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**A SEMIOTIC STUDY OF CULTURAL
(MIS)REPRESENTATION IN THE TELEVISION
ADVERTISEMENTS OF MULTINATIONAL
COMPANIES IN PAKISTAN: A CASE STUDY**

BY

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**A thesis submitted to the Department of English,
Faculty of Languages & Literature, International
Islamic University, Islamabad, in partial
fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of
M.Phil in English.**



**INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY
ISLAMABAD, PAKISTAN**

February, 2011



Accession No TH8040

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1. Women in mass media

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Muhammad Tahir Mazari

This work is dedicated to all those who are
struggling to make this world a better place than
they have found it and to those who are keeping
their candles lit.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Above all else, I owe everything that I have and whatever I am to Almighty Allah, Who showered my sinful soul with countless blessings and to Whom I have deepest gratitude.

No words can express my sense of thankfulness to Muhammad (PBUH), the last Prophet of Allah, whose enduring conviction and rebellion against the prevalent system of ignorance and injustice serve as beacon light for the rest of humanity.

I am hugely indebted to:

My father, who showed me that a man can make a world out of nothing if he only sets his mind to it.

My mother, for her unending love and sincerity that only a mother can have.

My sisters, for their love and compassion.

My wife, for her limitless cooperation that she extended my way during this arduous task and for bringing meaning into my life.

My daughter, Arfa, for being the light of my life and the A.C. of my heart.

Ms Riffat, for holding my hand and helping me take my first steps on the path of knowledge.

Muhammad Asif Gondal, for everything he did for me, and for those too he did not (which I am at a loss to tell).

All my precious friends whose presence around lightens up the darkness of life.

Above all, my supervisor, Muhammad Safeer, for his patient guidance and criticism that helped me improve this work.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

“...we have entered a deceptive world in which an entire culture labours assiduously at its counterfeit.”

(Baudrillard: 2001; 65)

1.1 Background and Problem

Media is one of the most potent forces that have emerged in the twentieth century to shape our lives and manufacture public opinion. In fact the influence of media on people's lives can hardly be over-emphasized since it has permeated into the various dimensions of our collective existence. Media's influence in determining the ways in which we perceive the world is duly recognized by Philip Rayner *et al.* (2001) in these words.

...we live in a 'mediated' society where many of our ideas about the world, knowledge of what is happening and perhaps most importantly, values come from beyond our individual daily or immediate experience, usually via the media.

(Rayner, *et al.*: 2001; 1)

The development of media in Pakistan has increased the transition in Pakistani society particularly over the last one decade due to the phenomenal growth of electronic media. The effect of print media (newspapers, weekly magazines etc.) on the lives of people has been limited to a more literate part of the populace. On the other hand, the electronic media has a far wider range of influence on the lives

of the common people in Pakistan since one needs no special skill for watching a talk show or a debate.

Television was first introduced in Pakistan in 1964 and at that time, there was only one television channel which aired a few programs in the evening. The channel was strictly monitored by the government. For a very long time, independent television channels were not allowed to run. After the plane crash of Pakistan's military dictator Zia-ul Haq, when the democratic government of Pakistan People's Party was formed, the way for independent channels was paved. However, only one such channel was allowed to run. Ironically enough, it was during the period of the next military dictator Pervez Musharraf that many independent television channels were issued licenses to run.

The rapid growth of electronic media in Pakistan, particularly during the last few years, has greatly affected the society of Pakistan. Electronic media are the most effective means of mass communication and there is a growing realization of its ability to form public opinion. In the countries where majority of the population already had access to a number of television channels, researchers have been extensively engaged in exploring the ways media influence the lives, cultures and the world view of masses.

In this study, however, my focus is not the larger socio-political role that the media has been playing in Pakistan; rather, my aim is to focus a very significant

aspect in which media have been registering its intrusive presence, that is, advertisements. Advertising is primarily aimed at persuading and convincing people into buying products and to influence the views of people about some specific product. However, the effects of television advertisements are not merely confined to consumerism but are multifarious and cover a variety of the aspects of viewers' lives including socio-cultural and ideological ones. In fact, television advertisements are responsible for the way people perceive the world around them and at the same time they can be used as effective means to propagate and promote certain behaviours and attitudes. These advertisements create a sense of 'false needs' and then emphasize the satisfaction of those false needs. Consequently, the viewers are made to struggle in order to fulfill these 'false needs' and they do so at the peril of their moral and ethical values. Advertisements can not only influence the very life-style of a community through subliminal messages that are hidden in them but can also indoctrinate people with certain ideologies.

Although much work has been carried out on advertisements and researchers have explored the ways in which television advertisements influence the public opinion, there is a lack of research in the context of the indigenous cultures of Pakistan and about the far-reaching effects that television advertisements have on society in general and on the minds and life-style of people in specific.¹

The subliminal messages that the electronic media campaigns imprint on the minds of the masses and as a result influence their culture and thinking patterns are the subject of present study. It is hoped that this study will bring about awareness in the general public regarding the influence of media on their lives and, if disseminated for public at large, it will convince people to develop a habit of remaining cautious while watching the apparently harmless box that occupies a very small space within their homes but whose intrusive influence is rarely realized. This study is carried out with the spirit of developing a resistance among people against the pervasions of a homogenizing culture that is invading the cultural landscape of Pakistan. The need is to alert the public to the dangers inherent in such ad campaigns as they have the potential to dislocate traditional moral values and local cultures.

1.2 Research Questions

In this study, I intend to explore the various ways in which the television advertisements of multinational companies and corporations have been influencing the culture of Pakistan during the last few years. It is also my intention to investigate into the following research questions:

1. How do advertisements influence the world-view and opinion of people beyond their primary function of increasing consumerism for some product?
2. In what ways the television advertisements of multinational companies are (mis)representing the local culture of Pakistan and influencing it?

For this purpose I shall employ the semiotic theory for the analysis of the television advertisement campaigns of a multinational company, The Coca-Cola Company, that have been appearing on television channels licensed by the government of Pakistan over the period of two years i.e. 2007-2009.

However, it is pertinent to note here that the misrepresentation of the indigenous cultures of Pakistan is not specific to the advertisements of only one multinational company i.e. The Coca-Cola Company but that other such companies also promote a foreign and a westernized culture at the cost of the indigenous cultures. The Pepsi Co. which is another international corporation producing beverages at a mass scale has been promoting its sales through advertisements for decades. These advertisements also tend to ignore the indigenous cultures and promote an elitist culture in order to encourage the consumers to engage in a struggle for climbing the social stairs at any cost.

It is my hypothesis that the television advertisements of multinational companies and corporations in Pakistan are misrepresenting the local cultures that are quite diverse. Moreover, the culture that is projected in such advertisements is that of an elite class that comprises of a mere fraction of the population of Pakistan and is westernized and removed from the cultural norms of this region.

1.3 Research Methodology

In this research, I intend to explore the ways television advertisements employ a

variety of signs to communicate the subliminal messages. Therefore, it is most appropriate to adopt a method and a theoretical/critical approach which aims to study signs and the ways they operate for the purpose of communication. Semiotics, which is the study of signs is the most suitable theory available for the purpose of exploring how various signs, verbal and visual, are used in advertisements.

It is pertinent to point out here that most of the cultural (mis)representation takes place in the advertisements of the products of multinational corporations; hence for the purpose of this research two such advertisements that have been appearing on Pakistani television channels since 2007 will be taken for analysis. The multinational company that is selected for this study has an international standing among the fraternity of corporations functioning globally. It is The Coca-Cola Company, a global leader in the beverage industry and one of the largest corporates in the United States of America which produces soft drinks and beverages for consumption in Pakistan also. For the purpose of delimiting this research, only two advertisements of The Coca-Cola Company are selected for analysis. The duration of these advertisements will be more than twenty seconds each.

Since this research is a case study, therefore, despite focusing on the two advertisements of the Coca-Cola Company, other advertisements from other multinational companies will also be referred to where necessary in order to

support my argument.

Since the purpose of this study is to explore a specific aspect of television advertising in some depth, my research is the case study that ultimately, is likely to yield a qualitative analysis. I shall also be employing critical theory, particularly in taking up such issues as cultural identity, cultural relativism and representation.

1.4 Framework and Chapter Division

The chapter division for this research will be as such:

1. Chapter 1: Introduction

In this chapter, I shall briefly develop the background of the problem and introduce the hypothesis which the study will either prove or confute. Besides, the chapter will also discuss the research methodology, the significance and the delimitations of the study and the way the work will be organized into various chapters.

2. Chapter 2: Literature Review (Mass Culture, Mass Society and Popular Culture: An Overview)

This chapter consists of an account of the work that already exists within this field of enquiry and of some of the theories of 'mass culture', 'mass society, and 'popular culture' pertinent to this research i.e. the Frankfurt School, the Marxist views, the Postmodernist theory and the structuralist theory about popular culture. It will, at the same time, provide an

overview of some of the key terms relevant to the research area so as to familiarize the reader with the academic environment in which the study is carried out.

3. Chapter 3: The problem of (Mis)representation: The Politics of Media Semiotics.

This chapter will mainly focus on the issue of representation and misrepresentation and the political dimensions of these issues, since cultural representation is a highly contested site. This chapter will also entail the role of media semiotics in (mis)representation resulting into the blurring of the dividing line between the image and reality.

4. Chapter 4: Cultural (Mis)representations in Pakistani Television Advertisements: Some Case Studies.

This chapter will consist of a semiotic analysis of the television advertisements of The Coca-Cola Company and examine the signs employed in these advertisements that have their signified concepts culturally determined and ascertain whether these advertisements represent the indigenous culture of Pakistan in a truthful manner or not. Besides, in this chapter I shall also examine the ways in which the signs communicate messages subliminally to the viewers and their effects on people's behavior. I have attached the electronic copy of the two ads with this dissertation.

5. Chapter 5: Conclusion

The final chapter will give the conclusion of the whole study revisiting the research questions earlier mentioned and see whether the answers to those questions have been sought or not. It will also give suggestions for further investigation into the area of enquiry.

1.5 Delimitation of the Study

As is suggested by the very title of this research, the study incorporates a number of various disciplines including media studies, cultural studies, linguistics, anthropology, sociology, postcolonial studies etc. However, taking into account all these disciplines is not possible and requires study at a much larger scale. Hence, during the course of this work, I shall be limiting myself to only those areas which are pertinent to the research questions mentioned above with only a passing reference to the other related fields where necessary.

Furthermore, I shall be limiting myself to the electronic media due to the scope of its influence on general masses. The effects of the print media are limited to a more literate part of the population but the influence of electronic media is far deeper and wider specifically owing to the messages it can convey subliminally to the viewers. Therefore, this research will be targeting only the advertisements appearing on the electronic media and the advertisements of the multinational companies since much of cultural misrepresentation is done in the television advertisements of such companies.

It has been a general observation that the local companies are, by and large, more sensitive to the values and traditions of people and their advertisements are intended to increase consumerism for their products. However, the aim of multinational corporations is not just to add the number of people who buy their products but also to impose a completely different lifestyle on them. It is for this reason that I shall choose the advertisements of a multinational corporation as a case study for the purpose of this research.

Although television has been effective in influencing the life-styles of people since its inception, the rapid growth of electronic media recently paved the way for the multinational companies to encroach upon the public sphere in a number of ways. These corporations are extensively engaged in a competition to persuade their viewers to buy their products and a boom has been observed in the growth of such corporations especially over the period of last two years. It is because of this that I shall confine myself to the television advertisements of The Coca-Cola Company that have appeared during the period of last two years i.e. from 2007 to 2009.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study is intended to benefit scholars and academicians and the populace in particular that is directly influenced by the onslaught of a culture and a lifestyle that treats them as a potential market only. At the same time, questions of

ideology can not be dismissed as in the case of such cultural productions ideology does play a significant role in order to affect social change. Such “MacDonaldization” of culture has far reaching economic, cultural and ideological repercussions for a nation. The theme is important enough to be taken up for a serious study.

As for academicians and researchers, this study is aimed to not only provide them with an area of research not yet much explored within the local context but also to emphasize the importance of carrying out further study in it. The growth of electronic media in Pakistan has made it imperative for researchers and scholars to systematically examine its role in the lives of people and to inform them about its negative influence on their minds so that they can train their minds not to be influenced by everything they see on television

NOTES

¹ It is my contention in this work that there is no singular culture of Pakistan and it is due to diverse cultural pattern of the country, hence the use of the plural "cultures". A more detailed discussion will be given in the next chapter under the heading of Pakistani Culture.

Chapter 2:
Review of Literature
(Mass Culture, Mass Society and Popular Culture: An
Overview)

Since this research is an integrated study incorporating various fields of enquiry, it is pertinent to explain the relevant key terms and to provide a detailed account of the issues and debates related to these fields from a critical perspective. This chapter is, therefore, going to provide the readers with a detailed account of the different terms used in this research and thus acclimatize them with the academic environment in which the study is conducted. For this purpose, I have divided this chapter in three main sections, each dealing with the terms of its relevant area. The first section is about the area of Cultural Studies and the terms related to this field. The second section deals with Media and Advertising, while the third section is related to Semiotics and its application for a cultural analysis.

2.1. Culture and Cultural Studies

As an academic discipline cultural studies evolved during the middle of the twentieth century and was “principally concerned with the nature of mass culture and the workings of culture industries.” (Marshall; 1998)¹ In his introduction to the second edition of his book *The Cultural Studies Reader*, Simon During contends that the discipline of cultural studies is a “field within multidisciplinary” and that other disciplines like politics, geography and

literature should be incorporated in it (During: 1999; 28-9). He believes that even though the discipline of cultural studies is not a formal academic one, it provides us with a perspective to revisit other disciplines from a political angle. The reason for considering cultural studies as a “field within multidisciplinaryity” is due to his belief that it “moves across” the boundaries of various disciplines and thus informs us of the way such a movement develops, both concord and conflict within disciplines.

Even though the term ‘cultural studies’ may broadly be used to denote a study of all the aspects of culture encompassing “the diverse ways in which culture is understood and analyzed, for example, sociology, history, ethnography and literary criticism, and even sociobiology, it may also, more precisely, be taken to refer to a distinctive field of academic enquiry.” (Andrew and Sedgwick: 2004; 100) Since this research involves a detailed discussion of some of the terms related to cultural studies, for example ‘mass culture’, ‘popular culture’, ‘culture industry’, ‘mass society’, it will be pertinent to look at these terms separately. However, before elaborating what ‘mass culture’ is and what is meant by the ‘culture industry’, it will be appropriate to look at the term ‘culture’ itself first.

2.1.1 Culture

The term ‘culture’ is quite problematic since it resists any attempt at reducing it to some specific definition.² The reason for the difficulty in defining the term “culture” is due to the fact that there is disagreement as to which of the things

should be included and excluded from the term. Although there are a number of ways in which the term has been defined, it will be pointless to look at all of those definitions here. It would suffice to look at a few representative definitions to see how differently the term has been defined by various theorists and to admit that most of these definitions try to include all those aspects of human life which can be brought under the umbrella term of 'culture'.³

The term has been defined as:

The social production and reproduction of sense, meaning and consciousness. The sphere of meaning, which unifies the spheres of production (economics) and social relations (politics).

(O'Sullivan *et al.*: 1994; 68)

Although this definition attempts to encompass everything which may have any relevance to the sense in which the word 'culture' is generally used, it focuses on the way culture is seen as a verbal construct rather than having an independent existence outside language. It is suggestive of the influence of post-structuralist worldview and ignores many important aspects of culture such as the customs and traditions which are practiced in a society beyond the domain of the use of language.

The editors of *Key Concepts in Cultural Theory* recognize the difficulty which one faces when one sets out on the task of defining an evasive term like culture because of its acquiring new meanings in different contexts. They have, nevertheless, tried to define the term like this:

Culture is the complex everyday world we all encounter and through which we all move. Culture begins at the point at which humans surpass whatever is simply given in their natural inheritance.

(Andrew and Sedgewick: 2004; 102)

This definition presents culture as a medium in which we exist and thus tries to cover every aspect of our lives making it even more difficult to pin it down to some specific things. The second part of the definition tries to limit the range of culture to the things which “surpass whatever is simply given in their natural inheritance”, but fails to make it clear as to what is meant by ‘natural inheritance’, leading to further ambiguity. Without explaining what it means by ‘natural inheritance’, it is impossible to ascertain as to what is implied by the word ‘surpass’.

Chris Barker is of the view that the reason for the term ‘culture’ acquiring new meanings is that the term has been talked about in a number of different ways, and since theorists and critics will keep on talking about it in different ways, the term will keep acquiring different meanings. He writes,

The multitudinous ways that culture has been talked about within cultural studies include culture as a whole way of life; as like a language; as constituted by representation; as a tool; as practices; as artifacts; as spatial arrangements; as power; as high or low; as mass and as popular....The concept of culture is thus political and contingent and to explore its meaning(s) is to trace its uses and the consequences that follow from this.

(Barker: 2004; 44)

Barker has rightly pointed out the political implications of the attempts to define or use the term culture.⁴

Edward Said, in the introduction of his book *Culture and Imperialism* has attempted to cover the various aspects that the term refers to by adopting two different things that the term means. He writes:

First of all it means all those practices, like the arts of description, communication, and representation, that have relative autonomy from the economic, social and political realms and that often exist in aesthetic forms, one of whose principle aims is pleasure.

(Said: 1994; xii)

Said elaborates it further by including both the “popular stock_of lore” and “specialized knowledge available in learned disciplines”. This definition of Said in the first sense, quite clearly establishes as to which of the things are included and which are excluded from the domain of the term. However, he realizes that the term cannot be fully explained without referring to the sense in which Matthew Arnold used it in nineteenth century. He further writes while explaining the sense in which he uses the term in his book:

Second...culture is a concept that includes a refining and elevating element, each society’s reservoir of the best that has been known and thought...

(Said: 1994; xii)

Thus, Said tries to incorporate the issues of ‘what culture is’ and ‘what it does’, both in his definition of the term and believes that culture in the latter sense becomes a source of identity. It is in these two senses that the term ‘culture’ will be used in this work since the definition comes closest to covering the wide range of influence it holds on human life.

2.1.2 Mass Society and Mass Culture

When the French Aristocrat Alexis de Tocqueville toured the United States of America in 1830s, he noticed that there was remarkable similarity in the ideas and values of people there. He was able to speculate at that time that such a society is prone to falling victim to a herd mentality which he termed as 'the tyranny of the majority'.(qtd. in Marshall) Envisioning the state of such a society Tocqueville states that such a society is just,

...an innumerable host of men, all alike and equal, - endlessly hastening after petty and vulgar pleasures with which they fill their souls. Each of them, withdrawn into himself, is virtually a stranger to the fate of all the others. For him, his children and personal friends comprise the entire human race. As for the remainder of his fellow citizens, he lives alongside them but does not see them. He touches them but does not feel them. He exists only in himself and for himself, and if he still has a family, he no longer has a country.

(Tocqueville: 2004; 818)

Tocqueville was trying to describe a society in which individuals existed relatively independently without much consciousness of being part of a larger community owing to the effects of industrialization and urbanization. His concern for the modus vivendi in post-industrial societies was shared by many other prominent nineteenth century sociologists. Emile Durkheim was able to diagnose anomie (an absence, breakdown, confusion, or conflict in the norms of a society) in the new social order (Durkheim: 1982), while Max Weber believed that it was the dead hand of bureaucracy that was at work (Weber: 1978).

Accounting for the rise of mass society and its reasons, Dominic Strinati writes,

The eradication of agrarian based work tied to the land, the destruction of the tightly knit village community, the decline of religion and the secularisation of societies associated with the growth of scientific knowledge, the spread of mechanised, monotonous and alienating factory work, the establishment of patterns of living in large anomic cities populated by anonymous crowds, the relative absence of moral integration (some of the things entailed for mass society theory by the processes of industrialisation and urbanisation) lie behind the emergence of mass society and mass culture.

(Strinati: 2003; 6)

Strinati has summed up here the reasons for the emergence of such a society and placed it in historical perspective. A term closely associated with the term 'mass society' and which Strinati has mentioned with it is 'mass culture'. Simply put, it is the culture of the people that constitute 'mass society', and is defined as a set of "values and ideas that arise from common exposure of a population to the same cultural activities, communications media, music and art, etc."(Online Dictionary of Social Sciences) However, there is a general agreement among most of the social theorists (MacDonald; 1957, Strinati; 2003; Mills; 1956,.....) that mass culture does not simply "arise", as is suggested in the definition quoted above, from the masses themselves and their exposure to "the same cultural activities, communications media, music and art, etc." The issue is much more complicated and political than it appears. MacDonald has explicitly stated the complex nature of the issue at hand in these words, "Mass Culture is imposed from above. It is fabricated by technicians hired by businessmen; its audiences are passive consumers, their participation limited to the choice between buying and not buying." (MacDonald: 1957; 60)

This statement of MacDonald emphasises the class struggle which is at the heart of the issue of mass culture. The “above” here clearly refers to the elite class of the society that manipulates and determines the tastes of the masses by first owning their culture and then giving it back to them in a state that suits the interests of this elite class. Strinati elaborates this point further when he writes that, “What happens is that those who control the institutions of power pander to the tastes of the mass in order to control them.” (Strinati: 2003; 8-9) He believes that this control over the masses is facilitated by the breaking-down of the institutions that provide people with a common basis for their values and morality in the post-industrial and urban setting. Since the modern societies are “atomised” and individuals within a society belonging to different backgrounds do not find “appropriate mediatory organisations” (Strinati: 2003; 7) they are “vulnerable to being manipulated and exploited by core institutions like the mass media and popular culture.” (Strinati: 2003; 7)

The elite class of the society takes advantage of this situation and creates an atmosphere of “amoral immediacy of rational individualism and secular anomie associated with the rise of mass consumption and mass culture...” (Strinati: 2003; 7) It is not very difficult to deduce the motives behind this. Apart from maintaining a status quo that protects their vested interests and the power structure of the society, since the corporations and companies which produce objects for the consumption of masses are owned by this elite class, creating an atmosphere and a culture that unconsciously lures the masses into buying their

products results into wealth accumulating in their hands. Mass culture, thus becomes a commodity that must be produced for mass consumption.

Simplifying the whole thing, Strinati states that “mass culture is...produced by mass production industrial techniques and is marketed for a profit to a mass public of consumers. It is commercial culture, mass produced for a mass market.” (Strinati: 2003; 10) The result of this commercialising of culture is that the target of such culture, or the audience for this mass culture is seen as “a mass of passive consumers” (Strinati: 2003; 12)⁵ which gradually moves away from their needs which are substituted with their desires. Mass culture, which is superficial and shallow, renders intellectual challenge and stimulation as redundant and unnecessary.⁶ MacDonald, while elucidating this point states;

it is a debased, trivial culture that voids both the deep realities (sex, death, failure, tragedy) and also the simple, spontaneous pleasures, since the realities would be too real and the pleasures too *lively* to induce...a narcotized acceptance of Mass Culture and of the commodities it sells as a substitute for the unsettling and unpredictable (hence unstable) joy, tragedy, wit, change, originality and beauty of real life. The masses, debauched by several generations of this sort of thing, in turn come to demand trivial and comfortable cultural products.

(MacDonald: 1957; 72-3)

Mass culture, therefore, puts no demands on its consumers to engage into any intellectual activity and makes thinking irrelevant, ensuring that there are no dissenting voices in the society against the hegemonic control of the elite class over the power structures of the society apart from encouraging commercialism and celebrating consumerism. This is what MacDonald also meant when he wrote

that mass culture “is fabricated by technicians hired by businessmen; its audiences are passive consumers, their participation limited to the choice between buying and not buying”. (MacDonald: 1957; 60)

2.1.3 Popular Culture

A term commonly equated with “mass culture” is ‘popular culture’ and is usually defined as “the culture that appeals to, or that is most comprehensible by, the general public...” (Edgar and Sedgwick: 2004; 285) However, Edgar and Sedgwick also recognise that such a simple definition tends to hide a number of complexities regarding the use of the term in cultural studies. Popular culture is generally posited either with some specific form of culture or opposed to it. Therefore, there may be found varying degrees of meaning associated with the term ‘popular culture’ which is sometimes related to folk culture, mass culture or high culture. (Edgar and Sedgwick: 2004; 285)

Raymond Williams has identified four different meanings of the word ‘popular’ in which it is used. The simplest of these is the most common sense in which the word is used by most of the people, i.e. things that are “well-liked by many people.” (Williams: 1983; 237) It can also refer to practices and objects that are generally considered base and unworthy as opposed to what comprises the elite or “high” culture—that is, the culture of the wealthy and the well-educated. The third sense in which the term can be used is a more commercialised one and Williams also points it out. It is in the sense of “work deliberately setting out to win favour with the people.” (Williams: 1983; 237) Commenting on this third use

of the term Harrington and Bielby write, “In this usage, popular culture is explicitly commercial: it is work that is produced to be consumed.” (Harrington & Bielby: 2004; 2) Finally, the term can be used to refer to “the culture actually made by people for themselves.” (Williams: 1983; 237)⁷

The development of mass media during the late twentieth century has led to a number of debates about popular culture. One of these is about the ambiguity related to the term regarding its being ‘good’ or ‘bad’ due to the politics involved. The editors of *Key Concepts in Communication and Cultural Studies*, while commenting on this ambiguity write, “The popularity (ubiquitousness) of the mass media in particular has resulted in a recurring ambiguity in both academic and public debate about whether the products of the media are good because they’re popular, or bad because they’re popular (the ‘more means worse’ idea).” (O’Sullivan *et al.*: 2002; 232) Commenting upon the two aspects of this ambiguity, they further state;

The ambiguity has two aspects. First, there is ambiguity about the extent to which popular culture is *imposed on* people in general (by media corporations or state agencies), or *derived from* their own experiences, tastes, habits, and so on. Second, there is ambiguity about the extent to which popular culture is merely an expression of a powerless and subordinate class position, or an autonomous and potentially liberating source of alternative ways of seeing and doing that can be opposed to dominant or official culture.

(O’Sullivan *et al.*: 2002; 232)

The editors of the book are clearly alluding to the two diametrically opposed positions which theorists generally tend to have while debating the issue of popular culture. One of these positions views popular culture from the perspective

that tries to explore the political dynamics of modern social life exposing the ways in which class struggle defines the structure of modern societies. The very idea of popular culture being “*imposed on people in general*” is suggestive of the manipulation of the tastes and aesthetics of people through the use of mass media. This position also views the masses as “powerless and subordinate”, a view upheld by Strinati in these words;

The audience is conceived of as a mass of passive consumers, prone to the manipulative persuasions of the mass media, submissive to the appeals to buy mass-produced commodities made by mass culture, supine before the false pleasures of mass consumption, and open to the commercial exploitation which motivates mass culture.

(Strinati; 2003; 12)

The second position which is referred to by the editors of *Key Concepts in Communication and Cultural Studies*, ignores the political aspect of the issue and emphasises the more simplistic approach towards the issue. The theorists (During: 1993; 1-25, Curran, Morley and Walkerdine: 1996; 1-5, Fiske: 1989; 1-2) which uphold this position view popular culture as genuinely emerging from the experiences of the people themselves and as a “potentially liberating source of alternative ways of seeing and doing that can be opposed to dominant or official culture.” (O’Sullivan *et al*: 2002; 232) It is now a “widely-accepted claim that consumers of cultural texts are not passive dupes but rather active participants in the creation of meaning.” (Harrington & Bielby: 2004; 4)

However, in this research, it is the former of the two positions which is upheld as one of the aims of this research is to explore the ways in which the dominant class of the society manipulates and controls the tastes of the masses and through the use of mass media turns their 'desires' into their 'needs'.

2.1.4 Pakistani Culture

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan came into being on 14th August, 1947 as a result of the division of former British India. The ideological foundations of the country have been pivotal in determining the cultural heritage of its people, who, despite belonging to various ethnic backgrounds, share its aims and ideals.

Although it is not possible to define the contours of the 'culture' of Pakistan, since such an attempt will inevitably be made on the presumption that there is a single, monolithic culture of the people of Pakistan which is not the case, one can yet try to look at the various dimensions of Pakistani culture.⁸ Muhammad Yusuf Abbasi has tried to sum up the issues related to the culture(s) of Pakistan by raising a number of questions. He writes,

How old is Pakistani culture? How should Pakistani culture be defined in terms of space and time? Is it a brand new creation on the ethnological map? Does it go back to five thousand years to the Indus Civilization? Is it purely a Muslim culture? How is it different from the culture of Muslims now living in Bharat? Why Pakistani culture is riddled with so many inner contradictions? Is it one culture or a conglomerate of regional cultures?

(Abbasi: 1992; 1)

The questions that Abbasi has raised here are quite pertinent since much of the complexity about the issue arises from the fact that Pakistani culture is in effect "a

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The questions that Abbasi has raised here are quite pertinent since much of the complexity about the issue arises from the fact that Pakistani culture is in effect "a

conglomerate of regional cultures”. The differences of these regional cultures are owing to a number of reasons including topographical variations of different regions, historical background, racial differences, ideological and religious context etc. However, before dwelling upon the cultural diversity, it is appropriate to first give an overview of the common features of the various cultures and the determining factors for these features.

Although geographically, Pakistan is divided into four provinces on the basis of ethnic and racial differences of the people that inhabit the land, these people share common religious and ideological foundations. It is such commonalities that are the basis of common features in the cultural varieties that can be observed in Pakistan. Islam is the religion of the majority of its populace and not only provides the foundation for a common culture of the people of Pakistan but also brings them closer to the rest of the Muslim world. Elaborating this particular aspect of Islamic culture, Dr Jameel Jalibi writes: “The soul of Islamic culture is “Unity” which symbolizes Unity and Oneness of Allah, unity of mankind and unity of life.” (Jalibi: 2008; 9)⁹ The same point has been further elaborated by Mazaheruddin Siddiqui in the following words, “The spirit of Islamic culture is neither exclusive nor suppressive of differences. However, it does try to accommodate all differences within the framework of a Unity so that Unity as well as diversity find their application within the domain of Islamic culture.” (Siddiqui: 1982; 66)

From what Siddiqui says, it is quite clear that Islamic culture is not “suppressive of differences” and that it gives ample room for cultural variations to exist. That is why, despite a very strong determining factor that is common to all the diverse cultures of Pakistan, the diversity is there nonetheless. Syed Abdul Quddus has broadly divided the culture of Pakistan into two major categories. He writes, “Traditionally, the cultural patterns have been the king’s court and the saint’s *khanqah* (sanctuary), the one urban and aristocratic, the other rural and popular; the one exoteric, the other esoteric.” (Quddus: 1989; xiii) However, this is not the only basis on which the cultural patterns can be explained since the diversity in the cultures of Pakistan is surprisingly intense and deep.

The cultural divide between the urban and the rural may seem to suggest that the urban and rural cultures are increasingly putting on a homogenous hue. However, it is important to understand that every city and village is distinctly different in its culture from others. The rural life of the province of Punjab is radically different from that of any other province owing to its being situated near Indian Punjab. The influence of Indian Punjab is not as discernable in any other province as in Punjab where many of the customs and practices followed are rooted in Hindu tradition. Hence, the festival of Basant is not celebrated in NWFP or Balochistan with the same fervor and zeal which is seen in Punjab. As for NWFP, the people are closer to the people of Afghanistan and share with them not only their language but also many customs and traditions.

In cities, the majority of the population belongs to the middle class that works either in government institutions for livelihood or engage in small business for earning their bread. The customs, traditions and the values of this middle class are largely based upon their deep association with their religion and are rooted in the land. As compared to this middle class that comprises of the majority of the urban population, a small, but considerably powerful class that is extremely rich follows cultural norms that are westernized. This particular class which consists of the members of civil bureaucracy, politicians, feudal lords, industrialists, high ranking military officials and judiciary is parasitic in nature and has been controlling the fate of the masses ever since the country came into being in 1947. The members of this class feel themselves drawn towards western cultural practices such as drinking, partying in which men and women mix freely. They find the local culture as backward and consider it below themselves if they associate with the traditions of their own land. It is this particular class which owns and controls the independent media in Pakistan and therefore, indirectly the content that appears on media.

In short, we can safely say that Pakistan displays remarkable cultural diversity and that it is a “conglomerate of regional cultures” (Abbasi: 1992; 1) instead of being one culture. Hence any study that involves a discussion of Pakistani culture is invariably bound to recognize the fact that there is no homogenized and singular culture of Pakistan.

2.2. Media Studies

Media Studies has arrived relatively late as a discipline on the academic scene. Despite its late arrival, the significance of the field is duly recognised and emphasised by critics and theorists. In this section, I shall look at the terms related to the field of Media Studies which are relevant to the research and the issues pertaining to these terms, such as ‘mass media’, ‘advertisement’, ‘representation and media’, ‘media and its influence’, etc.

2.2.1 Mass Media

The term “mass media” is generally used to refer to means of communication that target a very large audience. Although such means of communication have existed before the term gained common usage, it was the technological advancements that revolutionized the effectiveness of such media, especially with the development of nationwide radio networks, newspapers and magazines. However, it is difficult to put the term down to some definition since the means of communication which target a very large audience are ever evolving and a definition that includes all such means is not possible.¹⁰ Niklas Luhmann, while explaining the term writes,

...the term ‘mass media’ includes all those institutions of society which make use of copying technologies to disseminate communication. This means principally books, magazines and newspapers manufactured by the printing press, but also all kinds of photographic or electronic copying procedures provided that they generate large quantities of products whose target groups are yet undetermined. Also included in the term is the dissemination of communication via broadcasting, provided that it is generally accessible and does not merely serve to maintain a telephone connection between individual participants.

7/11/8090

(Luhmann: 2000, 2)

Even though Luhmann has tried to give a definition which attempts to incorporate all the various means of mass communication, his explanation is outdated since it fails to include the latest developments in the field of telecommunications.

The editors of *Key Concepts in Cultural Theory* have tried to define the term thus, “The mass media of communication are those institutions that produce and distribute information and video and audio images on a large scale.” (Edgar and Sedgwick: 2004; 224) The definition given above is relatively more comprehensive since instead of providing a list of such institutions it has focused on giving a general description of such institutions. Sedgwick and Edgar believe that mass media may have dated “from the invention of the printing press, and thus in the west, from Johann Gutenberg’s commercial exploitation of printing around 1450.” (Ibid).

In today’s world, the telecommunications technology has developed at such a rapid pace and such a mammoth scale that internet and mobiles have made almost every individual within reach of those who want to disseminate communication. The result of this development is directly on the ways people perceive the world around them and their tastes and attitudes which are easily manipulated by those in control of the institutions of mass media. Mass media is used to provide masses with entertainment but such entertainment is not without its political

implications.¹¹ From a Marxist perspective, mass media is “one of the core contemporary instruments of ideology.” (Ibid)

Jean Baudrillard, the French cultural theorist, has been very critical of mass media due to its impact on democratic society. According to Baudrillard, the contemporary world is dominated by signs, images and representations and this domination is of such a degree that the line of distinction between the sign and its referent—the real world, has blurred. (Baudrillard: 1990; 64-66) It is mass media that is involved in the production and dissemination of these signs resulting into the real world pushed so much behind that it is almost forgotten. Each sign then becomes a vendible commodity and the world is transformed into palatable and consumable fragments.

Baudrillard has challenged the notion of reality in his philosophical treatise *Simulacra and Simulation* through exploring the relationship between signs, images and the contemporary society. He argues that we live in a simulated world of images and signs that have replaced reality itself and that our perceived reality has grown far stronger than what is actually real. Baudrillard calls this world of signs and symbols which has replaced the real world as simulacra. (Baudrillard: 1994)

He has also traced the development of simulacra historically and identified three phases of this development. In the first phase, images appear but only as artificial

reflection of the real and this happened in the pre-modern age. The second phase is marked by the mass production of copies during the Industrial Revolution which resulted in the blurring of the distinction between reality and its image. In the third phase, the distinction between reality and its representation breaks down and the simulacrum precedes the real. This has happened in the postmodern age.

(Ibid)

Baudrillard's views may strike one as queer and even verging on paranoia regarding the issue of reality, but the very strangeness is suggestive of the all pervasive impact of mass media on our lives. The very conception of what is real and what is not has undergone radical change.¹²

2.2.2 Advertising and Advertisement.

Advertising is the oldest and the most reliable means of persuading “people to buy goods and services in a market economy.” (Casey, *et al.*: 2002; 3) While explaining the impact of advertising on sales of a product, the editors of *Television Studies: The Key Concepts* write,

From an economic perspective, advertising is seen as creating demand for consumer goods, allowing for the widespread proliferation of product names and brands — without advertising it would be difficult for consumers to negotiate supermarket shelves containing dozens or even hundreds of varieties of the same product.

(Casey, *et al.*: 2002; 3-4)

However, the effects of advertising are not limited to increasing demand for consumer goods only. The above statement makes it clear that this observation is made from an ‘economic perspective’ only.

Advertising has changed so many forms and modes over the period of time and there are so many ways of doing it that the effects of advertising now encompass a variety of aspects of human life.¹³ The effects of advertising are not merely confined to boosting the sales impact but advertising has a much broader cultural role to play in society. In fact, increasing consumption is only an apparent function of advertising and many of the more important aspects of production are ignored due to the structure of advertisements. Raymond Williams (1980) considers advertising as a means of promoting capitalism and averting attention from class differences in society. This critique has become even stronger since globalization has foregrounded the ever widening differences between those who consume the products and those who produce it in factories and workshops.

The discourse of advertising in the modern age inevitably results into the more critical issues of production and consumption to be pushed aside and ignored. Advertising is primarily aimed at convincing the target audience that consumption is good and this is done through creating false needs in people for the products while issues like environmental degradation that result from the production process are ignored. In fact, the solutions to such problems are also given in the form of more consumption. (Casey, *et al*: 2002; 6)

Martin Davidson, in his book *The Consumerist Manifesto: Advertising in Postmodern Times*, looks into these various dimensions of advertising and

explores the ways in which advertising has gained an important role in determining the cultural contents of a society. He believes that the language and the images that are employed in advertising are rife with political and ideological consequences. He writes, "Images are no longer just pictures, but constructions designed to communicate, and consolidate, ideological 'truths'." (Davidson: 1994; 113)

The current research is aimed at exploring how the television advertisements of multinational corporations in Pakistan are constructing images which 'communicate, and consolidate, ideological 'truths'', what those 'truths' are and how those 'truths' are influencing the culture of Pakistani society through the politics of (mis)representations. Further discussion on the dynamics of advertising in cultural context will follow in the chapter in which the advertisements are analyzed.

2.3. Semiotics

The word 'semiotics' is derived from the root *semeion* which is a Greek word meaning 'a sign'. (The Chambers Dictionary; 1997) Semiotics has been defined as "the systematic study of signs". (Eagleton: 1986; 100) However, this is a too simplistic way of defining a much complicated discipline as 'semiotics'. William O'Grady, Michael Dobrovolsky and Francis Katamba have expressed it thus:

Semiotics is a field of study that links many diverse disciplines, among them linguistics, anthropology, philosophy, zoology, genetics, literary study, and computer science. An understanding of signs is essential for understanding how messages are transmitted.

(O'Grady *et al.*: 1997; 628)

It is quite clear from this quotation that 'semiotics' is a much more complex discipline than what it generally appears. It will be fruitful to explore the development of this discipline in order to understand how views about 'sign' have developed.

2.3.1 Sign, Signifier and Signified

Semiotics began with the groundbreaking views of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857—1913) about language. Saussure emphasized the synchronic study of language instead of the traditional diachronic study which aimed at studying language through exploring its gradual development in historical context. Saussure's theory of language in terms of signs is explained by M. H. Abrams in his *A Glossary of Literary Terms* thus, where he tries to list the most important concepts of Saussure:

A sign consists of two inseparable components or aspects, the *signifier* (in language, a set of speech sounds, or of marks on a page) and the *signified* (the concept, or idea, which is the meaning of the sign.

(Abrams: 1999; 280)

Saussure claimed that the relationship between a signifier and its signified is arbitrary and that except for a few onomatopoeic words which are perceived as similar to the sounds they signify, meanings which we give to words are "maintained by convention only." (Barry: 2002; 41) Saussure writes,

No one contests the principle of the arbitrary nature of the sign, but it is often easier to discover a truth than to assign it its rightful place. The above principle dominates the whole of linguistic analysis of a language.

Its consequences are innumerable, though they are not all, it is true, equally evident straight away. It is after many detours that one discovers them, and with them the fundamental importance of this principle.

(Course in General Linguistics: 1983; 68)

What Saussure meant by this is that “there is no natural or inevitable link between the signifier and the signified.” (Culler: 1988; 19)

He further went on to say that the meanings words have are relational. What it means is that “the definition of any given word depends upon its relation with other ‘adjoining’ words.” (Barry: 2002; 42) Saussure was referring to the ‘differencing networks’ in the words of Peter Barry, in which words exist and find their meanings. A word thus acquires its meaning in terms of its difference from other words in a language. It also acquires its meaning through its position in a sentence. Thus the word ‘bark’ in the sentence ‘I heard the dog bark when I reached the gate.’ is different from the word in ‘The bark of the tree came off very easily.’

The third concept of Saussure which influenced the structuralists greatly is that “language *constitutes* our world; it doesn’t just record it or label it.” (Barry: 2002; 43) It implies that meaning is constructed by human mind and expressed in language. However, since this research is more concerned with Saussure’s views about language as a sign system rather than his views about language in general, it is beyond the scope of this research to discuss these points in detail.

2.3.2 Peirce's Model

Although semiotics developed on the findings of Saussure, it was the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce who systematically studied signs and distinguished them into three categories. Instead of the dyadic model of Saussure, Peirce gave a triadic (three part) model of sign including the *representamen*, *interpretant* and an *object*. The three terms have been explained thus by Daniel Chandler:

1. The *representamen*: the form which the sign takes (not necessarily material).
2. An *interpretant*: not an interpreter but rather the sense made of the sign.
3. An *object*: to which the sign refers. (Chandler: 2006; 32)

It is the inclusion of an *object* which makes Peirce's model different from that of Saussure. Chandler rightly points out that "the *representamen* is similar in meaning to Saussure's *signifier* while the *interpretant* is similar in meaning to the *signified*." (Chandler: 2006; 33) Thus, for Peirce, "a sign, or *representamen*, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity." (Peirce: 1986; 5)

Peirce also distinguished three distinct classes of signs in the second trichotomy in his essay "Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs". Peirce writes:

...a Sign may be termed an *Icon*, an *Index*, or a *Symbol*. An *Icon* is a sign which refers to the Object that it denotes merely by virtue of characters of its own, and which it possesses, just the same, whether any such object actually exists or not....An *Index* is a sign which

refers to the Object that it denotes by virtue of being really affected by that Object....A *Symbol* is a sign which refers to the Object that it denotes by virtue of a law, usually an association of general ideas which operates to cause the Symbol to be interpreted as referring to that Object.

(Peirce: 1986; 8)

The classification by Charles Sanders Peirce is widely accepted by linguistics and literary theorists. Rocco Capozzi, while commenting on Peirce's classification of signs into these three groups remarks:

Peirce's classification of signs into icons, indices and symbols is grounded on the three different types of referring to an object. Sign is related to its object either by similarity, or by real interaction, or by symbolic, abstract denotation. This classification emphasizes the referential nature of sign as well.

(Capozzi: 1997; 166)

However, it is not only C. S. Peirce who has tried to classify signs thus. Umberto Eco, the Italian philosopher, literary critic, novelist and semiotician has also classified signs initially into two groups, i.e. artificial signs and natural signs. Eco distinguishes between these two types of signs on the basis of their origins. He writes, "Signs are also distinguished according to whether they originate from a *sender* or a natural *source*." (Eco: 1979; 177) However, it is not the only classification of signs that Eco has done. He writes, "Signs are also distinguished according to their *semiotic specificity*. Some signs are objects explicitly produced in order to signify, others are objects produced in order to perform a given function." (Ibid)¹⁴

In this research, it is the model of C. S. Peirce that is followed since his triadic model of signs presents a reliable way of interpreting verbal and visual signs used

in television advertisements. Therefore, a detailed account of Eco's model will be out of place and unnecessary.

In this chapter I have tried to provide an overview of some of the key terms and issues related to the major fields of enquiry relevant to the research carried out. The purpose was to familiarize the readers with the academic environment in which the study is carried out and at the same time to emphasize the need for it through establishing a gap within the existing work in the field.

It is true that Pakistan's cultures have been a subject of extensive study from various perspectives and writers like Jameel Jalibi, Muhammad Yusuf Abbasi and M. H. Siddiqui have explored the formation and transformation of Pakistani cultures in their works. There have been occasional references to the influence of television and media in affecting a change in the cultural patterns of Pakistan such as the work of Kanwar Muhammad Dilshad, *Zarae Iblag Aur Tehqiqi Tariqay* which is in Urdu and which provides a very interesting study of the various dimensions of media in Pakistan. However, there has been a dearth of any systematic research into the influence of television advertisements on the cultures of people generally and specifically the advertisements of multi-national companies in Pakistan. Therefore, it is hoped that this study will not only help in filling the gap somewhat and also provide researches with an area of enquiry that demands from researchers to be explored further.

Since, the research is about the issues of representation and misrepresentation of cultures in the television advertisements of multinational companies in Pakistan and these two issues provide the very core of the framework for this study, it is important to deal with them at length in a separate chapter. The next chapter will, therefore, provide a discussion about the issues of representation and misrepresentation at length exploring the historical rendering of the two issues.

NOTES

¹ The reader can benefit from Professor John Hartley's book *A Short History of Cultural Studies* which encapsulates the emergence of the discipline of Cultural Studies in historical context. Professor Hartley's work tries to explore the effects of the relatively modern trend of interdisciplinary and integrated studies on the emergence of this new academic discipline.

² Almost all the dictionaries which attempt to define the term 'culture' state the difficulty in defining the term but for different reasons. However, I believe that the difficulty arises because of the question of what to include and what to exclude in the definition from the spheres of human existence and activities.

³ By 'representative' here, I mean the definitions found in encyclopedic dictionaries or the ones given by the acclaimed theorist. However, the justification of including some definitions and not the others is done on the basis of the relevance of their definition to the research project at hand.

⁴ Although Barker has indicated that any attempt to understand the meaning of the term culture is inevitably related with an understanding of the use of it which implies political dimensions, it is my understanding that there is hardly any idea or concept in this world which is without some sort of politics attached to it. Looked at from this angle, every human utterance and every gesture acquires political meanings, and the very purpose of this research is to explore how the apparently naïve and "innocent" images that are employed in television advertisements are rife with politics.

⁵ The reason that I have relied upon Dominic Strinati in this case is that his work *An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture* explores the rise of mass society and mass culture in historical context in a very lucid and elaborate manner. Secondly, his arguments about the factors involved sound quite logical and are pertinent to the study at hand.

⁶ This is done largely due to the fact that when people are provided with objects they can consume as a general habit since everyone is doing so, thinking becomes unnecessary. Thought is required where an individual is given a choice to make, but in the process of production and consumption of mass culture, this element of choice in its real sense is missing. Hence thought becomes redundant.

⁷ In order to get an overview of the historical development of popular culture and how it evolved in Europe, Peter Burke's book *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* can prove invaluable. The book examines European culture from the sixteenth century to the eighteenth century i.e. before the industrialization of European societies and provides its readers with an elaborate and well documented record of the factors that contributed in the emergence of popular culture in Europe.

⁸ It is pertinent to note here that the word 'culture' here is not used merely as a fact but also a process. What I mean by this is that 'culture' is not something static and unchanging; rather it is always acquiring new characteristics and shapes.

⁹ Jameel Jalibi has summarized the concept of Islamic culture in seven points which are briefly as follows;

1. The basis of Islamic culture is Islam.
2. Islamic culture treats the material and spiritual aspects of life as unified components.
3. Unity is the soul of Islamic culture—the unity of mankind and unity of life.
4. Islam promotes moderation as the proper way of life and does not emphasize only one aspect of life at the expense of others.
5. Life is seen as meaningful and God's bounty to man. Its preservation and promotion are regarded as high values in Islam.
6. Acquiring knowledge is one of the distinctive features of Islamic culture.
7. *Taqwa* (piety) is one of the basic concepts of Islamic culture and arises out of the rigid observance of the Quranic injunctions of distinguishing between good and evil, sacred and profane, lawful and unlawful.

¹⁰ The latest means of mass communication which can be included in the study of mass media include sms (Short Message Service) and even Internet blogs.

¹¹ The influence of mass media can be understood from the range of its uses. Apart from entertainment, mass media can be used for the purpose of political propaganda, for ideological warfare, for subversion of reality, for manipulation of cultural content of a society etc.

¹² The conception of Baudrillard regarding what is real and what is not echoes the post-structuralist view of reality which also questions the very notion of objective reality.

¹³ Mark Tungate's ground-breaking exploration of modern day advertising in his book *Adland: A Global History of Advertising* is a very useful reading in this context. In this book, Tungate has examined modern advertising placing it in the historical context of the origins and the development of advertising. He also looks into the different forms that advertising has taken in the modern age of digital technology like podcasting, interactive campaigns and text messaging. The book has also focused on the important players in the advertising industry and provides its readers with exclusive interviews with some of the leading names in advertising. It, at the same time, provides a comprehensive overview of the current shape of the industry globally and also suggests how the industry may develop in the future.

¹⁴ Although Eco's model of signs is no less significant in the field of semiotics, since this research is going to employ Pierce's model of signs on the television advertisements of multinational companies, I have not dwelt on Eco's model in detail.

Chapter 3:

The Problem of (Mis)representation and The Politics of Media Representation.

One of the key issues pertinent to this research project is that of representation and misrepresentation. I have deliberately formed it as (mis)representation in order to emphasise the nature of all representations since all representations, in some some sense, are misrepresentations. Therefore, in this chapter I shall explore the issue of (mis)representation and its various dimensions and forms along with the means which are used for it. For this purpose, the chapter will be divided into two sections; the first section dealing with the question, what is meant by representation and misrepresentation and an explanation of the term (mis)representation. The discussion will encompass the philosophical aspects of the issue at hand from a postmodernist perspective since the development and the massive growth of electronic media has radically changed the way representation and misrepresentation can take place, and try to register the views of theorists also from a critical standpoint. The second section of this chapter will be related to the media semiotics and how it can be used for political purposes.

3.1. Representation/Misrepresentation

The word 'representation' has been variously defined in various dictionaries and almost all the meanings add to the confusion as to what the word 'representation' really means. Generally speaking, representation means "the construction in any

medium (especially the *mass media*) of aspects of 'reality' such as people, places, objects, events, cultural identities and other abstract concepts. Such representations may be in speech or writing as well as in still or moving pictures."¹ This definition clearly follows the postmodernist approach towards reality which contends that there is no such thing as an objective reality and that what is usually presented as truth is merely another way of representing something and representation inevitably is the construction of reality. From a postmodernist perspective, one can say that there are no-truths, only representations, or in the provocative words of Nietzsche, 'There are no facts, only interpretations.'²

It is pertinent to note here that representation refers to both the process and its product. Thus, a study of representation involves both these aspects i.e. how representation (the construction of truth) is done and what is the nature and function of the end product (the constructed version of the 'objective' truth or reality). Besides, any discussion about the issue of representation will invariably involve a probe into the following points also:

1. What is the relationship of the representation of something with that thing in its existence as an objective entity?
2. Can there be a true representation of something?
3. How does a representation of something replace that particular thing?
4. How can a representation be interpreted?

5. What are the factors that determine the representation of an object in a particular manner?
6. Can there be a representation of a representation?

It must be remembered that no representation can take place without some degree of bias involved, whether in favour of the thing which is represented or against it. Hence, the use of the term (mis)representation which suggests that every representation is in fact some sort of misrepresentation and that-wherever the word representation is being used, it implies a certain level or degree of deviation, distortion or misrepresentation. This is due to the fact that no matter how objectively an effort is made to give a detached representation to something, the representation will inevitably be different from the original object. What we perceive as 'real' is also a mere construction of it and even our 'direct' experiences are 'mediated' by our perceptual code. Our prior experiences and our past knowledge always determine the way we perceive the world around us and it is not possible to rid ourselves of all those experiences and knowledge.³

It is also significant to understand that through a constant repetition and re-use, representations tend to replace the object which is represented and are 'naturalized' thus.⁴ The target audience for which the representation is done gradually starts considering the representation itself as the real thing at the cost of the real. Any representation of an object also requires an interpretation in order to understand what it means. Since representation is done in the form of codes and

signs, the most reliable means of interpretation would be to focus on those signs and codes which are used for the process of representation. A study of these signs and codes will also call for a look into those factors which determine the way something is represented.

3.1.1. Representation in Historical Context

Historically speaking, representation has been going on in one way or another for as long as man learnt to communicate. The old cave paintings were man's earliest attempts at representing his own understanding of the world around him and his efforts to control nature. However, as man acquired more complex means of communication, representation also became complex and the motives behind it too. With the advent of language, it became easier to paint the world in the colour of one's choice. The stories that were told and the folktales that grew out of human imagination were attempts at figuring out an explanation for the universe around and these stories of antiquity represent man's earliest attempts at seeking answers to questions about the world and the universe.

With the development of the means of communication, representation acquired new and more complex forms. The invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg in 1440 radically altered the form of representation since the mass production and circulation of texts was now made possible. For a very long period in history, written texts were the best means of representing the world and it remained so until the development of electronic media in the form of radio. With

the invention of radio and its mass production, representation gained a new impetus and assumed the shape of propaganda. This was possible due to the access that radio gave to those in control of this medium of communication since through radio; hundreds of thousands of people could be addressed at the same time.

The invention of television radically revolutionized the way the world could be represented in the form of images that were no longer still and thus representation started gaining further dimensions as colour and sound were added to television productions. The issue of television and representation is subject of much discussion ever since critics of television realized the pervasive influence of television, and more so because of the fact that representation on television is so powerful and strong that often it is taken as 'real'. In fact, the representation becomes more real than reality itself and the dividing line usually gets blurred resulting in the creation of 'hyperreality'. Detailed discussion is given in the section 3.2.1.

3.1.2. Representation in Postcolonial Context

In post-colonial studies, the very concept of the "other" became an area of investigation as a result of an enquiry into the ways people living in the margins were represented in the dominant discourse of the colonizers.⁵ Edward Said has discussed at length the process of representation that constructed the 'other' people and races in the discourse of the colonizers in a manner that was conducive

for the very act of colonizing. (Said: 1994, 1995) Said was prompted to investigate into the issue because of the surprising lack of much reaction in the imperial centres against the cruelty and barbarism with which the natives of the colonies were treated by their masters. He believed that the human values cherished by the people of the imperial centres could not have allowed them to take all that cruelty and barbarism for granted. Through his investigation and research, he came to realize that the lack of any reaction was because of the representation of the subject races and people in the texts that were produced for consumption at home. These texts, which included the travelogues, histories and even works of literature, represented the people living in the margins in stereotypes of brutes, barbarians and savages who must be civilized in order for the world to have peace. It was under the garb of this 'civilizing mission' that all kinds of brutalities were inflicted on the natives.

Edward Said's monumental work *Orientalism* is a text which explored the ways the 'orient' was represented in the colonial discourse as a land that must be explored. Writing about such representation, Said writes,

The idea of representation is a theatrical one: the Orient is the stage on which the whole East is confined. On this stage will appear figures whose role it is to represent the larger whole from which they emanate. The Orient then seems to be, not an unlimited extension beyond the familiar European world, but rather a closed field, a theatrical stage affixed to Europe.

(Said: 1995; 63)

By 'theatrical', Said is referring to the confined space of discursive practices in which the Orient was constructed by Europe and in which the Orient was

presented as almost the opposite of everything that Europe is. Such a representation of the Orient greatly facilitated the imperial ambitions of western colonial powers of that time. This relationship of representation with power is one of the key areas of enquiry that Said has taken up in his work.

Representation is seen as an aspect of knowledge of the Orient and Said builds upon the theory of Michel Foucault while delineating how this relationship works in orientalist discourse. In orientalist discourse, the production of knowledge is the prerogative of the dominant power and the knowledge produced is ratified as true since it establishes the dominance of that power. Drawing a connection between 'truth' and 'power' in colonial discourse, Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin write,

Truth is what counts as true within the system of rules for a particular discourse; power is that which annexes, determines and verifies truth. Truth is never outside power, or deprived of power, the production of truth is a function of power and, as Foucault says, 'we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth'.

(Ashcroft *et al.*: 2001; 167)

The relationship between power and truth is elaborated in the phrase about power as something that "annexes, determines and verifies truth." Of course, anything which is not verified by 'power' as true will not be held as such. Thus, the representation of the Orient in case of orientalist discourse and the 'Other' in colonial discourse becomes true since the verifying authority is the same as the one that is producing these truths.

Edward Said has confined himself to the written texts of scholarship produced in the west that construct the Orient and Europe's 'other'. However, representation of the Orient has taken many forms and uses a number of media that are recognized by Ziauddin Sardar. In the preface of his book *Orientalism*, Sardar writes, "After retrenching itself in scholarship and literary imagination, Orientalism has moved on to conquer film, television and CD-ROMs." (Sardar: 2002; vii) Since this research is primarily concerned with representation in electronic media, therefore, it will be pertinent to look at the issue of representation and the media.

3.2. Representation and Media

Since this research is mainly concerned with representation in media, therefore, an account of the ways in which the term 'representation' is used in media studies is given instead of focusing on it in a more general sense. While commenting about the connection of media with representation the writers of *Television Studies: Key Concepts* write that, "although not all media texts set out to be 'realistic', many of them (*news, documentary, much drama*, for instance) do set out to do so, and there is a historic and specific connection between television and the idea of 'reflecting reality'. However, whether a television programme sets out to be realistic or not, it always engages in a process of representation." (Casey *et al*: 2002; 198)

This connection is quite understandable since what is projected on the screen is always a representation of the real and can never be considered as 'real' as the real is. The very choice of the camera angle while taking a shot takes the image on the television screen away from the object which that image represents. Apart from the camera angle, the lighting, the hue which is used, the special effects which are administered in the laboratories, the graphics which are added and a number of other factors determine how something is projected on the screen. The projection on the screen can sometimes be so different from the real object that it remains hardly recognizable. The following picture can serve the purpose in which the letter B is shown from eight different camera angles. In each of the angle, the shape of the letter appears different and none of them corresponds with the actual letter in English.

Same is the case with reality which is projected in media. What is 'real', is often a casualty of the process of its representation in media.



The result of this casualty is that the line between the real and its representation grows thin and it becomes difficult to tell the real from its representation. This confusion results in the inability of the mind to distinguish reality from what is made to look real. The term 'hyperreality' referred to earlier has been coined to describe the way the mind defines 'real' when the actual event is transformed into

something else through the filters of the media. While discussing the impact of media on reality, the editors of *Television Studies: The Key Concepts* write,

Television is the dominant source of visual culture in contemporary western – and, increasingly, other – societies, making it central to public and private life. Its endless flow of sounds and images produces what Baudrillard calls a culture of simulation at the expense of originality. Media reality (and particularly televisual reality) becomes indistinguishable from social reality as what we see, hear and experience via the media is confused with the routine interactions we perform on a daily basis.

(Casey *et al.*: 2002; 171)

Citing Baudrillard, they further state that “television and life dissolve into one another as free-floating *signs* and images”, and it is this dissolution which Baudrillard calls ‘hyperreality’. (Ibid).

Victoria O’Donnell expresses the way something is represented on television in the following words,

Television provides a continual flow of images and sounds that links viewers to the world. Television production shapes how an event unfolds and limits the meaning of what is seen. Television mediates reality by selecting and interpreting images in order to present them to the viewers. Representation of people and events is encoded by technical codes with the camera, lighting, sound, music, and editing in order to convey the narrative, conflict, character action, dialogue, setting, casting, and so on. Representational codes work together to encode a preferred meaning, yet at the same time to present the illusion of naturalness.

(O’Donnell: 2007; 163)

O’Donnell has delineated not only the representation itself that takes place in media but also elaborated its process when she talks about the encoding of the things which are to be represented. She has also considered the selection of

certain images and the rejection of others as part of the politics which is involved in the representation. (Ibid) At the same time, the pervasive influence of media in constructing the world around us for us is also recognized by her when she states that our knowledge about the people living in places not otherwise accessible to us is based upon the representation they get on the media.⁶

3.2.1. The Politics of Media Representation

As a matter of fact, it is not merely our knowledge about the people living in other parts of the world that is based upon their representation in media but almost everything that we know about the world around us is mediated in the form of some kind of representation. Baudrillard's thesis may appear verging on paranoia that ever since the development of mass media, we have been living more in the world of constructed reality and less in the physical world, yet one can see that his implication is quite valid. (Baudrillard: 1994) What we know about the world around us is mostly based upon that little box inside our homes that we call a television set. In his essay, "The Gulf War: Is it Really Taking Place?", Baudrillard has explored the way media creates such mega events like the Gulf war and questions whether any such event took place in reality. Talking about the war he writes,

The war, along with the fake and presumptive warriors, generals, experts and television presenters we see speculating about it all through the day, watches itself in a mirror: am I pretty enough, am I operational enough, am I spectacular enough, am I sophisticated enough to make an entry onto the historical stage?

(Baudrillard in *Postmodern Debates*: 2001; 63)

It is interesting to note here that Baudrillard has discussed about the war as an actor here that is presenting itself as a consumable product for the masses. The very fact that it must be 'presentable' on the screen is suggestive of the representation which it is going to get on the media. It is also true that not many of us have known the Gulf war from first hand experience but know it only through what is reported in the print and the electronic media.

War is a much more political event. Even our knowledge of the much simpler and innocent things in life comes to us through the medium of television. We know about African wildlife through National Geographic Channel and Animal Planet and our knowledge about historical events comes to us from the History Channel. And just like history which is only the interpretation of the past and not the past itself, the events presented on the channel are also tinged with bias. Some sort of bias is inherent in every representation and every opinion that is held. However, no matter what the nature of this bias is, media representation has hardly ever been a threat to the existing system.⁷

It is a point to consider that everything that is given a space on the television screen is merely a representation of that particular thing and that every such representation is tinged with the colour of bias. The bias can be either in favour of the thing represented or against it. In case of it being in favour of the object, the object is represented as better than the original and in case the bias is against, then the object is represented as worse than the original. Hence, no matter how an

honest attempt is done to represent something objectively, the representation is invariably different owing to the encoding of the message in the form of visual images and verbal signs. In television programmes, not many claim to be as realistic as news reporting and yet the very choice of words used for reporting and the selection of the images to accompany a news item render its veracity questionable and its authenticity challengeable.

3.2.2 Representation and Advertisement

Whereas news reports claim to be as close to reality as anything can be, no such thing can be said of advertisements since the very purpose of an advertisement is to persuade the viewers to purchase a product and this can be done only through highlighting the usefulness and the good qualities of that particular thing. However, increasing sales and promoting consumerism is only one aspect of advertising and advertisements. Television advertisements have a very deep and pervasive influence on the minds of viewers owing to the fact that there is hardly any program which is not sponsored by those who want to inform the public about their products. One is bound to watch advertisements if one is to watch a program on television.

Advertisements on televisions use a number of ways to persuade and convince viewers about buying specific products and in the process of this persuasion; they convey subliminal messages to them. These subliminal messages are usually encoded and the viewers take them without ever becoming conscious about them.

Advertisements appeal to their audience through creating false values and false needs by transforming their desires into their supposed needs. They construct a world in which objects of desire are presented as basic needs and through constant bombardment of images and recurrent motifs, the audience is made to believe that what is presented, is the actual need and not merely a desire. Thus, carrying a handsome mobile that is equipped with the latest digital technologies of MP3 player, camera, sound and video recording facilities, FM radio, (and that costs its buyer also a handsome amount) becomes a need and not a luxury, especially when it is projected to be fashionable (read popular).⁸

It is the aim of this research to investigate into the manner in which television advertisements employ signs to communicate subliminal messages to their audience and indoctrinate them with the ideologies of the dominant class. Not only this, but they also play a significant role in determining the cultural content of a society through representing a world of false values and needs. In the next chapter, I shall be examining the television advertisements of a multinational company and see how these advertisements misrepresent the indigenous culture and propagate an alien culture.

NOTES

¹ This definition is taken from the website of the Aberystwyth University: <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Modules/MC30820/represent.html> retrieved on 26 September, 2009.

² For further exploration of this point, readings into the works of postmodern theorist Jean Baudrillard will be useful. I have touched upon his views in the second chapter. Baudrillard contends that there is no such thing as real and that everything is merely a perception of the human mind. Since the modern age is dominated by the electronic media, our world is the world constructed by this media. He calls this constructed reality 'simulacra'.

³ The idea has been thoroughly discussed by Aldous Huxley in his essay "Knowledge and Understanding". He considers past knowledge to be one of the greatest obstacles in our developing an understanding of the world around us and believes that we tend to see the world not as it is but as we want to see it. He also differentiates the two concepts i.e. knowledge and understanding and contends that it is understanding that we should yearn for instead of knowledge.

⁴ I use the word "naturalized" here in the same sense in which it is used by the writers of *Empire Writes Back* when they talked about how the colonized are represented in the dominant discourse of the colonizers and through constant repetition of set phrases and carefully chosen vocabulary, this representation is 'naturalized' for the audience at home.

⁵ Gail Ching-Liang Low's book *White Skins/Black Masks: Representation and Colonialism* focuses on the representation of the colonized people and their world in the fiction of H. R. Haggard and Rudyard Kipling. Although the focus of the book is the fiction of these two writers, the way Low has placed the issue of representation in the context of colonialism and the myth-making which was part of the whole colonial enterprise in a more general paradigm.

⁶ The chapter titled "Representation and its Audience" in O'Donnell's book *Television Criticism* is a very useful reading in this regard. She looks at the various perspectives of the issue of representation ranging from how it is done to how it must be interpreted. She also explores the televisual images and the way they represent reality.

⁷ By 'existing system', I do not mean here the political system of governance but the system of class division and that of the exploitation of one class at the hands of the dominant elite class. Media does not pose any threat to such a system; rather it ensures that the power structure of the society remains intact. James Curran has drawn interesting parallels between media in the modern world and the church in the Middle Ages in his book *Media and Power*. He writes, "The priesthood told their congregations that the power structure was divinely

sanctioned; their successors (modern media) implied that it was endorsed at regular intervals by the ballot box.” (Curran; 2003, 77)

⁸ A detailed discussion is given in the second chapter of this work about how popular culture is produced for mass consumption by the masses for the purpose of furthering the divide between the elite class of the society which owns the capital and general masses. Here, the term ‘popular’ is used in the sense of a value which is created by the same elite class in order to facilitate the consumption of their products in the market.

Chapter 4:

Cultural (Mis)representations in Pakistani Television

Advertisements: Some Case Studies.

In this chapter, I shall explore how the television advertisements of multinational companies in Pakistan represent the local and indigenous cultures of Pakistan and the ways in which an alien culture is projected in them, through applying semiotic analysis. It is my intention to focus on the multinational company of Coca Cola and take two advertisements and explore them one by one. For this purpose, the introduction of the company is given describing its international standing and a brief history of its rise before exploring the signs employed in the two selected advertisements of the company.

For the purpose of analysis, each advertisement will be explored separately with the focus on the verbal and visual signs and the meanings that these signs carry within. Each sign will be discussed at length with emphasis on its denotative and connotative meanings, and its cultural significance. The study will also encompass the effects that these advertisements may have on the audience and how through signs, messages are communicated to them subliminally.

4.1. The Coca-Cola Company¹

The Coca-Cola Company was founded in 1892 and is best known for the non-alcoholic beverage of the same name, i.e. Coca-Cola which was first produced in

1886 by the pharmacist John Stith Pemberton. The company has grown tremendously over the last one hundred and twenty three years and currently, its beverages are sold in more than two hundred countries. The company has a staggering number of employees worldwide that reaches the figure of 92,400 and claims to produce over three thousand different beverages and drinks. The website of this multinational corporate giant claims that it provides approximately 1.6 billion servings every day and even though the claim appears to be too incredible to believe, it still gives one a rough idea of the magnitude of this organization. When seen in the light of the statistics provided by the company in its annual review for the year 2008, the claim seems to carry some weight. It is reported in the review that the net operating revenues for the year 2008 have grossed to 31,944 million US dollars and the gross profit that the company earned in the year was 20,570 million US dollars.

The statistics provided above indicate that The Coca-Cola Company, being one of the largest multinational companies, has been targeting a huge populace of the planet as the consumers of its products. The mission statement of the company in which it gives its vision of the future focusing on the year 2020, establishes its global ambitions and also the fact that it treats its target populace without considering geographical, racial or ideological boundaries. While referring to this particular aspect of the product, Ilze Bezuidenhout (1998) writes, "The product transcends language, culture, race, gender, and age boundaries." In fact, most of the multinational companies and corporations aim to dissolve geographical

boundaries and promote a culture which is homogenized since such a culture provides a more conducive environment for increasing the sale of their products. The Coca-Cola Company is an American company and it is American culture that is promoted and propagated in its advertisements. Describing this particular aspect of the Coca-Cola Company, Bezuidenhout says, "Most importantly, however, is that the advertisements reflect American values and ways of living and carry these values over to other cultures. They do not change their campaigns to blend with the local culture in a country; rather they incorporate elements of that culture." (Ibid) Bezuidenhout's statement supports the view that in their campaigns, the Coca-Cola is not merely selling its product, in a value-free atmosphere, but is involved in the export and promotion of an alien culture that is value-laden American culture.

It is my intention to explore the way that these multinational companies try to produce and promote a global culture—a culture that is westernized and more pertinently Americanized—through their publicity campaigns since such a culture makes it easier for them to increase the sale of their products. In doing so, they ignore and marginalize the local cultures of their target populace and push it into the periphery. Through the analysis of the following advertisements, I shall try to prove this and also critically examine the effects of this production of a global culture on the cultural values traditionally held in our country.

4.1.1. Coke & Meal TVC²

Description: The following advertisement first appeared on the television channels of Pakistan in the month of May in year 2007 and since then it has been appearing quite regularly on television in Pakistan. The ad opens in a restaurant where a group of young boys are about to start their meal and are enjoying their time. The food is served in front of them and they start eating it when one of them opens the bottle of Coca Cola. As soon as the sound of the opening of the bottle is heard, everyone pauses and looks at the boy who has opened the bottle. The boy picks up the bottle and moves it in a circular movement over his head before passing it on to another friend sitting across the table. A song in a foreign language accompanies the dancing and the partying that start at once with some boys standing on their chairs while dancing. After some time when the euphoria ends they realize that everyone is looking at them and sit down feeling embarrassed. However, their embarrassment vanishes when people sitting on tables around them stand up with bottles of coke in their hands and start dancing on the same tune. Even the waiters join them in their dance and all of them move their bottles over their heads in a circular movement. The ad ends with the screen turning bright red with the silhouette of the shape of coke bottle with words in Urdu inscribed around it "*kha le, pee le, jee le Coke zindagi*". The word "coke" is inscribed inside the bottle.

The advertisement contains a number of signs which call for explanation and interpretation. Here, I am going to look at these signs one by one and look at their denotative and connotative meanings along with their cultural significance.

The setting: The ad opens with the camera on an angle from where the setting of the proceeding action becomes vivid from the outset. It is a restaurant and the focus is the table on which six boys are sitting. The tables around are occupied by people who are casually dressed and there are mostly teenage boys and girls present there. A few waiters can be seen dressed in formal dresses serving those sitting on the tables.

4.1.1.i. Dress:

Dress is a very strong cultural sign and it can signify a number of meanings depending upon the context in which it is seen.³ The entry for the word “dress” in *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* also gives some space to the functions of dress in cultural context apart from providing “warmth and protection”, which include “to beautify or enhance sexual appeal, and to supply information about the wearer (i.e., age, sex, social status, occupation)” (Encyclopaedia Britannica: 1993; vol. 4. pp. 222) As a sign, the dress which is worn becomes signifier and the signified is either the message which is intended to be communicated or the meaning which it contains. It can signify cultural affiliations, ideological associations, psychological or mental inclinations and the class of society to which an individual belongs. “To explore man’s dress therefore is not merely a study in

fashion, but it strips him (and her) to their innermost being. There is so much more to be seen behind a (stuffed-shirted) man's tuxedo and a (topless) woman's bikini than meets the eye." (Brasch: 1990; 84) For example, in Hans Christian Anderson's story *The Red Shoes*, the red shoes worn by Karen on the occasion of her mother's funeral connotatively suggest a denial of the norms of society since it is not suitable to wear red on an occasion that demands mourning in Christian tradition. Now, this denial is suggested by the context of the norms of the Christian tradition which demand wearing black on such occasions. Thus, the colour of your dress becomes a sign in the context in which it is seen and interpreted.

In this particular advertisement, the dress worn by the boys and girls sitting on the tables in the restaurant is also a powerful cultural sign. It not only connotes the class they belong to but also points to the fact that they imitate a cultural practice which is not rooted in their own land. Thus, the sign of the dress here is a symbol, according to Peirce's trichotomy, since it refers to something by virtue of an association of general ideas. The traditional dress of Pakistan for men is *Qamees* and *Shalwar*, usually with a vest coat with few minor variations in different parts of the country.⁴ In the advertisement, none of the boys and girls is seen wearing the traditional dress but the dress which they wear is western/American, as can be seen in Figure 1 in which a couple of images have been captured from the advertisement. Furthermore, it is a casual dressing that most of the people seen in the advertisement have done except for the waiters who are attending the

customers. The dress, taken as a sign here, can be interpreted in a number of ways. It signifies the influence of a foreign culture on the indigenous people of the land which runs so deep that they all prefer to be dressed in a fashion that is foreign.



Figure 1

The dress of the people in this advertisement also clearly establishes the class to which they belong. Brasch's observation is quite convincing when he writes, "Dress has always been a means of distinction: between races, classes, sexes, and generations." (Brasch: 1990; 84) It is usually the females of the upper or the elite class in Pakistani society, who wear jeans and shirt and consider *dopatta* or the headgear as a piece of clothing that can be done away with. In fact, wearing a headgear is often seen as a sign of backwardness and conservative mindset among the women of the elite class. The women seen in this advertisement are wearing jeans and shirts without any headgear. The dress code of the females testifies that the class which they represent is the elite class which the advertisement is projecting at the expense of the rest of the Pakistani social classes that are

marginalized. As a matter of fact, the lower and middle classes hardly find any space on the television screen in the advertisements of multinational companies since these companies aim to promote the life-style of the elite class as something desirable.

In an advertisement of the PepsiCo which is another multinational beverages company, a famous group of singers Vital Signs was selected for the purpose of promotion of sales. In this particular ad which I am referring to, the singers of the group are seen travelling on a road when they come across a road block. Realizing that they will be late for their concert they take out their instruments and start singing on the spot turning the whole place into a theatre. It is interesting that the group which was seen wearing the traditional dress of Pakistan in their first song "Dil Dil Pakistan" is wearing jeans and loose shirts in this advertisement. The dress that they wear in this particular advertisement reflects an influence of the westernized lifestyle and is an attempt to promote such a lifestyle too.

The projection and promotion of such a life-style and culture that belongs to the elite class of the society invariably results into creating a desire in the classes lagging behind to join them in the party. It is interesting to note here that the meal turns into a party as soon as the bottle of Coca-Cola is opened and soon everyone joins in celebrations. The signified message is quite clear—an invitation to the rest of the people (viewers and audiences) to join the party. But in order to do so, they will first have to qualify by climbing the social ladder through emulating and

imitating the people shown here. However, mere imitation does not result into one climbing the social ladder to join the elite class but the temptation is too strong for the young boys and girls to resist, who try to dress up like those representing the elite class in such advertisements, without realizing that mere imitation does not result into their becoming acceptable as the members of the class they imitate.

4.1.1.ii. Food

Food is yet another sign that informs an avid mind about a number of signified concepts. It is common knowledge that every region of the world has its own distinct traditional food and that the food is served in different parts of the world in different manners too.⁵ Accounting for different food habits and practices followed in different parts of the world, the editors of *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* write,

Rice is the staple in most of Southeast Asia. The distinctive feature of the cooking of India and Indonesia is the generous and imaginative use of spices to lend an added zest to foods. Olive oil is the common denominator of the Mediterranean cuisines. Northern Europe and North America use a variety of cooking fats, among them butter, cream, lard, and goose and chicken fats, but the common gastronomic denominator throughout most of these lands is wheat, the basic crop. In Latin America corn (maize) is the staple and is used in a wide variety of forms.

(Encyclopaedia Britannica: 1993; vol.19, pp. 689)

Thus, we have restaurants that specialize in Chinese food, desi (local) food, Italian food and western dishes along with Pizza Huts and Macdonalds that specialize in burgers. The very fact that such restaurants that offer a wide variety of food items are Chinese, Italian or Western establishes that certain food items

represent certain regions of the world. Hence, food which is seen in a television advertisement acquires additional meaning in the cultural context in which it is interpreted.

In the television advertisement under discussion, the group of boys sitting on the table is served food by waiters and the viewers are given very clear and vivid picture of it in the four images that have been captured in Figure 2. All the images show food items (steak, barbeque, pizza and burger) which are western. There is no eastern dish which gets any space on the table of these young boys. The food here becomes a sign and as an iconic sign, the signified object is the food itself stripped of any cultural significance but as a symbol, the signified concept is the cultural practice of following western norms in matters of satisfying instinctive needs of the body too. Even though the advertisement is produced for viewers of the subcontinent, it is the eating practices of the west that is projected here and such a projection of an apparently naïve choice of food is not without its reasons.

The choice of food, just like the choice of dress signifies the class structure of the society which is being highlighted here in which only the upper class is given representation while the lower classes are ignored and marginalized. The food shown here is the choice of the more privileged class of the society that can afford to go to western restaurants and order steaks, pizzas and burgers while the members of the lower classes are struggling for crumbs.

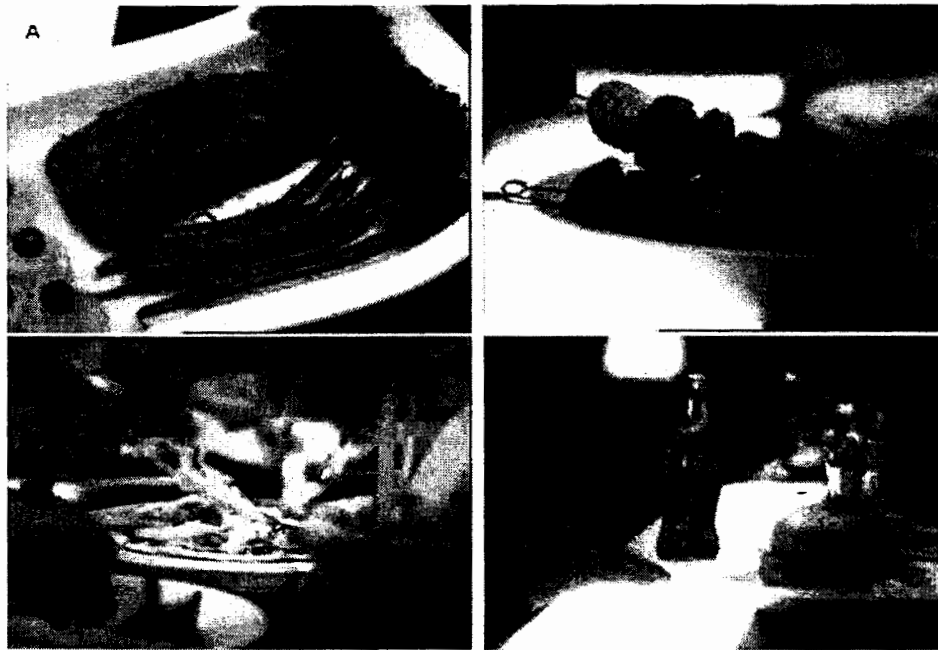


Figure 2

The western food signifies yet another phenomenon when it is seen as a sign in a broader context. It is being represented in an advertisement which is intended for eastern viewers and this blend of western object and eastern target audience serves to advance the process of globalization. It is a postmodernist collage that aims to soften geographical boundaries and materialize the possibility of transforming our world into a global village. As stated above, the multinational companies usually view their target audience (potential consumers) irrespective of their colour, cast, creed and nationalities. The reason for treating people thus is not their love for all human beings that is above these petty issues but the fact that for them a consumer is an agent to increase their capital and it does not matter what colour, cast, creed or nationality he or she is.

Globalization is a key factor in determining the content of the television advertisements of multinational companies and the ultimate aim is the creation of a global culture that is uniform, homogenized and monolithic since a culture like this will ensure their control and hegemony in society. It is pertinent to note here that even when national or racial differences are considered and the recognition of these finds its way in their publicity campaigns, their primary focus remains the increase of consumerism. For the elaboration of this point, an advertisement of The Coca-Cola Company can be cited that appeared in different countries at the same time on television screens. In this particular advertisement, a boy and a girl are shown sitting on a bench. The boy takes a bottle of Coca-Cola out of his bag and starts drinking it. The girl seems to take no notice of him. Suddenly, the boy starts producing the sound of a mobile ringing in his bag. He opens his bag, takes out another bottle of Coca-Cola and offering it to the girl says, "It's for you." The girl smiles and accepting the offer, comes closer to the boy. It is interesting to observe that in all the countries in which the advertisement was aired, the boy and the girl belonged to the same respective nationality. Now the point I am trying to drive home is that it apparently reflects a concern for the sensibilities of the audience on part of the Company when they employed characters from the respective nationalities and in the case of this particular advertisement, an exception is made. However, a closer and more critical look into the matter reveals that more than a concern for their nationalities and the sensibilities of the audience, this is done for the ultimate aim of persuading the viewers belonging to different countries into buying their product by employing similar tactics.

4.1.1.iii. Over the Head Gesture

In a television advertisement, not only the images that are static can be studied as signs but any action or a gesture that constitutes a meaning or carries with it some signified concept may also be examined as a sign. In the television advertisement, as in most of the Coca-Cola advertisements that appeared during the last couple of years, a specific gesture have gained an almost trademark status with The Coca-Cola Company. In this particular gesture, the characters hold either the bottle of the beverage or the glass in which the beverage has been poured and move it over their heads in a circular movement as if to give an impression of a planet revolving around the sun, or a moon revolving around its planet.

In the advertisement under discussion, this gesture is repeated for almost nine times and in the beginning it is the boys who do it one by one but later on everyone repeats it. The gesture can be seen in the images captured from the advertisement in Figure 3. The four images shown here are all captured from the same advertisement. Although it seems to be a simple act of moving the beverage over one's head but its recurrence turns it into a motif that carries additional meaning.

As a sign this movement can be interpreted to signify two distinct concepts. For one, the similarity between the gesture in which a bottle is made to move in a circular movement around the head and the revolving of planets around the sun or the moons around planets provides a clue as the signified concept of this gesture.



Figure 3

It can be said with confidence that the movement denotes the gravitational pull of the head that keeps a bottle of Coca-Cola tied to it through centripetal force and connotes the preoccupation of the mind with the drink. In other words, it is implied that the intellect has the same impact over the drink as the sun has on earth or the earth has on the moon i.e. attracts it to itself. Of course, such an interpretation is suggestive of an insight into the persuasion strategy that is adopted by the company to attract customers but it also, at the same time, foregrounds the subliminal message to the viewers that the drink is the choice of those who are the intellectual elite of the society.

The gesture also connotes the company's ambitions for global dominance in a competition with other beverage companies like Pepsi. Multinational companies whose productions lie in the same category are always competing for market dominance and their publicity campaigns are part of this race for dominance. At times, these companies cross the ethical boundaries even to destroy the image of rival companies too but that mostly happens in case of local and regional companies with very little international standing. The Coca-Cola Company is a beverage company that has a very credible standing in the fraternity of international companies and as mentioned above in the introductory part of the company, it already targets the population of over two hundred countries. Now, the gesture can either be taken as signifying the global dominance of the company or the ambitions for such. As a matter of fact, with 1.6 billion servings every day that the company claims on its website, it already is a global power to reckon with. And this has been expressed in the form of this particular gesture in which the bottle of Coca-Cola is revolving around the head like a satellite as if the head is the globe and it is covering every part of it. The implicit meaning is quite evident that the Company envisions a future in which all those living on earth are the consumers of its products.

4.1.1.iv. Sliding of the Bottle

As soon as the boy who opens the first bottle of Coca-Cola moves it over his head in a circular motion, he passes it on to the boy sitting next to him. However, it is interesting to note that he does not merely hand it over to him but places the bottle on the table and slides it to his friend who then catches the bottle in the middle of

its slide, as can be seen in the two images in Figure 4. This specific movement of sliding the bottle across the table may seem to be without any significance to a casual viewer but a cautious viewer who has the knowledge of the Western classic movies of Hollywood is hard to miss the point.

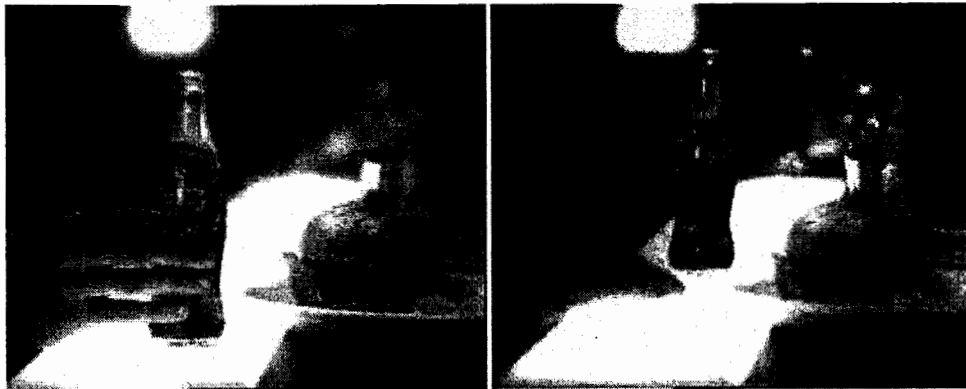


Figure 4

In many Hollywood movies of the genre of Western Classic, the bartender usually fills the glass with the drink and slides it across the counter to the customer sitting on a stool at the other end of the counter. In the movie *Open Range*, Kevin Costner who has played the role of a free grazer goes into a bar along with his partner and asks for a drink. When the bartender tells him that the owner of the bar has forbidden serving to free grazers, he holds the glass in his hand and slides it on the counter towards an unsuspecting bartender who was leaning forward, hitting him with the glass on the side of his face. In yet another film, *Desperado* which does not exactly belong to the genre of Western Classic but which follows a number of the traditions of the genre, the same action can be seen when at the start of the movie a customer enters a bar and asks for beer. In short, the particular sliding of the bottle or the glass is a typical theme of the Western movies of

Hollywood and seen in this context, this movement acquires additional meanings in the advertisement.

When seen in the larger context of the Hollywood movies of the Western Classic genre, the sliding of the bottle of Coca-Cola signifies an attitude towards life and a whole outlook of life, the outlook and the attitude that finds its full expression in the dancing and partying that follows. It is the outlook in which life is seen as a brief period that has been given to us as a gift and we should make the most of it while we can by indulging into an epicurean celebration of life. In most of the movies of the genre with which this particular gesture is associated, human life is regarded as an insignificant thing and the hero goes about killing his enemies without feeling any pangs of conscience or expressing any remorse. The villain(s) usually spend much of their time looting and having fun in bars and pubs and are seen living their lives at the basic instinctive level of existence. They are least concerned about any serious pursuits in life. Thus, the sliding of the bottle in this advertisement conveys a message subliminally to the viewers that their outlook of life should also be one of celebrating the time of life they have in fun and partying. This message is communicated in yet another sign in this advertisement at the end which is going to be discussed in the next section.

4.1.1.v. The Last Message

The advertisement ends with the screen becoming red and a silhouette of the bottle of Coca-Cola appearing in the left side of the screen as shown in Figure 5.

The song in Brazillian language also ends with the final words in Urdu, "*kha le, pi le, jee le Coca-Cola*" and on the red background that appears on the screen words are inscribed in white in Urdu, "*Kha le, Pi le, Jee le Coke zindagi*". The last words of the song and the words that appear on the screen can be translated thus, "Eat, drink and live a Coke life." The words here are to be treated collectively as a sign and the signified concept is quite clear. It is the promotion and propagation of a philosophy of life that is based upon the views of Epicurus who considered pleasure to be the highest good. The phrase "*Jee le Coke zindagi*" which can be roughly translated as "live a Coke life" here is quite significant as it denotes a

modus vivendi based upon the beverage itself, as if Coke in itself is a way of life and the message is communicated in absolutely certain terms. When seen as a way of life, Coke

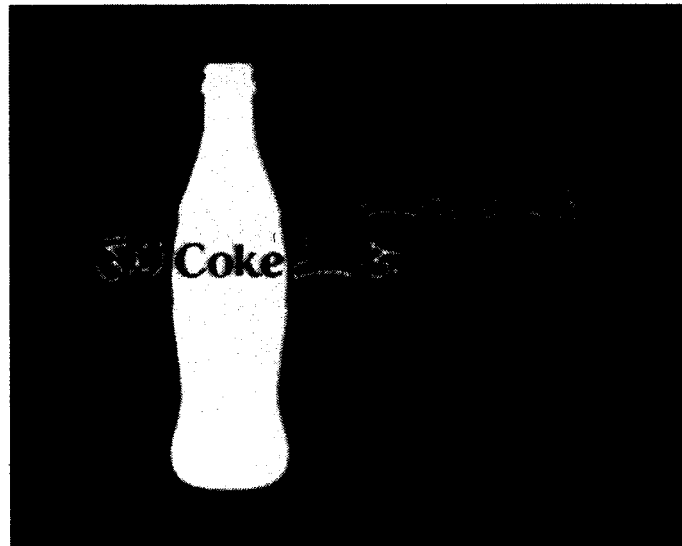


Figure 5

demands the rest of the people (the under-privileged classes of society) that they should also join the upper class in its celebration of life by drinking Coca-Cola.

The fact that this message is given with a bright and shining red background makes it even more meaningful. Commenting upon the two colours of red and white used in the advertisements of Coca-Cola, Ilze Bezuidenhout (1998) writes,

The most striking and important feature of the brand is the colours associated with the product, namely red and white. Red is a strong, emotional colour, whereas white is neutral but highly contrastive with red. Red attracts attention and stands out among other colours; it is associated with danger, excitement, love...a cheeky, daring colour filled with emotional connotations. White is associated with purity and goodness.⁶

(Ilze Bezuidenhout: 1998)

In eastern cultures too, the red colour is associated with strong passion and powerful emotions, hence the colour of a bride's wedding dress in Pakistan is still red. In western cultures, the colour of the cloth that a bullfighter holds in his hands while provoking the bull to charge is also red. In the context of both these facts, the red colour in contrast with white signifies the strong emotions associated with the beverage and an invitation to indulge into an expression of these emotions without caring for the cultural norms and traditions. Thus, the message is communicated subliminally through the use of colours too.

Such a message is bound to further the consciousness of the class divide in society and to make the lower classes struggle harder to join the upper class that can afford to indulge into such an epicurean celebration of life at the same time. Such a struggle will result into the less privileged section of the society seeking ways of satisfying their desires by any means necessary and to become financially as sound as the more privileged class, since the class division is founded on the economic basis in Pakistan like most other countries of the world. However, the

elite class of the society that controls the production of the objects of desire (like Coca-Cola itself) and instills an aspiration in the lower classes to struggle to join them, at the same time, ensures to keep them at a safe distance. The youth of the less privileged classes are deceived into believing that they can join the upper strata of the society by merely imitating them. Consequently, they would try to dress up like the youth of the elite class and eat junk food like them. They will drink Coca-Cola and feel privileged just like the youth of the class that is represented in this particular advertisement.

4.1.2. Coke and Meal 2

Description: This advertisement also appeared on the television channels in Pakistan in 2007. In this particular advertisement, an eastern family is shown sitting on the dining table for meal. There are two young girls and two boys who are sitting on the table facing each other and an old lady (apparently the grandmother) is sitting in a prominent position. The girls and the old lady are wearing the traditional eastern dress with a *dopatta* across their shoulders while the boys are wearing casual shirts and trousers. As the food is served, they all start eating it when the youngest girl sitting on the table opens a big bottle of Coca-Cola. As she twists the cap open, the sound of the trapped gas escaping attracts everyone's attention and there is a pause in which everyone looks up. And then all of a sudden, the seriousness of the mealtime breaks into a spirit of partying in which the contents of the bottle are poured in glasses and the glasses are passed on to other people. As soon as the glass comes into their hand, they pick it up and

advertisement. I shall take up the signs that are either not present in the first advertisement or are given a different treatment here.

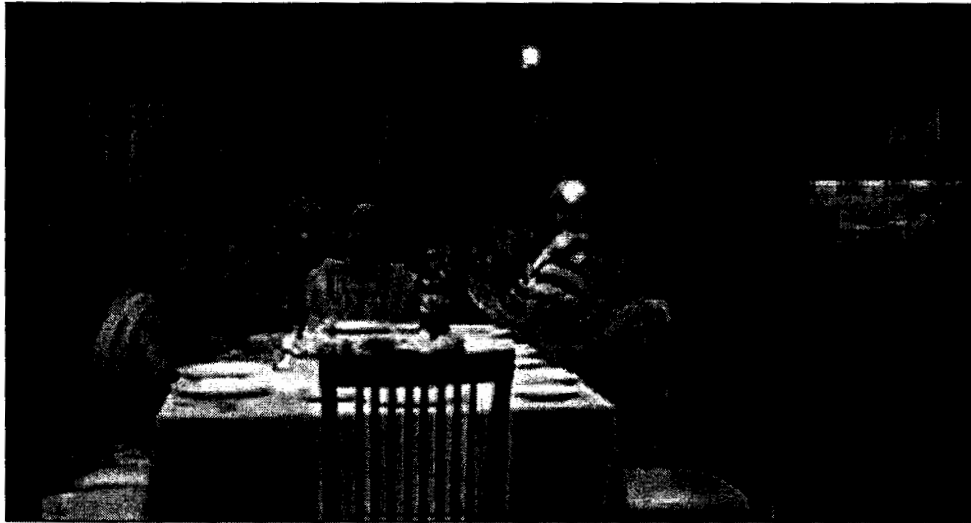


Figure 6

4.1.2.i. The Dress and Food.

In the advertisement under discussion, the male members of the family are dressed in pants and shirts while the female members are all dressed in traditional eastern fashion. They are wearing *qamees*, *shalwar* and *dopatta* which is the headgear and the traditional dress of women in Pakistani families. Not only the dress which is worn by womenfolk in this advertisement but also the food that is shown here is eastern unlike the advertisement discussed above. The dress of the females in the advertisement and the food that is shown can be seen in the images in Figure 7 that have been captured from the advertisement.



Figure 7

It may appear relatively strange that the multinational company of Coca-Cola has employed more traditional and regional signs here in contrast with the first advertisement and that these cultural signs can be seen as disproving my earlier argument about the propagation and projection of a foreign culture.

I here contend that the employing of cultural signs that are rooted in our own region is deliberate and a more desirable objective is achieved through emphasizing these signs. The target audience is made to realize that they are watching a family that belongs to their own society and thus, their association with the family in the advertisement is developed. This association is quite significant in determining the message that is communicated to the audience subliminally when the bottle of Coca-Cola is opened and the meal turns into a

party. The subliminal message conveyed is regarding the values traditionally related with the idea of a family and mealtime in eastern cultures which are dislocated here in this advertisement. A more detailed discussion of this is given in the next section in which the sign of family itself is explored at length.

4.1.2.ii. The Family

Family is a very strong institution in eastern societies and unlike most of western societies; it has still retained its integrity with most of the customs and traditions intact. The very first image that appears on the screen in this advertisement is that of a family sitting on table for meal with an old lady (apparently the grandmother) sitting in a prominent position. Treated as a sign, the family can be taken to signify a number of concepts but since this research is oriented towards the cultural content of a sign, I shall be focusing on this particular aspect of family.

Families in eastern societies follow certain decorum during mealtimes and by tradition the elders are given a lot of respect in household affairs. There is a hierarchical order that is maintained in many families in which the younger members are educated to behave properly in the presence of their elders. There are mostly unwritten rules for the behaviour of the youth in such families and such rules are not allowed to break. For example, children are not allowed to speak louder than their elders and shout in their presence and it is not permissible to dress improperly in front of elders. It is usually the responsibility of the elders

to stop their children from breaking these traditions and disapprove of any such action.

In the advertisement which is being discussed, the family and the traditional values that are associated with it in eastern cultures are misrepresented in a way that the very institution of family and its values are perverted. This is done through dissociating the signifier family with the conventional signified concepts and its association with quite the opposite signified concepts. The traditional concepts associated with family have been discussed above, while in this advertisement the family as a sign is associated with the concept in which the line that separates the younger members of the family from the elders is missing. As soon as the bottle is opened, the celebration starts which is joined by everyone present including the old lady with white hair. Instead of disapproving the hullabaloo that follows which would have been the case if the traditional ideas were upheld, she becomes a part of it. Not only this, but when the father arrives and everyone freezes for a few seconds in embarrassment, it is suggested that the respect for elders and parental authority will prevail finally. However, this expectation is soon answered in the form of the father figure also dancing and joining in the partying spirit.

This particular case of association of perverse ideas with a signifier traditionally upheld as one of the most revered institutions in eastern cultures needs to be explored deeply since the messages communicated subliminally through this

association are quite significant. Such association tends to misrepresent the family unit as it exists in eastern cultures and through such misrepresentation attempts to restructure the idea of the family and affect a cultural transformation. This cultural change is in all probability going to result into the disintegration of the institution of family and the dismantling of parental authority in homes where the distinguishing line between the young and the old disappears. It is also worth mentioning here that the employing of eastern cultural signs like the dress of the female members and the food, the association of perverted signified concepts with the signifier family becomes stronger since the viewers at once identify themselves with the characters in the advertisement.

In the advertisements of the multinational company PepsiCo that appeared on the television in Pakistan during the 90s, the last message usually ran like this "The Choice of A New Generation". The very idea is to draw a line between the old and the new generation and thus create a rift between the two generations. It seems that the Company is aiming to drive a wedge between the older generation that upholds the traditional values of society and the new generation that seeks to rebel against these very traditions.

The imperceptible message conveyed to the viewers of this advertisement works on the minds of the youth and the elders in our families through a hypnotic process.⁷ These advertisements appear on the television channels repeatedly and through a constant bombardment of an image on the minds of the viewers, it is

both naturalized and normalized.⁸ Even if someone may have found the advertisement unpalatable to the cultural sensibilities initially, his/her reaction must have grown weaker with the repetition with which the advertisement appeared on television channels and the message that is conveyed.

4.1.2.iii. The Last Message

Just like the first advertisement, this one also ends with the Brazillian song ending with Urdu words "*Kha le, pi le, jee le Coca-Cola*". However, in this advertisement the screen turns red with the silhouette of a dish in white colour. There is a spoon and a fork on both sides of the dish and the bottle of Coke in the middle of the dish while words in white appear "*Kha le, pi le, jee le Coke zindagi*" as can be seen in Figure 8.

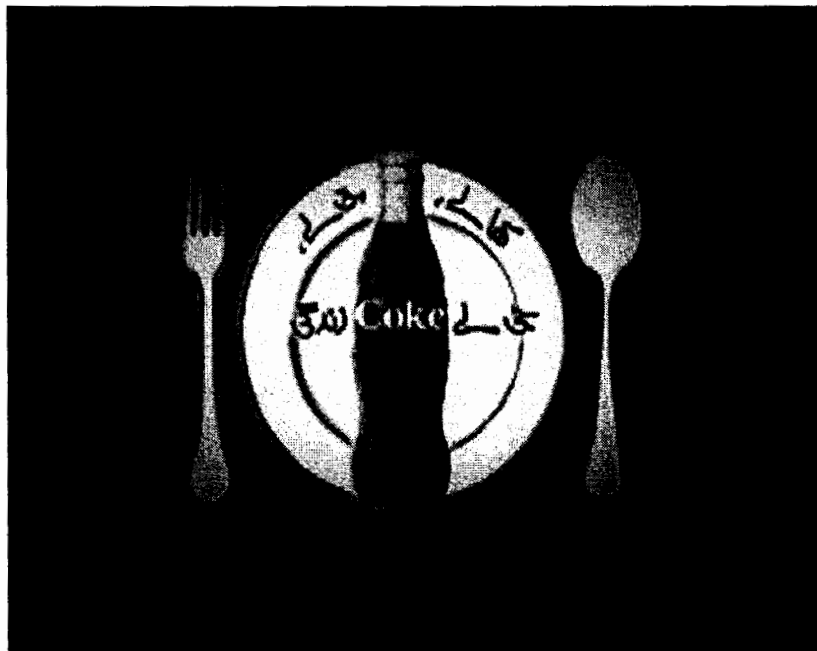


Figure 8

The visual and the verbal signs here are similar to the signs in the first advertisement with a few minor changes in the visual signs and they have been explored above at length. The addition of the dish and the fork and spoon here needs to be analyzed since this change is not without signification. The cutlery here signifies mealtime and with the bottle of Coca Cola in the middle, it is suggested that no meal is complete without the beverage. Besides, the words "*Kha le, pi le*" (eat, drink) denotes the basic instinctive level of existence which is being emphasized—an epicurean approach towards life already discussed.

It is a point to be considered that the message that is conveyed to the viewers through the verbal and the visual signs here is an appeal not to the mind or the intellect but the body and the physical need. It can be said that the advertisement advocates a life-style that does not demand an active engagement of the intellect or the mind, rather one in which the ultimate good is to satisfy one's physical needs. And this physical need is also particularly of a pleasing kind.

NOTES

¹ All the information given in the introduction of this section is taken from the website of the company itself. URL: <http://www.thecocacolacompany.com/ourcompany/index.html> retrieved on 15th October, 2009.

² The titles of these advertisements are taken from the video clips which are provided to the television channels by the company. The title appears on those clips for a few seconds before the advertisements start.

³ By 'context' here I mean the occasion on which the dress is worn, the cultural structure in which a dress as a sign is placed and the overall background which provides it its meaning.

⁴ A *Qamees* is like a shirt which is longer than the one worn with pants and a *Shalwar* is like a loose trouser. A headgear is used in different parts of the country which can be a turban or a cap. There is quite a variety in the shape and stuff of the caps used. However, the basic dress code followed in Pakistan and which is considered to be the traditional dress includes *Shalwar* and *Qamees* for men. For women, an additional part of their dress along with *Qamees* and *Shalwar* is a long piece of clothing to be worn as the headgear called *Dopatta*.

⁵ The art of "selecting, preparing, serving and enjoying fine food" is generally called gastronomy. The reader can benefit from the entry on 'Gastronomy' in *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* in which a detailed account of this art is given focusing on different gastronomic regions of the world.

⁶ The extract has been taken from the dissertation of Ilze Bezuidenhout titled "A Discursive-Semiotic Approach to Cultural Aspects in Persuasive Advertisements" from URL: <http://ilze.org/semio/index.htm> retrieved on 26-10-09.

⁷ Hypnosis is a process in which the human mind is subjected to exposure to a certain message recurrently until the mind responds to the message on its own without the volition of the person concerned. A trance like state is induced by those who practice hypnotism and their subject starts behaving and acting without conscious knowledge. When a message is repeated a number of times in a television advertisement, the viewers start taking it without getting consciously aware of it.

⁸ By the phrase "naturalize and normalize", I mean here that what strikes one as shocking in the beginning does not remain so when that particular thing happens repeatedly and becomes a normal occurrence. A bomb blast in any western country will shock the people far more than it does in Pakistan since it has become a common incident. People now just read the news in the newspapers or watch it on television and then go on with their daily routine.

Conclusion

This research was carried out for the purpose of exploring how the indigenous cultures of Pakistan are represented and a foreign culture is promoted and propagated in the television advertisements of multinational companies. It was my hypothesis that the multinational companies aim to create a homogenized global culture that transcends the geographical boundaries and the socio-cultural distinctions in order to transform their target audience into a uniform mass so as to ensure their control of society. This is done through a deliberate marginalization and misrepresentation of the local cultures of different regions in their publicity campaigns and imposing of an alien culture on people.¹ This imposition of an alien culture is not as forceful as the word 'imposition' may suggest, rather it is done in a manner that does not alarm the viewers and they are made to adopt such cultural values without ever becoming conscious of it.

In order to find out whether my hypothesis is valid or not, I set out to seek answers to the following questions;

1. How do advertisements influence the world-view and opinion of people beyond their primary function of increasing consumerism for some product?
2. In what ways the television advertisements of multinational companies are (mis)representing the local culture of Pakistan and influencing it?

For the purpose of finding answers to these questions, two advertisements of the multinational company The Coca-Cola Company, which appeared on the television channels of Pakistan during the last two years, were chosen. Since the best way to analyze and interpret an advertisement is to look at the signs that are employed in them, I applied semiotics as the means to find out the implied meaning contained within. The findings of the research are described at length below and the conclusions drawn on the basis of those findings are also given at the end of this chapter.

Through the investigation carried out, it was found that the local, indigenous culture of Pakistan is quite versatile and, in fact, it would be quite true to assert that Pakistan does not have a singular, homogenized culture. Geographically, the country is divided into four provinces on the basis of the four major racial divides, i.e. Punjab, Sind, North-Western Frontier Province and Baluchistan populated by Punjabi, Sindhi, Pushtoon and Baluchi people respectively. Now, each of these provinces has distinctive cultural values and customs that are at times quite distinct and peculiar according to their backgrounds. Hence, there is a remarkable variety in the cultures of these four provinces and then it is also true that in each province, the culture of the cities is markedly different from the rural culture. In short, Pakistan is a country endowed with quite versatile cultural patterns and despite certain common features based upon common religious beliefs and values; there is diversity in the cultures of its people. Since the focus of this research has been largely on the cultural divide between the masses and the elite class of the

society that comprises only a minor fraction of its population, therefore, I have tried to elaborate the differences between the cultural norms followed by the elite and the masses.

The masses in Pakistan are deeply rooted in the traditional heritage of their land and associate themselves with the customs and values followed by their ancestors. They very strongly adhere to the religious ideology and the belief that their country was founded in the name of Islam, therefore, their practices and customs reflect their belief. Religion still plays quite a significant role in determining their worldview and even though the people have experienced ethnic violence carried out in the name of religion; their religious beliefs are still strongly intact. The strong protests on the issue of the blasphemous cartoons published in foreign newspapers testify their emotional attachment with their ideas about religion. Apart from religion, traditional views about family, marriage, relationships and their sanctity, honour, education of women, veil and other issues of life prevail among the general masses who resist strongly whenever any change is attempted from outside.

As compared to the masses, the elite class of the society that comprises only a minor fraction of the population of Pakistan has been in control of the fates of the masses ever since the country came into being in 1947. This elite class largely consists of the civil bureaucracy, politicians, high ranking military officers, judiciary and the industrialists. It is this elite class that has been exploiting the

natural and human resources of the country for the last six decades while the struggle for survival for the common man has become increasingly difficult. In fact, the elite class in Pakistan has been parasitic and the masses have always been exploited in the name of the promise of a good future. This elite class owns means of production and the capital and therefore, is extremely rich. Hence, its culture and the values are also radically different from the culture and the values of the general public. Many of the customs and practices which the general public would disapprove very strongly and would result into censure at their hands are quite common among the members belonging to the elite class, for example, drinking, womanizing and partying in which men and women are allowed to mix freely, are common practices among this class. In short, we can say that this elite class of the society idealizes a western life-style and tries to imitate western cultural practices. They do not find the traditions and customs of the land palatable and often look at these either with contempt or at least do not feel any cultural or emotional affiliation with them.

After studying the advertisements of The Coca-Cola Company closely and the culture which is being projected in them, it was found that the advertisements mainly project a culture which is westernized and alien to Pakistan's region and its general public. It is established that the multinational companies employ images and signs that signify concepts that are rooted in foreign cultural contexts and through these signs, the indigenous cultures of the land are marginalized and pushed into peripheries. If at all, the regional cultures of the land find some space

in the signs of the advertisement, this space is not given to these signs without reason. As in the case of the second advertisement analyzed, it was noted that signs from the indigenous culture were used to further strengthen the emphasis on the disruption and dislocation of the cultural norms and traditions of a particular region.

The projection and propagation of a culture that is westernized in character and elitist in nature provides clues to the intent of the multinational companies and the research proves that these companies aim to create a global culture that is homogenized and conducive for maintaining their control and hegemony in society while ensuring their manipulation of capital also. Advertising is the best means of doing this since advertisements not only serve their primary functions of informing the people about new and better products available in market and persuading them to buy these products, but also convey messages subliminally to them. The subliminal messages influence people and convince them about some particular life-style to be desirable. It is quite understandable that many of the objects that are promoted in television advertisements gradually become symbols of latest trend and fashion and more than often these objects reflect the status of the class to which one belongs. Consequently, the world view of people is manipulated through apparently simple and innocent advertisements and their 'desires' are turned into their 'needs'. This transformation of 'desires' into 'needs' has very deep and negative effects on the society, since in order to fulfill these "needs" people have to engage themselves into a struggle for being able to afford

them also. Hence, they involve into a money-making frenzy in which the line between lawful and illegal means gradually grows thin. Thus, we can safely say that television advertisements are affecting a change in the internal structure of the society by working on the ideologies of people and their world view.

The cultural transformation affected by television advertisements is not something that takes place overnight. It is a gradual process and takes place without making people conscious about it. Images appearing on television screens that initially shock people gradually lose their intensity as something shocking and are normalized through constant repetition. This normalization is done through a constant bombardment of the same image on the mind since the effect on the mind is the same as that of constant rubbing on skin which becomes numb and stops feeling the rub in the end. Television advertisements that were disapproved by the general public initially do not invite as much censure now and this is a proof of the fact that people's sensibilities become hardened with time. There was a time when a woman wearing skirts with her legs naked appearing on the pages of newspaper magazines invited the fury of the public since it was something absolutely unthinkable in an Islamic country. That was once the case with a foreign female model but since such images gradually found space on the pages of local magazines, today when a local female model appears on these pages, it does not result into a very strong reaction.

Since it is established through this research that the television advertisements of multinational companies are causing a cultural transformation and propagating and projecting an alien culture in Pakistan through employing signs that convey messages subliminally, it is pertinent to point out that the area needs to be explored further encompassing some other aspects also. Researchers can explore the advertising strategies adopted by other multinational companies and how these strategies are influencing the local cultures of this land. They should also aim at bringing an awareness among the common people of Pakistan about how to view apparently simple and naïve advertisements in specific and other programs appearing on television in general, which was one of the aims of this research also.

The growth of independent media in Pakistan over the last few years has made it imperative for people to adopt a more cautious approach towards television. This small box in our homes has far reaching effects on our lives than is generally estimated, and the effects range from our very personal lives to our families and also the society at large. As is established from this study, television images gradually lose their sharp edges that hurt our cultural sensibilities initially through recurrence and the messages communicated to the viewers work on their minds without ever making them conscious of it. Attitudes of people are gradually changed and their reactions are manipulated by the image appearing on their television screen. It is, therefore, important that they should develop a habit of remaining vigilant while watching television and a mental resistance to the

negative messages hidden in the signs employed. Only through developing such an attitude towards the television set in our homes, we can hope to resist the onslaught of an alien culture that is attempting to disrupt and dislocate our own cultural values and replace them with ones not rooted in our own tradition.

NOTES

¹Perhaps the use of the word "imposing" here does not convey the exact sense in which the alien culture is promoted and propagated without making people conscious about it. What actually happens is that through repeating a certain life-style in their advertisements and convincing their viewers that such a life-style is desirable; the multinational companies indoctrinate the masses into adopting alien cultural values at the cost of their own culture.

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APPENDEX

The Coca-Cola Company

Mission, Vision & Values

The world is changing all around us. To continue to thrive as a business over the next ten years and beyond, we must look ahead, understand the trends and forces that will shape our business in the future and move swiftly to prepare for what's to come. We must get ready for tomorrow today. That's what our 2020 Vision is all about. It creates a long-term destination for our business and provides us with a "Roadmap" for winning together with our bottler partners.

Our Mission

Our Roadmap starts with our mission, which is enduring. It declares our purpose as a company and serves as the standard against which we weigh our actions and decisions.

- To refresh the world...
- To inspire moments of optimism and happiness...
- To create value and make a difference.

Our Vision

Our vision serves as the framework for our Roadmap and guides every aspect of our business by describing what we need to accomplish in order to continue achieving sustainable, quality growth.

- **People:** Be a great place to work where people are inspired to be the best they can be.
- **Portfolio:** Bring to the world a portfolio of quality beverage brands that anticipate and satisfy people's desires and needs.
- **Partners:** Nurture a winning network of customers and suppliers, together we create mutual, enduring value.
- **Planet:** Be a responsible citizen that makes a difference by helping build and support sustainable communities.
- **Profit:** Maximize long-term return to shareowners while being mindful of our overall responsibilities.
- **Productivity:** Be a highly effective, lean and fast-moving organization.

Our Winning Culture

Our Winning Culture defines the attitudes and behaviors that will be required of us to make our 2020 Vision a reality.

Live Our Values

Our values serve as a compass for our actions and describe how we behave in the world.

- **Leadership:** The courage to shape a better future
- **Collaboration:** Leverage collective genius
- **Integrity:** Be real
- **Accountability:** If it is to be, it's up to me
- **Passion:** Committed in heart and mind
- **Diversity:** As inclusive as our brands
- **Quality:** What we do, we do well

Focus on the Market

- Focus on needs of our consumers, customers and franchise partners
- Get out into the market and listen, observe and learn
- Possess a world view
- Focus on execution in the marketplace every day
- Be insatiably curious

Work Smart

- Act with urgency
- Remain responsive to change
- Have the courage to change course when needed
- Remain constructively discontent
- Work efficiently

Act Like Owners

- Be accountable for our actions and inactions
- Steward system assets and focus on building value
- Reward our people for taking risks and finding better ways to solve problems
- Learn from our outcomes -- what worked and what didn't

Be the Brand

- Inspire creativity, passion, optimism and fun

http://www.thecoca-colacompany.com/ourcompany/mission_vision_values.html
retrieved on 15th October, 2009.

