her presence acts as a culturally rooted signifier, implying that Lux helps customers align with her high social standing and public persona. The advertisement employs the symbolic process to establish the meaning or identity of participants within a visual context. Some other symbolic signs used in the current ads are that Maya Ali is the white colour of the bathrobe, the background and then the soap suggested the idea that if a person uses soap his complexion will be white and that is considered beautiful in contrast dark complexion is considered ugly. These colour choices also represent cleanliness, luxury, gentleness, and purity. Similarly, the representation of Maya Ali in the award show, receiving the trophy for Best Face Award of the Year, symbolises success, recognition, and desirability that can be achieved using Lux soap. It also supports the notion that achieving beauty through Lux results in wider social achievement, such as fame and admiration. Maya Ali's radiant smile and confident demeanour symbolise positivity, happiness, confidence and self-satisfaction. Furthermore, the linguistic description "New Lux, Hamara Best Soap, De Chand Sa Roshan Chehra" highlights symbolic associations used in beauty advertisements. It reinforces the cultural ideal of a radiant, moon-like complexion (*Chand*), reflecting South Asian beauty standards that value fair, flawless skin.

Golden Pearl Max Light Men's Facewash

Iconic Sign

A variety of components are shown that reflect events and changes that occur in real life. Close-ups of Naseem Shah's face show signs of dullness, sweat, and dirt. These visuals show typical skin issues that men, especially those who play sports or are active outside, encounter in harsh settings. This portrayal makes it relatable to viewers, specifically those of a young age. The 3D animation scene depicting beads infiltrating the skin reflects scientific mechanisms, instilling a sense of trust and authenticity regarding the product's deep-cleansing claims. Similarly, Naseem Shah's transformation from dull, dark skin to a clear, radiant complexion serves as an iconic representation of the product's efficacy, guaranteeing noticeable outcomes.

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Indexical Sign

Smoke, dirt, and sweat on Naseem's face during the cricket playground and bike riding scenes indicate the negative consequences of being exposed to extreme environments. This establishes the notion that these issues can be resolved by the products being advertised. Naseem's radiant skin after using the face wash indicates that the product is directly responsible for removing the damage caused by outside stressors because it addresses the unique needs of men with similar experiences.

Symbolic Signs

Some signs are employed as symbols, and their meaning is derived from cultural or societal standards, e.g. "Let your face glow" is the Golden Pearl motto and logo. These represent the larger cultural desire for beauty, particularly radiant, fair, clear and glowing skin, which is frequently associated with prosperity, health, and beauty in South Asian cultures. Similarly, the use of opulent settings (black car, event, toilet, etc.) symbolises success, wealth, and status, subtly implying that having brighter skin raises one's social position and self-esteem. Furthermore, A personal connection is symbolised by Naseem Shah's direct gaze and pointing motions at the camera, which establish an authoritative endorsement that appeals directly to the viewers.

Findings and Discussion:

Beauty commercials often rely on a combination of cultural and social semiotic codes to communicate their messages and shape the audience's perception of beauty. These codes operate through visuals, language, and other sensory elements, which, when combined, create a compelling narrative for the target consumer. Below is a breakdown of these codes based on the data from the Lux and Golden Pearl Max Light Men's Face Wash advertisements:

1. **Skin Color**

Cultural semiotic code: In Pakistan, fair skin has long symbolised moral purity, social superiority, and cultural desirability. This belief has roots in colonial history and traditional caste structures, where light skin was associated with the elite and upper class. It is also tied to traditional matrimonial ideals where a bride's fair complexion is seen as an asset and a marker of family prestige. As stated by Hundal (2010), Asian women are continuously reminded that if they go darker, no male will want to marry them, and having a fair complexion is seen as essential in the marriage market. Beauty advertisements exploit this culturally embedded code by reinforcing the idea that fairness is not only beautiful but essential for acceptance and upward mobility.

Social semiotic code: Socially, however, skin colour is increasingly influenced by global beauty standards, where fairness is equated with success, modernity, professionalism, confidence, and high social mobility. This aligns with Mendes and Carter (2008) contend that the hypnotic and deceptive language used in commercials creates an atmosphere of insecurity in society. Because of this insecurity, people are more susceptible to emotional manipulation by beauty product marketers. Supporting this interpretation, according to Jones (2013), women's urge to lighten their complexion was a noticeable phenomenon in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The alterations were so significant that black complexion is still discriminated against in beauty ads. It is noticed in most advertisements, especially beauty ads, that only fair and light-complexioned women are used to represent their beauty products, and if not so a lot of editing and photoshops are used to make their appearances fairer**.** Additionally, Jones (2013) also highlighted that ads promised lighter-skinned women better social, economic, and other statuses. The advertisement constructs a concept about the reality of our society that beauty is not only a personal quality but a social currency. Maya Ali's self-assured manner, fan interactions, and award acceptance serve as examples of how Lux soap enhances

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physical beauty to garner social recognition, admiration, and approval. The media defines and promotes beauty, which is rewarded in the world (McKinley, 2017). This semiotic construction presents the product as a means of attaining societal acceptability as well as individual self-improvement. According to McKinley (2017), it is universal that people who are considered attractive in whatever community receive rewards for their status; being conventionally beautiful offers one an advantage over those who are not (McKinley, 2017).

2. Flawless Facial Appearance

Cultural semiotic code: Traditionally, clear and healthy skin is seen as a sign of natural beauty and good health, youthfulness, and moral character, often associated with a woman's eligibility for marriage.

Social semiotic code: A key social semiotic code in contemporary beauty advertisements is the idealisation of a flawless facial appearance, which includes a fair complexion, clear skin with no blemishes, marks, or dark circles, silky hair and a hair-free body. Beauty advertisements rely heavily on visual cues that promote an unattainable ideal of "natural perfection." This includes the use of nude-toned makeup designed to appear invisible, reinforcing the illusion that beauty is effortless and intrinsic rather than constructed or cosmetic. Body hair removal, smoothness, and radiant complexions are visually coded as signs of refinement and control. These portrayals draw from a long historical trajectory. As Basow (1991) details, the cultural imperative for women to remove body hair did not exist until advertising created it in the early 20th century. Gillette's "Great Underarm Campaign" in 1915 aggressively defined underarm hair as *"superfluous," "unwanted," "ugly," and "unfashionable,"* fundamentally reshaping public perceptions. Later, during and after World War II, the removal of female body hair became mainstream, embedding itself as a near-universal beauty norm (Terry and Braun, 2013). Today, people are still being stigmatised as unattractive, unclean, or primitive, who do not conform to these norms. For example, in the Lux ad featuring Maya Ali, her smooth, radiant skin is blemish-free, highlighting that beauty is linked to flawless facial grooming. The ad implies that achieving this perfection is attainable through Lux products, positioning flawless skin as both a beauty ideal and a social marker.In the Golden Pearl Max Light Men's Face Wash ad, Naseem Shah's clear, smooth face similarly emphasises the importance of blemish-free skin for men. This reflects modern beauty standards where perfect grooming is seen as a sign of confidence and success, challenging traditional masculinity norms. Both ads reinforce the societal pressure to meet these beauty ideals, linking flawless appearance to social value and self-worth.

3. Commodification and consumerism of Beauty

Cultural semiotic code: In the traditional Pakistani context, beauty was considered a natural gift from God, something to be modestly maintained, not overtly altered or commercialised. The emphasis was on inner purity rather than external manipulation.

Social semiotic code: Modern consumer culture transforms beauty into a commodity that can be bought, enhanced, and performed. The use of products becomes a necessity to achieve societal approval and competitive success. These ads depict the soap and face wash as tools that provide access to social acceptance and enhanced beauty, positioning them as essential for achieving the cultural ideal of flawless skin. By doing so, they shift the focus from innate beauty to one that is commodified and dependent on consumer products. This approach reflects a broader global trend where beauty is increasingly marketed as something that can be purchased, aligning with modern consumer culture and societal pressures. According to Englis et al. (1994), falsehoods and unrealistic standards related to happiness and consumerism have been promoted by beauty marketing. Heyes (2007) supports this view, arguing that these products have deceived society and simply encouraged women to make costly purchases. In

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this context, Maya Ali and Naseem Shah's consistently positive demeanor in the ad acts as a persuasive force, subtly implying that product use leads to not just physical transformation but also emotional fulfillment and social elevation.

4. **Dress Norms**

Cultural semiotic code: Traditional dress norms in Pakistan emphasise modesty and cultural identity, aligning with Islamic principles often represented through garments like the shalwar kameez and the dupatta (headscarf) for women. These norms align with cultural codes that associate modest dress with respect and social decency.

Social semiotic code: However, modern beauty advertisements present Westernised fashion as an embodiment of individuality and self-expression. The shift in representation, such as the portrayal of women in fitted, revealing clothing as in the Lux ad, Maya Ali is shown in an elegant, modern outfit and Naseem Shah in a shirt-pants combination, presents himself in a well-groomed, contemporary style that strays from traditional Pakistani modest dress codes, embracing a more individualistic and globalised ideal of beauty. The visible transformation of celebrities through styling, makeup, and fashion in these ads reflects what **Barthes** would call the "mythologisation" of beauty, where surface appearances are treated as markers of deeper personal and social value. This shift underscores a broader transformation in beauty standards, where fashion is no longer solely about cultural identity but about presenting oneself as part of a modern, cosmopolitan world.

5. **Gender Roles**

Cultural semiotic code: In Pakistani culture, distinct roles have traditionally been ascribed to masculinity and femininity. Femininity has long been associated with beauty, gentleness, grace, and dependence on others, especially financially. In contrast, masculinity has been linked to physical toughness, emotional stoicism, and authority. In contrast to women, who are expected to "correct" any blemishes on their skin, men are not obliged to take care of their skin or even taught how to do so. Rough or scarred skin is often seen as a sign of masculinity, while soft, smooth, and flawless skin is seen as a sign of femininity (Lafrance, 2018; see also Patterson & Schroeder, 2010

Social semiotic code: In beauty advertisements, women are often depicted as embodiments of graceful beauty, with figures like Maya Ali representing independent women who invest in self-care to achieve beauty and confidence. This narrative suggests that women can build successful careers and find social acceptance without being dependent on others or confined to the role of a housewife.

Historically, men have been portrayed as indifferent to personal grooming and self-care. These cultural connotations of the skin draw attention to the ways that gender is ingrained in both working and not working on the skin. Scholars have seen a counter-cultural tendency in which young men care about their beauty and have a sexualised vision of themselves, even though working on the skin was traditionally framed as a feminine practice (Atkinson, 2008; Robinson & Anderson, 2022). According to Atkinson (2008), this trend is known as "metrosexuality" or the beautification of the male body. It was used to characterise "a homosexualised vision of masculinity, in the sense that this studied narcissism and attention to self-grooming, traditionally associated with gayness" (McNair, 2002, p. 157) but now in the modern era, Men can recreate their bodies and identities as socially powerful in "male-feminine" ways by working on their skin (Atkinson, 2008).). In this way, it is possible to interpret the beauty of the male body as a rejection of conventional male norms in favour of feminised bodywork techniques. Because of this, scholars like Atkinson (2008) have questioned if masculinities are in "crisis," particularly in light of the current emphasis on physical attractiveness in visual and consumer culture. Engaging in what Featherstone (1982) long ago referred to as "the

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performing self," which lays "greater emphasis upon appearance, display, and the management of impressions," the "new" narcissistic man is preoccupied with his self-image. However, commercials use masculine characteristics and tactics to associate cosmetics with conventional notions of masculinity. Social semiotic codes of conduct are linked to cultural norms regarding gender roles and beauty. The representation of Naseem Shah in Golden Pearl Max Light Men's Face Wash advertisement, participating in physically hard activities such as cricket and biking, facing modern problems (pollution, sweating, and oil), supports the idea that skincare is not at odds with roughness or masculinity. Instead, it enhances it. The ad emphasises that men also need specialised skincare to maintain a glowy, fair, and bright appearance, highlighting the fact that, despite their physically demanding routines, men are now accountable for their appearance. This demonstrates that skincare is an essential part of a modern man's life without compromising his masculinity. As a result, this shift bridges the gap between traditional views of masculinity and the evolving beauty standards for men, suggesting a more balanced approach to personal care and self-expression for both genders.

6. Social Values

Cultural semiotic code: In traditional Pakistani culture, beauty has often been equated with a woman's marriageability and family honour. A woman's beauty has historically been viewed as her primary asset in marriage negotiations, and her social worth has been largely determined by her physical appearance. This cultural code links beauty to societal approval, particularly in the context of family and marriage.

Social semiotic code: However, modern beauty advertisements are increasingly shifting the focus from beauty as a tool for marriage to beauty as a symbol of individual achievement. Self-worth, success, and public recognition are now tied to beauty, especially as celebrities and professional achievers are featured in advertisements. Numerous studies have shown that attractiveness provides the world with metrics for evaluating success, intelligence, desirable genes, and health (Dakanalis et al., 2015). The majority of people in American society aspire to be beautiful since physical attractiveness is viewed as a powerful asset. Furthermore, society frequently emphasises the ideal beauty that is depicted in ads, indicating that it draws attention since it is linked to success, intelligence, and fame (Dakanalis et al., 2015).These shifts suggest that beauty is not only about securing family honour but also about empowerment, fame, and personal achievement, framing beauty as a pathway to individual success in the modern, globalised world. It is evident when Maya Ali receives the face of the year award and in the second male ad when Naseem exits a high-end vehicle and enters a glitzy gathering, suggesting that maintaining your appearance correlates with self-assurance and social or professional success.

7. Celebrity Endorsement

Cultural semiotic code: Celebrities in Pakistan hold significant cultural power, often acting as cultural icons that represent societal ideals of beauty, success, and moral integrity. Culturally, celebrity endorsements function to reinforce cultural identity through familiar language, dress, and behaviour, establishing emotional and symbolic connections with audiences. Celebrities such as Maya Ali and Naseem Shah embody modern beauty ideals while still maintaining elements of cultural authenticity, offering a cultural endorsement that enhances the product's appeal. For example, Maya Ali's graceful persona and positive demeanour, such as her respectful body language, Urdu dialogue, soft expressions, or interaction with fans or friends, bring associations of feminine dignity, social respectability, and cultural elegance to the Lux soap brand. In the advertisement, Maya wears modern clothing yet maintains a respectful appearance, suggesting that women can embrace modernity while still honouring tradition. This portrayal reflects a fashionable, independent woman, yet still

"respectable" by cultural standards. This is exactly how beauty ideals are reshaped and negotiated in a changing society. Similarly, in the Golden Pearl Max Light Men's Face Wash ad, Naseem Shah is portrayed in a modern and stylish lifestyle, reflecting that men can care for their skin without losing their masculinity. His role connects beauty with discipline, confidence, and national pride, illustrating evolving standards for male beauty in Pakistan.

Social semiotic code: In beauty advertisements, celebrities are not merely endorsing products; they are symbols of contemporary beauty standards and social aspirations. Their presence in advertisements lends credibility to the product, validating its authenticity and effectiveness. When a well-known figure like Maya Ali or Naseem Shah promotes a beauty product, their fame, expertise, social status and admired image are transferred to the brand or to the product and then to the consumer, shaping social perceptions and purchase decisions This creates a social message that beauty is linked to status, confidence, and public admiration. The integration of celebrities further reflects the power of media in shaping social norms, emphasising the desirability of beauty products as part of a broader cultural aspiration

Conclusion:

It is concluded that beauty is no longer a static cultural value but a dynamic construct that is continuously negotiated, performed, and commodified through media. The findings reveal that traditional cultural codes are increasingly being redefined through social semiotic shifts that align beauty with individual empowerment, modern success, and public recognition. Advertisements go beyond selling products they construct realities, shape gender roles, aspirations, and identity. Modern clothing and celebrity figures play a key role in blending tradition with modernity, making beauty practices appear essential for today's social and professional life. Male beauty, in particular, is reframed through masculine-coded visuals that allow skincare to coexist with toughness, discipline, and success, thereby bridging the gap between metrosexual aesthetics and conventional masculinity. Ultimately, beauty is no longer just about appearance; it is a symbolic system that constructs, reinforces, and occasionally resists dominant ideologies around gender, success, social value and identity.

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