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Women in Print Advertisement: 1950s and 60s in Pakistan

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Abstract

This article examines the presence of women in Pakistani advertising print media, during the initial two decades of newly born state, Pakistan from 1950s and 1960s. Advertisement is one of the most important tools to shape country's economy and to influence the mind-set of consumers buying behaviour. This research is based on archival research and advertising print mediums, it analyses how women were represented as consumers, models, and professionals in the emerging advertising industry of post-independence Pakistan. The study shows that, while women were primarily represented in household and beauty-related roles. These roles linked to traditional gender expectations of the society. The article argues that advertising during this era both reflected and shaped evolving conceptions of Pakistani womanhood during a critical period of nation-building.

Keywords: Advertisement in Pakistan, Women in Media, Gender Representation, 1950s-1960s Pakistan, Consumer Culture.

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Introduction

The emergence of print advertising targeting women in Pakistan during the 1950s and 1960s represents an important era but this era is under explore which represents important part of cultural history.



When Pakistan gained independence in 1947, it inherited a print media landscape that included established newspapers such as *Jang* (founded 1939) and *Nawa-i-Waqt* (founded in 1940), alongside the newly established *Dawn* (launched August 1947), *Pakistan Times* (February, 1947)³.

These print media houses became the primary sources to reach the educated, urban class of the society, particularly important target for advertisers seeking to expand their consumer goods.

This article examines how women were represented in Pakistani print advertisements in the first two decades of independence. This research will analyse the visual and textual strategies employed by advertisers and the cultural meanings these representations conveyed.⁴

³ S.M. Shahid, "The Dawn of Advertising in Pakistan (1947-2017)," *Aurora Magazine*, Dawn Media Group, January 6, 2020.

⁴ Ibid.

It inherited not only the challenges of establishing a new state but also the task of creating entirely new media industries from scratch. Among these, advertising emerged as a field that would both reflect and influence societal attitudes toward gender roles. portrayal of women in Pakistani advertising during these two decades gives a unique insight, which to examine the process of nation-building, buying attitude of Pakistani consumers and gender roles in the early decades of Pakistan.

In initial days of Pakistan, the print media houses followed, a complex mixture of factors such as: the legacy of British colonial advertising practices, the influence of west, the emergence of local's talent, cultural and religious background of a Muslim-majority nation. When advertisements targeted female consumers, as models and performers in commercials, and at last portrayed the role of professionals working within the industry itself.

This study explores, the diverse ways in which women appeared in Pakistani advertising during the 1950s and 1960s, the theoretical framework for this analysis is based on gender, cultural studies and media studies and based on the archival data which showed how advertising constructs and naturalizes gender roles in our societies and analyse the limitations of agencies and society that existed during that time. It draws on archival materials from advertising publications, newspaper archives, industry accounts, and scholarly studies to construct a comprehensive picture of women's presence in this formative period of Pakistani media history keeping in mind the background of nation building and historical context of exploring cultural identity in newly born state.⁵

Print Media and Women in post-Independence era of Pakistan

The Social Position of Women in the 1950s

Advertising agency in initial days of Pakistan, was limited, there were few media houses, they were covering local population that time. Print media consists of magazines, digests and newspapers. During 1950s and 60s, in west Pakistan major newspapers were

The Mirror (English, Karachi, founded 1951)

Dawn (English, Karachi, founded 1947)

Jang (Urdu, Karachi, founded 1939)

Nawa-i-Waqt (Urdu, Lahore, founded 1940)

⁵ Erving Goffman, *Gender Advertisements* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979)

The Pakistan Times (English, Lahore, founded in 1947)



A visual chronicle of Pakistan's Print Media-iconic newspapers

These newspapers served at the district level, English newspapers, readers were educated, elite and government officials while Urdu newspapers had broader market of literate middle-class readers.⁶

Print media, grew over time, the 1950s in Pakistan were marked as a complex society divided between modernisation and traditional set up of our society. While the new nation sought to establish itself as a progressive Muslim state, women's roles largely constrained to conservative social norms. literary rate of women in 1950s and 60, remained annually 8 to 10 percent app, especially in urban classes.⁷

With these limitations, women's magazines achieved good reader market among educated class. *The Mirror of the Month*, founded by Zeb-un-Nissa Hamidullah in 1951, became "a matter of prestige for practically every educated household in the country."⁸

The constitution of 1956 granted women voting rights, and women from strong political background remained prominent public figures.

⁶ Shahid, "The Dawn of Advertising in Pakistan."

⁷ Iram, A., Bukhari, S. H. Z., & Abbas, Z. (2023). Portrayal of women in advertising industry of Pakistan. *Pakistan Journal of Social Research*, 5(02), 216-225

⁸ Zaib-un-Nissa Hamidullah (1921-2000)," *Sister-Hood.com*, May 23, 2019.



Photo Archives of Pakistan

Begum Ra'ana Liaquat Ali Khan is being welcomed by Air Marshal Sir Richard Llewellyn Roger Atcherley at the occasion of the induction of a Hawker Fury aircraft into the then Royal Pakistan Air Force, a gift from Wali-e-Swat.

However, for the majority of Pakistani women, particularly in rural areas, life continued to be shaped by traditional expectations regarding domesticity and family roles.

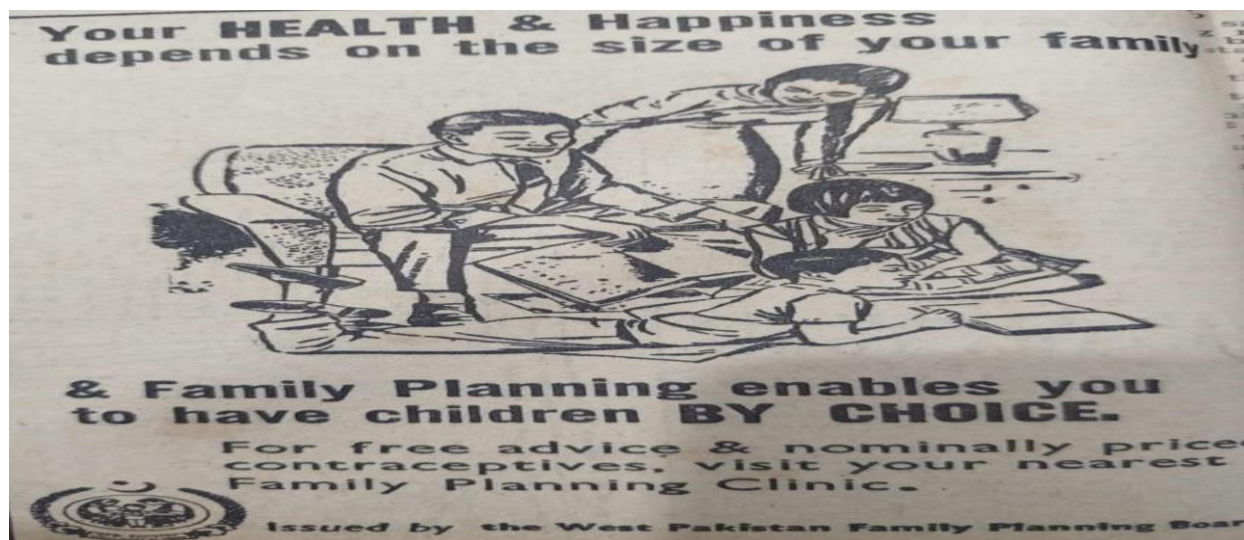
Urban, educated women had somewhat greater opportunities for public participation.

Akhbar-e-Khawateen (Women's Newspaper), an Urdu-language weekly launched in the mid of 1960s, that targeted female readers. Published by Mashriq Publications in Karachi, the magazine quickly established itself as an important platform for women's content and advertising. The emergence of such publications showed growing recognition of women and growing demand of readership and the commercial market for female consumers.⁹

During the 1950s and 1960s, print media became a key political actor especially during constitutional debates and military regime. The state often exercised control through press laws, yet newspapers continued to act as platforms for political discussion. Newspapers and magazines have not only reported events but actively shaped meanings through text and visuals. Understanding their themes, trends, and representations is essential for media, history, and cultural studies.¹⁰

⁹ Library of Congress, "What Were Pakistani Women Reading in the Sixties? A Glance at 'Akhbar-i khavatin'," 4 *Corners of the World*, November 13, 2023.

¹⁰ Mahnoor Tanvir, "Pakistan's Media Evolution Post-1947," *Scribd*, accessed January 25, 2026, <https://www.scribd.com/presentation/437613043/Mass-Media-After-Independence>.



This picture, is taken from Pakistan times, under the rule of Ayub khan in 1966, in Pakistan times, family planning awareness was first illustrated, it gives choice to women of Pakistan about the size of their family, about their health.

The 1960s, often referred to as the "Decade of Progress" under President Ayub Khan's military government (1958-1969), witnessed significant economic growth and social change. The industrialization policies of the Ayub regime created new employment opportunities, and urban middle-class consumption expanded considerably. Western influences became more visible in urban areas.

For women, this period brought both new opportunities and contradictions. While the government promoted family planning and women's education as part of its modernization agenda, conservative social attitudes remained strong. The visibility of women in public life increased, but this visibility was often accompanied by new forms of scrutiny and regulation. Advertising played a significant role in mediating these tensions, offering images of modern Pakistani womanhood that balanced aspiration with cultural acceptability.

Print media and Women in their advertisements

In 1950s and particularly, in 1960s, women were frequently, portrayed in advertisements specially in beauty products, house hold products, drinking, food items, fashion, and in almost every product to influence the consumer behaviour.

Beauty and Personal Care Products

One of the most prominent categories of advertising directed at women during the 1950s and 1960s was beauty and personal care products. International brands such as Lux soap, which had been advertised in the subcontinent since the 1920s, continued to feature prominently in Pakistani media. However, local brands also emerged with advertising specifically tailored to Pakistani consumers.

Tibet Snow



Tibet snow, launched in 1956, was Pakistan's first "beauty cream" and was advertised largely, in print media. The advertising for Tibet Snow drew on both international beauty standards and at local norms. They propagate that the product as essential for the modern Pakistani woman who wished to maintain her appearance while fulfilling her domestic responsibilities and look pretty.¹¹

Rooh Afza

Rooh afza, was also most loved and watched advertisement in print media of that time, it was not merely, women product but it showed women extensively. Hakim Mohammed Said, who established Hamdard Pakistan, who wrote his own advertising copy. He labelled, Rooh Afza "mashroob-e-mashriq" (the summer drink of the East) and placed advertisements in women's weeklies that promised the drink would finish summer's heat".¹²

¹¹ Iram, A., Bukhari, S. H. Z., & Abbas, Z. (2023). Portrayal of women in advertising industry of Pakistan. *Pakistan Journal of Social Research*, 5(02), 216-225.

¹² "In Pakistan, Rooh Afza scents memories and refreshes souls," *Al Jazeera Features*, April 25, 2022.



Images of Rooh Afza, in different newspapers and magazines

Household Products and the Domestic Ideal

Advertising for household products consistently depicted women in their traditional roles as wives, mothers, and homemakers.

The **Dalda** ghee, manufactured by Lever Brothers (now Unilever), became one of the most heavily advertised brands of the era. Dalda, associated the product with motherhood.

Dalda, associated the ghee with mother's love, where there is mothers' duty to take care of their family health and wellbeing.¹³

¹³ S.M. Shahid, "The Dawn of Advertising in Pakistan (1947-2017)," *Aurora Magazine*, Dawn Media Group, January 6, 2020.



Nawa-i-waqt add

Cherry Blossom shoe polish, in its early 1960s adds initially captured men, but later they tried to attract women as well in the same era featured, a young girl whose shoes not only shined throughout the day, they also made adds related shoe polish understands the activities a child does during the day and is there to help mom keep her child's shoes shiny. The change in advertising strategy targeting from men to mothers, shows the growing acceptance of women as primary decision makers for household purchases.

Fashion and Textile Advertising

1960s witnessed the emergence of fashion advertising targeting Pakistani women. As Zeb-un-Nissa Hamidullah's magazine *The Mirror* documented, urban Pakistani women were increasingly interested in fashion trends from both East and West Pakistan. As economy grew in Ayub's era, urban middle class consumption expanded.

The sari remained the dominant form of dress for women in East Pakistan and was widely adopted in West Pakistan as well, particularly among the urban elite.¹⁴

¹⁴ "Picturing Pakistan's Past: The Beatles, Booze and Bikinis," *NPR Picture Show*, August 20, 2012.



Zaib-un-Nissa Hamidullah was the editor and publisher of "The Mirror" monthly magazine

Akhbar-e-Khawateen (Women's Newspaper), a weekly magazine that began publication in the mid-1960s, featured extensive advertising for textiles and fashion. Advertisements in these publications showcased "the latest textile trends, new and shiny appliance. Skin-lightening creams were a particularly prominent category, with advertisements claiming not only to enhance appearance but to improve overall quality of life.



A confident Pakistani woman on a vintage Akhbar-e-Khawateen cover, blending tradition with modern style

These fashion advertisements simultaneously promoted consumption and established standards of feminine appearance that emphasized elegant dress and sophisticated presentation.¹⁵

The PIA Air Hostess: Icon of Modern Pakistani Womanhood

Perhaps no image of women in Pakistani advertising during this period was more iconic than that of the Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) air hostess. PIA, established in 1955 after the government acquired Orient Airways, quickly developed a reputation for excellence in service and became a symbol of Pakistan's modern progressive image.¹⁶

The airline's advertising prominently featured its female cabin crew, who were presented as ambassadors of Pakistani hospitality and sophistication.

Momi Gul Durrani, one of PIA's most celebrated air hostesses of the 1950s and 1960s, became "perhaps the most easily recognized PIA Air Hostess of her time"¹⁷ through her appearances in the airline's advertisements. Described as "tall, fair with film-star looks," Momi represented an idealized image of Pakistani femininity that combined traditional grace with modern professionalism.

¹⁵ Library of Congress, "What Were Pakistani Women Reading in the Sixties? A Glance at 'Akhbar-i khavatin'," 4 *Corners of the World*, November 13, 2023.

¹⁶ "PIA, the jet-age and working women," *Bagicha Blog*, January 30, 2017.

¹⁷ "PIA's legendary Air Hostess Momi," *History of PIA*, accessed 2024.



PIA Air hostess were Portrayed in Newspapers in 1960s

A 1966 PIA advertisement explicitly connected the air hostess role to traditional feminine virtues.

The advertisement depicted in newspaper's, "a young, elegant lady playing with a child on board a flight" and continued: "Affection for the young, respect for elders and the desire to be helpful, hospitable and gracious make-up of every daughter of Pakistan"

This advertising approach served a dual purpose. On one hand, it legitimized the air hostess profession by framing it as an extension of traditional feminine roles.

On the other hand, it promoted an image of Pakistan that was "modern, progressive, internationalist and welcoming".

The PIA air hostess became a symbol of what Pakistani women could achieve while remaining culturally intact with their roots, a powerful message during a period of rapid social change during Ayub Khans period.

In Coffee and tea advertisements women were frequently portrayed in 1960s.

Professional Participation of Females

While the advertising industry of the 1950s and 1960s had male majority, there were some exceptions of women who worked as copywriters and creative professionals. The industry pioneer S.M. Shahid notes that "every agency had an English and an Urdu copywriter" during this period, though he does not specify how many of these were women.¹⁸

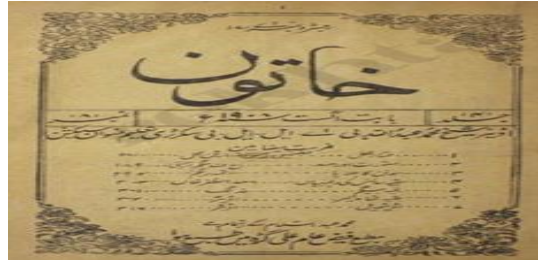
One significant figure was **Zuhra Karim**, who launched *SHE* magazine in 1963. While primarily a publication for women, *SHE* also served as a platform for female voices in journalism and advertising. Zuhra Karim's magazine "contained a mix of progressive special features and regular features more familiar with women's magazines, such as a cookery section, horoscopes and fashion".

¹⁸ S.M. Shahid, "The Dawn of Advertising in Pakistan (1947-2017)," *Aurora Magazine*, Dawn Media Group, January 6, 2020.

The magazine's advertising pages provided space for brands to reach female consumers directly, and her editorial vision shaped how products were presented to this audience.¹⁹

Women's Magazines as Advertising Platforms

Women's magazines played a crucial role in both providing employment for women in media and creating advertising platforms targeted specifically at female consumers.



An archival cover of the Urdu women's magazine Khatoon published in 1908

In 1948, Fatima Begum launched a daily women's newspaper called ***Khatoon*** from Lahore, but it closed soon due to financial problems. By the 1960s to 1980s regular women's magazines became popular. These magazines reflected differences between Urban and ruler women. While they mostly promoted domestic roles, and sometimes discussed women's education and basic rights.

These magazines followed the tradition of pre-partition publications like *Tehzeeb-e-Niswan* which focused on women's education and moral training. Most content showed women as obedient wives, emotional lovers, and fashion-conscious figure. Marriage was shown as the main goal of a woman life.²⁰

The Mirror of the Month, founded by **Zeb-un-Nissa Hamidullah** in 1951, was Pakistan's first English-language women's magazine which became every household name.

Hamidullah's magazine featured domestic interests, social writings, fashion ideas and day to day issues.

It also gave political awareness to women.²¹ The magazine's advertising pages featured products ranging from fashion and cosmetics to household appliances, providing a space where brands could communicate directly with educated, urban women.

Akhbar-e-Khawateen, which started in the mid-1960s, gave similar content in Urdu language but had a broader audience of educated women.

It had "advertisements for the latest textile trends, new and shiny appliances, weekly horoscopes, and routine stories of the whereabouts of Karachi's socialites".²² These publications created a

¹⁹ Zuhra Karim, pioneer of journalism in Pakistan," *LSE History Blog*, July 19, 2023.

²⁰ Rukhsana Yasmeen and Muhammad Iqbal Chawla, "Representation of Women in Postcolonial Literature in Pakistan," *A Research Journal of South Asian Studies* Vol 34, no. 2 (2019): 623–24.

²¹ Mrs. Asma Afzal Shami, "Political Empowerment of Women in Pakistan," *Pakistan Vision* Vol 10, no. 1 (2009): 142.

²² "750 Issues of Akhbar-e-Khawateen (1964–1986, Pakistan)," *Khajistan*, accessed January 28, 2026, https://khajistan.com/products/750-issues-of-akhbar-e-khawateen-1964-1986-pakistan?utm_source=perplexity&variant=45838709391574.

mediated space where women's consumption was normalized and celebrated, even as it remained largely confined to domestic contexts.

Illustration strategies in Print Media

Print media and the domestication of Women's Representation

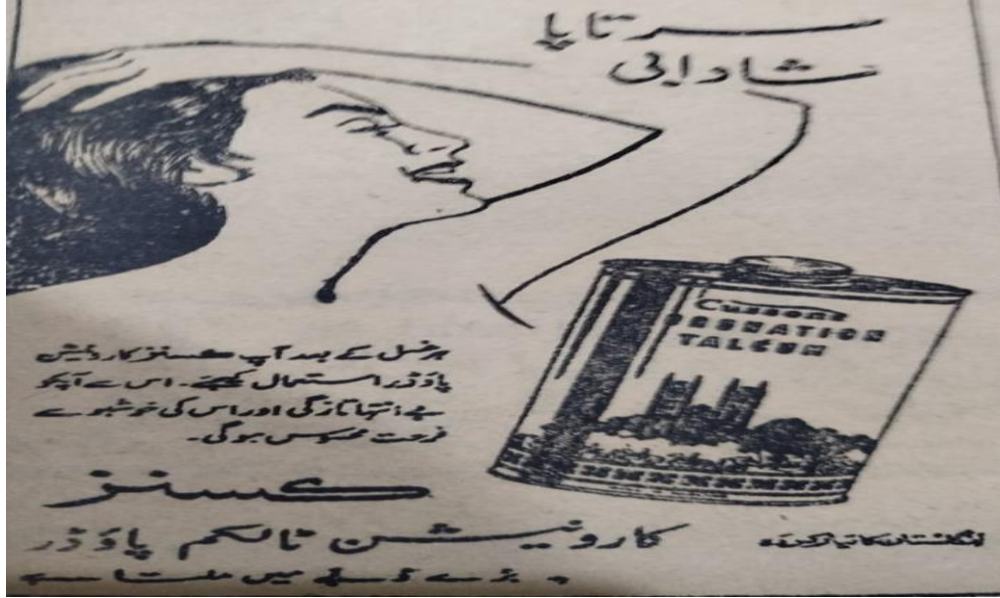
Most common feature of advertising during that era, women were emphasised on domestic roles. Women were almost depicted as home makers, mothers, sisters, wives and daughters. They were rarely portrayed as an independent woman with their goals. This case is reflected and showed the social pattern of society.

Women are shown promoting cooking oil,

serving tea, selling beauty soap, fairness creams and shampoo. Advertisements for fairness creams consistently suggested that lighter skin was more desirable and that using these products would improve women's social status and their demand for marital status.

The Library of Congress's analysis of *Akhbar-e-Khawateen* from the 1960s notes that "cosmetic advertisements were featured in every edition of the serial as well, and they certainly played a part in establishing oftentimes unattainable beauty standards among its readership. Skin-lightening creams, as pictured above, claimed not only to physically lighten and enhance a customer's appearance, but suggested the improvement in overall quality of life when added in the customer's beauty routine"²³

²³ Ibid



Advertisement in Urdu newspaper

Linguistic Appeals to the readers

The textual content of print advertisements targeting women employed specific linguistic strategies designed to appeal to female readers. Every agency employed both English and Urdu copywriters, recognizing that effective advertising required culturally appropriate language.

Products were positioned as helping women be better mothers and care for their families more effectively.

Products promised to enhance women's appearance and, by extension, their social and marital prospects.

Products were associated with modern life.

progressive values, appealing to women who saw themselves as forward-thinking. Despite modern appeals, advertising as appropriate for Pakistani women and with Islamic values.²⁴

²⁴ Shahid, "The Dawn of Advertising in Pakistan."



Appearance of women as mother in urdu newspapers

Design and structure of advertisement in print media

The design of print advertisements focusses on women evolved during the 1950s and 1960s. Early advertisements were often relatively simple, with limited use of colour but later presentation by the mid-1960s changed, print advertisements were more prominent, Headlines that captured attention and conveyed key benefits were more illustrated. Body showing was more common.

Division between Modernism and Traditions

Print advertising during this period showed a mixture of tension between modernity and tradition. It depicts on one side, advertisers sought to promote new products and consumption practices associated with modern lifestyles.

On the contrary, they needed to ensure that their appeals remained culturally appropriate and did not challenge traditional values too directly.²⁵

Advertisements of modern products were in traditional roles.

²⁵ "Picturing Pakistan's Past," NPR.



Advertisements in Nawa-i-waqt in 1960s

Print Media, constructed new Identity: Womanhood of Pakistani women

Advertising during the 1950s and 1960s played an important role in constructing images modern Pakistani woman. These images were idealized, presenting urban, educated, middle-class femininity as the norm while marginalizing the experiences of rural and working-class women.

The new image of women in Pakistan showed multi-tasking who balance traditions with progress, maintaining her cultural identity and norms while at same time used new technology as well.

Women should be sophisticated, decent but aware of latest trends but intact in local values.²⁶

The expansion of advertising targeting women during this period was closely linked to the growth of consumer culture in Pakistan. As the economy grew during the 1960s, particularly in urban areas, more women had access to disposable income and the products that advertising promoted. The "Decade of Progress" under Ayub Khan saw increased industrialization and the expansion of the middle class, creating new markets for consumer goods.

Limitations in portraying women

Despite the increased portrayal of women in advertising during this period, significant limitations r Rural were present. men, who constituted the majority of Pakistan's female population, were largely invisible in advertising imagery. Working-class women were similarly marginalized, appearing occasionally as domestic servants but rarely as consumers or aspirational figures.

The advertising industry itself remained male-dominated, with women primarily occupying subordinate positions or working in specialized women's media. The creative decisions that shaped how women were represented were largely made by men, reflecting male perspectives on female identity and aspiration.

²⁶ Syed Hassan Raza and Muhammad Zeshan Haider, "The Depiction of Women in Pakistani Print Media: A Comparative Study of Daily Dawn and Daily Jang," *Pakistan Journal of History and Culture* Vol 37, no. 1 (2016): 79-81.

Conclusion

The representation of women in Pakistani advertising during the 1950s and 1960s established showed complex structure of Pakistani society that intact between modernism and traditions.

The emphasis on domestic roles, the promotion of beauty standards, and the targeting of women as primary consumers all became enduring features of Pakistani advertising. At the same time, the pioneering women who worked in the industry and the occasional progressive representations provided precedents for later developments.

Studying women in print media helps us understand power, culture, and the struggle between tradition and modern change in Pakistani society. In the early post-independence period, women had very little presence in newspapers. Editorial positions and decision-making roles were controlled by men. Women's pages focused on home management, child care, and moral advice. This reinforced and narrow image of womanhood.

Ayub Khan period, modernization policies created new work opportunities for women. Newspapers began to show women as teachers, nurses, and social workers. Still, responsibility and moral behavior remained central themes. Legal reforms like the Muslim Family Law Ordinance of 1961 received attention in the press. Women's organization such as (APWA) were also discussed. Print media became a space where debates about woman's rights took place. Advertisements reflected similar tensions. Women were first shown only in kitchens and homes.

The period also laid the groundwork for the more dramatic changes that would occur in the 1970s and beyond. The professionalization of the advertising industry, the expansion of television, and the increasing participation of women in the workforce would all transform how women were depicted and employed in advertising.

The foundation established during the 1950s and 1960s both in terms of industry structures and representational conventions would shape these later developments in significant ways.

The stereotypes and patterns established during these formative decades continue to influence advertising practice, even as they have been challenged and modified by changing social attitudes and the emergence of new media techniques and print media remained the major tool as shaping the society.

Conflict of Interest

The authors showed no conflict of interest.

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