

## SOCIO CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF MUZZ APP BILLBOARDS IN DEFYING MUSLIMS MARRIAGE NORMS

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### **Abstract**

*This study draws focus on how advertisements attract their audience by reflecting or reshaping culture and society. This research critically analyzes the Muzz App's Billboards to evaluate how these advertisements use humor, visuals, and discourse to challenge traditional Muslim marriage norms within an Islamic society. By putting tradition and modernity together, Muzz app's advertisements promote self arranged marriages as an alternative to traditional matchmaking practices. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory provides a theoretical framework to examine how these billboards interact with cultural context and influence societal behavior. Findings suggest that advertisements do not only promote the brands but also influence the cultural narratives and set the new norms in the society.*

### **1. Introduction**

Advertising is one of the most powerful forms of media in communication and marketing in today's digital world. Advertisements not only promote products, services, ideas and increase the sales, but also mean to shape consumer perceptions and societal norms. Particularly, Billboard advertisements are a highly visible and influential medium of advertising used to reach masses. Billboards tend to express cultural messages and influence social practices beyond their immediate commercial objectives (Mushtaq et al. 2021)

In Muslim societies marriages have long been governed by strict cultural and religious expectations. Parently arranged marriages, cousin marriages and even the pressure of marriage from the society have become cultural norms in these societies. In Muslim societies, billboard advertisements play a dual role by reflecting traditional norms and serving as vehicles for change. This is particularly evident in the digital and outdoor advertisements which establish new narratives that challenge societal norms and revise social practices like matchmaking and marriage (Islam, 2016).

Muzz App's billboard advertisements are redefining the landscape of Muslim marriage norms by presenting an innovative alternative to traditional marriage norms. This cultural shift does not reject moral, ethical and Islamic principles but instead bridges the tradition and modernity; and motivates youth to adopt to modern ideals within the framework of Islamic teachings. For instance, Muzz emphasizes the importance of individual agency within the sacred institution of marriage. This personal choice of individuals involved, aligns with the key principle of marriage laws in Islamic framework.

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory is applied for studying how advertisements interact with cultural contexts and how society responds to such bold advertisements. This theory suggests that culture and society play pivotal roles in shaping individual actions and decision-making processes. Muzz's advertisements hold this by addressing deeply ingrained cultural expectations around marriage and subtly promoting modern alternatives.

This study also investigates the discourse strategies used by Muzz App to attract the audience. By examining billboard advertisements, it explores how its billboards use humor to challenge the most sensitive norms in society; and how culturally resonant and familiar words are used to get popularity among the youth, its targeted audience. Through qualitative

thematic analysis, this research offers valuable insights into the socio-cultural impact of Muzz App's advertisements and their role in reshaping marriage narratives within Muslim communities.

### 1.1. Research Questions

1. How do Muzz App's advertisements use discourse to challenge traditional Muslim marriage norms?
2. What discursive strategies does Muzz App use to attract users in the Muslim matchmaking market?

### 2. Literature Review

The primary function of advertisements is to promote a brand and influence consumers (Shaikh et al. 2015). Advertisements sell products and reflect social and cultural norms by conveying underlying ideologies (Masood & Shafi, 2020). Language plays an important role in this regard, functioning as tools of tools. (Vygotsky, 1986). Language embeds hidden meanings and ideologies that make consumer decisions. (Masood et al. 2020). These meanings are often emotional in nature and influence the audience to perceive products and services (Shafi, 2019). This is especially apparent in advertisements that quietly reinforce societal norms and ideologies. They also shape consumer behavior by appealing to these values (Khalid, Bughio, & Kadri, 2019; Rifa'i, 2010). For example, advertisements frequently emphasize gender roles and stereotypes. Advertisements trigger consumers to align with the product's implied lifestyle. (Mushtaq et al., 2021), (Hussain et al., 2021). Furthermore, advertisements have been identified as carriers of societal ideologies, subtly normalizing specific behaviors and values within their cultural contexts (Islam, 2016). Besides ideology, advertisers employ various discourse strategies and marketing trends to generate brand loyalty and maximize profit (Khan et al., 2023). Emotional appeals, coupled with cultural symbols, are commonly used to foster a sense of belonging and community among targeted audiences. (Mahmood et al., 2021). In the case of Muzz App's billboards, these advertisements not only shape cultural norms and ideologies but also challenge marriage norms of traditional Muslim societies. By doing so, they engage young Muslim men and women to explore their platform and encourage self-arranged matchmaking within a religiously resonant framework (de Rooij, 2016).

#### 2.1. Past Researches

Masood et al. (2020) found that advertisements include underlying messages. These messages use emotions to attract consumers and influence their choices. Vantomme, Geuens, and Dewitte (2006) explored how advertisements often focus on gender roles, reinforce stereotypes, and present ideal lifestyles. This aligns with findings by Hussain et al. (2021), who noted that advertising practices often sustain stereotypes to establish traditional gender expectations.

Orth and Halancova (2004) studied gender portrayals in advertisements. They noticed that women are often objectified or shown as independent figures based on campaign goals. Such portrayals encourage conformity to societal expectations (Adorno, 2013). Anusha (2008) criticized the media for unfairly representing women and using objectification as a marketing strategy. Kilbourne (1999) highlighted this trend as contagious and forced women to pursue unattainable ideals at the expense of individuality.

Many researchers have analyzed gender representation in advertisements. Pandey, Garg, Kataria, and Dhasmana (2016) used discourse analysis to point out the ideological themes in advertisements. Fairclough's (1993) Model of Critical Discourse Analysis explored how advertisements reinforce power and gender inequality. Fatima et al. (2021) found that many advertisements sustain male dominance by portraying women as secondary figures. Similarly,

Grier and Kumanyika (2010) discussed how advertising leverages cultural cues to maintain social hierarchies

Ali et al. (2012) observed how advertisements reflect social norms. They explored that advertisements often use stereotypes to reinforce specific gender roles. Matthes et al. (2016) studied objectification in global television advertisements. They concluded that gender stereotypes remain consistent across cultures despite societal progress.

In Pakistan, Abid et al. (2016) examined billboard advertisements critically. They discovered that the advertisements are indicative of societal norms and cultural ideologies. Masood et al. (2021) pointed out that regional adverts tend to draw on traditional gender roles. Similarly, Mir et al. (2024) noted that ads on South Asia frequently engage with socio-religious themes to enhance cultural relatability. These studies inform us as to how commercials affect social norms and reflect cultural values. This research builds on these findings to explore how Muzz App's advertisements defy conventional Muslim marriage expectations. It examines how these ads synthesize contemporary values with Islamic values.

Existing researchers on billboard advertisements have applied different theoretical frameworks to analyze ideological and social messaging in them. Fairclough's (1993) 3D Model of Critical Discourse Analysis has been commonly used to examine how advertisements reinforce social expectations by analyzing texts on three different levels: description, interpretation, and explanation levels (Khalid et al., 2019). Furthermore, socio-semiotic theory (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) and semiotic frameworks (Saussure, 1983; Peirce, 1931) have been applied to explore how signs and symbols in advertisements put out hidden cultural values and ideologies, particularly regarding gender roles and consumer behavior (Rifa'i, 2010; Mushtaq et al., 2021).

Sociocultural Theory provides a framework for decoding how advertisements interact with and affect cultural contexts by stressing social interactions and cultural factors. These factors form individual beliefs, ideologies, and practices. Developed from Vygotsky's (1978) work, Sociocultural Theory focuses on the concept that cultural standards and social interactions influence behavior and identity. Vygotsky highlighted the significance of instruments such as language, cultural symbols, and shared practices in influencing individual cognition and social values. This approach is especially appropriate when examining advertisements, since they are cultural tools that mediate society's norms and affect personal decisions. Unlike semiotic or discourse models that mainly focus on interpreting signs and analyzing texts, Sociocultural Theory offers a real-world understanding of how advertising fits into broader social systems and gradually shapes communal values and personal decisions (de Rooij, 2016). In this study, sociocultural theory will take a closer look at how Muzz's advertisements push back against traditional marriage norms by encouraging self-arranged marriages within an Islamic context. This approach motivates young Muslims to embrace a path that balances cultural respect with modern independence.

While these frameworks provide valuable insights into how ads reflect and influence societal norms, there's still a significant gap in research when it comes to understanding how advertisements interact with cultural settings to shape behaviors and beliefs. This study will dive deeper into how Muzz App's ads challenge conventional Muslim marriage practices and promote alternative ways of matchmaking that stay true to Islamic principles while empowering individual choice. Ultimately, this research will shed light on Muzz's role in shaping contemporary marriage ideals within Muslim communities.

### **3. Data Analysis**

This section delves critically into the selected Muzz App's billboard advertisements, and explores how they question traditional Muslim marriage norms and encourage more

modern approaches to matchmaking. The analysis follows Sociocultural Theory, which highlights how societal tools, cultural practices, and language influence individual actions, reflecting the idea that social interactions and shared values help to shape community beliefs (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 88).

**Advertisement #1**

***“Pakistan mein 22 crore log hain aur tum abhi b single ho?”***

**(There are 220 million people in Pakistan and you are still single)**



This billboard humorously addresses the social pressure regarding singlehood within the context of the dense population of Pakistan. In countries like Pakistan, this social pressure is more evident on both genders, male and female. It mirrors Vygotsky's (1986) statement that social influences drive individual thinking. The true direction of the development of thinking is from the social to the individual (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 36). Using this social pressure of being single as a marketing slogan, Muzz directly engages individuals who feel left out due to cultural expectations of early marriage.

According to Khalid et al. (2019), humor in advertising engages audiences effectively by reducing resistance to challenging norms. By using humor and casual language, the ad reduces the stigma associated with being single, thus creating a sense of relatability among viewers.

This ad makes use of cultural artifacts, including language and humor, to negotiate the perception of the individual regarding the societal norm. It fits the multimodality framework emphasized by Hussain et al. (2021) since it argues for the mutual interplay between text and image in audience comprehension. The advertisement presents self-arranged marriage as a potential choice, undermining the strong belief that a person must be married to achieve social acceptance. Here, Vygotsky's concept of mediating tools is visible, as the advertisement uses words and images to challenge group norms and provide alternative views. The ad challenges societal pressure by reframing the narrative humorously. It presents Muzz as an empowering platform where individuals can independently take control of their matchmaking journey.

**Advertisement #2**

***“Cousins ko choro, koi aur dhoondo”***

**(Forget the cousin and go find someone else)**



This ad directly critiques cousin marriages, a very common practice in many traditional Muslim societies. Bold and conversational language invites the viewer to question traditional norms against broader possibilities.

Cousin marriages are deeply ingrained in family traditions, and mostly these cousin marriages are arranged by parents. This ad reflects the concept of Sociocultural Theory by depicting how social interactions and cultural constructs shape the norms and practices. The conversational tone of "koi aur dhoondo" makes viewers question traditional marriage norms and consider alternatives.

According to Hussain et al. (2021), advertisements addressing sensitive topics must balance critique with relatability. This ad achieves that by using humor to reduce confrontation while promoting inclusivity. It breaks down traditional beliefs gently rather than challenging them aggressively. The ad also resonates with Schmitt's (1999) emphasis on affective experiences, which enhance audience engagement by appealing to emotions and shared cultural values.

This advertisement thus markets the ideology of having greater options under the Islamic ethos in response to the traditionalism of family-led marriage arrangements and cousin marriages. It markets Muzz as being culturally sensitive, yet a very progressive answer for modern marriage arranging.

### **Advertisement #3**

***Shaadi ke liye Jugaad nahi, Muzz chahiye!***

**(For marriage, you need Muzz, not shortcuts)**



This billboard contrasts informal matchmaking methods with Muzz's structured approach. The ad employs *situated cultural tools* like colloquial language (**Jugaad**) to highlight the inefficiencies of traditional matchmaking methods. It leverages Vygotsky's

notion of *scaffolding*, providing a systematic alternative to traditional practices. The ad critiques outdated practices while aligning with Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) notion of semiotics, where language and imagery work together to convey layered meanings. It also aligns with the cultural shift toward technology and professionalism by positioning Muzz as a reliable platform.

**Advertisement #4**

***“Waqt agaya apni shaadi ka bandu’bast khud karnay ka”***  
**(The time to arrange your own marriage has come.)**



This ad promotes personal agency in marriage choices, and defies the conventional Muslim marriage norms. It directly appeals to viewers, shapes their perceptions about new norms and urges them to take control of their marital choices.

The ad reflects Vygotsky’s focus on agency through cultural tools. In Islamic societies like Pakistan, parents are involved in the whole match making process. By promoting personal decision-making, it disrupts the traditional power dynamics dominated by parents. The assertive tone of the ad encourages viewers to embrace independence, aligning with Schmitt’s (1999) concept of "**ACT experiences**," which are designed to inspire behavioral change. It also aligns with the Islamic principle of marriages where agency of both the individuals is necessary for nikah.

Centered on the theme of individual empowerment, the ad also aligns with Khalid et al. (2019), who argue that advertisements promoting self-reliance are more effective in driving cultural change than those advocating dependence. By incorporating Islamic values, the ad strikes a balance between modern independence and traditional expectations. It positions Muzz as a culturally sensitive platform that supports contemporary values of autonomy while respecting Islamic traditions.

**Advertisement #5**

***“Log kya kahenge? Hum Muzz pe milay the”***  
**(what will people say ,we met on muzz )**



This advertisement squarely addresses the fear of social pressure which is included in "*Log kya kahenge*". Crossing that out symbolizes the rejection of societal pressure and urges viewers to take their decisions without any pressure. The next sentence "*Hum Muzz pr Mile the*" makes this date meeting normal in the society suggesting that, it does not matter whether we meet on muzz or some other conventional platforms for match making.

This advertisement employs language as a cultural broker to subvert the expectations of society. The shift from judgment to empowerment is consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) perception of language as an instrument for the transformation of societal attitudes. The employment of the familiar success story, "*Hum Muzz par mile thay*" is consistent with Vygotsky's focus on common cultural practices in shaping individual actions.

This ad takes societal judgment, a primary deterrent to self-arranged marriages, and rediscovers it to redefine societal expectations. According to Hussain et al. (2021), such narrative changes are crucial for countering ingrained norms. It places Muzz as the platform that overcomes these obstacles to modern matchmaking.

**Advertisement #6**

**"Rishtay Whatsapp pe nahi, Muzz pe buntay hain"**  
(Relations are not built on WhatsApp but on Muz)



This ad critiques the informal use of WhatsApp for matchmaking and contrasts it with Muzz's professional and structured approach. The ad appeals to younger audiences because they value efficiency and reliability.

The ad illustrates how technological innovation (cultural tools) reconfigures traditional practices. It illustrates the shift from amateur to professional sites, riding on Vygotsky's cultural evolution using tech like Muzz.

This ad critiques the inadequacy of informal platforms and positions Muzz as a progressive and culturally aligned solution. It aligns with Schmitt's (1999) "THINK experiences," which challenge traditional thought patterns. It addresses the need for professionalism in modern matchmaking.

**Advertisement #7**

**“Muslims! Arrange your own marriage before your parents do”**



This ad humorously critiques the traditional reliance on family-arranged marriages, urging individuals to take charge of their own matchmaking.

This ad emphasizes *individual agency* within a collective cultural framework. By addressing the audience as Muslims, it fosters a sense of shared identity while encouraging independence. The ad aligns with Vygotsky's notion of cultural tools shaping both individual and collective practices.

The ad's humor reduces resistance to challenging norms, aligning with Schmitt's (1999) affective and social-identity experiences. It positions Muzz as a platform blending cultural values with modern agency, encouraging a balanced approach to matchmaking.

**Advertisement #8**

**“Sab ko bhai bolti raho gi kya? Bus bhi karo aur shadi karo!”**

**(Will you keep calling everyone 'brother'? Enough already—just get married!)**



This ad humorously critiques the culture habit of addressing male acquaintances as



"bhai" for avoiding romantic undertones. As per traditional muslim society, women address men as Brother while showing a culturally-dependent mind. (Vygotsky, 1986) Therefore, by crossing out the line, the advertisement goes against all the traditional parameters of Muslim societies and encourages openness in their relationships .

This advertisement uses language as a tool to change the perception of society. It is against the linguistic norms that create platonic boundaries. It supports Vygotsky's idea of language as a mediator for cultural and behavioral transformation.

According to Islam (2016), such advertisements reshape cultural narratives by addressing implicit biases. The ad promotes openness in relationships while respecting cultural sensitivities, positioning Muzz as a progressive yet culturally aligned platform.

#### **Advertisement #9**

***“Rishta aunty hu, rishta bakwas laoun gi magar paise puray lu gi!”***

***(I am the matchmaker aunt-terrible proposals guaranteed, but my fee? Always premium!)***



Social interactions and cultural tools develop humans' cognition. (Vygotsky, 1986) This ad is making a new perception of match making by addressing the inefficiencies of traditional match making practices. In South Asian culture, if one wants to marry outside the family, *rishtay wali anti* ( matchmaker aunt) acts as a bridge between the both families, groom and bride's; and makes this match possible. Her job is to search suitable matches, and she charges from both families.

This advertisement critiques the traditional matchmaking practices, particularly the role of the matchmaker aunt . Through satire, the advertisement acts as a scaffold and advises viewers to not rely on matchmaker aunts because they charge a premium and take terrible matches. It challenges this traditional matchmaking practice of arranged marriage outside the family by leveraging the vygotsky's principles of the ZPD and scaffolding; it provides Muzz as a modern alternative for self arranged marriages.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This study examines the billboard advertisements of Muzz App as a challenge to traditional Muslim marriage norms like cousin marriages, parental involvement in the choice of marriage, societal pressure of being married and arranged marriages through matchmaker aunts. By challenging these traditional norms, Muzz billboard ads promote individuality and self-reliance, encouraging youth to use modern ways of match making . From a Sociocultural Theory perspective, these advertisements act as scaffolding tools helping individuals transition from traditional arranged marriages to modern self-arranged matchmaking. They guide audiences through the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) by presenting new

marriage norms in a way that is relatable, engaging, and non-confrontational. The findings reveal that advertising is not just a marketing tool but also a cultural force and shapes new narratives about marriage in Muslim societies. Muzz advertisements use humor, relatable language, and culturally embedded references to attract the audience.

Beyond its cultural influence, Muzz's approach has practical implications for the digital matchmaking industry. It highlights a shift in consumer expectations, showing how modern Muslim audiences seek matchmaking platforms that respect religious values while offering personal agency. Other matchmaking apps may adopt similar advertising strategies to appeal to culturally conservative yet digitally active audiences.

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