

More than a Pretty Face? Cognitive Objectification, Literal Objectification, and Dehumanization in Beauty Advertisements

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This research examines how women are portrayed in beauty advertisements televised in Pakistan, with a specific focus on the mechanisms of objectification and dehumanisation embedded within contemporary media culture. Using a qualitative content analysis approach, the study evaluates 30 beauty-oriented advertisements broadcast on leading Pakistani television channels during the period 2022 to 2025. Drawing upon objectification theory alongside visual discourse analysis, the results demonstrate two closely connected thematic dimensions. First, female bodies are represented as segmented aesthetic commodities, where cinematic devices, including close-up imagery and selective visual framing, confine women's identities to distinct bodily features, thereby presenting physical appearance as the central basis of worth, self-assurance, and social advancement. Second, the findings indicate a suppression of individuality through the circulation of standardised beauty norms, in which women are consistently depicted with similar appearances, passive social roles, and constrained agency, thus reinforcing their construction as replaceable subjects shaped by product-centred transformation. Taken together, these representational patterns legitimise restrictive beauty ideals and perpetuate gendered hierarchies within Pakistani consumer culture. By contextualising these layered forms of objectification within a South Asian media setting, the study makes a meaningful contribution to Asian media and cultural studies while underscoring

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the broader implications of televised beauty narratives for gender representation and ethically responsible advertising practices across the region.

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Introduction

Advertising has consistently been acknowledged as a highly influential site for the formation and reinforcement of social norms and gender identities, frequently operating through mechanisms of objectification and dehumanisation (Bartky, 1990; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Within this sphere, women are often depicted in conventionally seductive, ornamental, or decorative roles, thereby advancing restrictive beauty ideals and weakening the recognition of their individuality (Döring et al., 2020; Sharma & Bumb, 2021; Vargas-Bianchi & Mensa, 2020). In addition, advertising exerts a substantial influence on consumers by shaping self-perception and interpretations of the surrounding social environment, while simultaneously mirroring cultural practices that inform how individuals learn, care, think, interact socially, and evaluate ethical concerns (Ewen, 2022).

In light of these effects, advertisements increasingly position women as objects, frequently fragmenting and packaging their bodies as instruments for product promotion. As a result, the objectification of women in advertising contexts often reduces them to sexualised symbols. Consequently, women are perceived as less human when their identities are confined to bodily appearance and isolated physical features (McComb & Mills, 2022). Within conventional advertising, beauty products occupy a central role in constructing societal beauty standards and shaping understandings of self-worth, attractiveness, and gender expectations (Enriquez et al., 2025). The excessive emphasis placed on idealised appearance has contributed to reducing women to their physical attractiveness, thereby encouraging unrealistic standards and fostering a culture in which external appearance is prioritised over personal capabilities or intellectual qualities. In this regard, (Kilbourne, 2012) observed that advertising discourse centred on beauty frequently presents women as passive objects rather than autonomous individuals possessing agency. Such portrayals further encourage advertisers to represent women as stripped of essential human attributes (Iyer & Dani, 2025).

By 2023, traditional portrayals of women had declined considerably, while historically marginalised female roles began to receive greater visibility. Despite this shift, however, gender imbalance in advertising representation has not been eliminated. Women continue to appear

predominantly in domestic and family-oriented settings, whereas their presence in leadership roles remains comparatively limited (Galsanjimed & Sekiguchi, 2023). Similarly, men continue to be more frequently represented in professional and physically active roles than women (Williams, 2023). The cosmetics industry has played a particularly significant role in sustaining such portrayals. As a vast multimillion-dollar sector, it depends heavily on advertising strategies that persuade consumers that attractiveness, desirability, and sexual appeal constitute essential characteristics of womanhood and are necessary for social acceptance. Consequently, women increasingly begin to perceive themselves through an external gaze, directing attention towards physical features and often developing discomfort or embarrassment regarding their bodies.

Richmeyer (2023) argued that advertisers persist in presenting unrealistic body images for two principal reasons: first, consumers are more inclined to purchase products when they are associated with individuals deemed physically attractive, and second, such portrayals are perpetuated to align with prevailing market trends. Likewise, Nasir et al. (2021) noted that television advertisements objectify women through multiple physical markers, including skin tone and fairness, body shape, figure, height, long and glossy hair, delicate and flawless skin, and thinness. In this way, advertising reinforces the objectification of women through the continuous promotion of rigid beauty norms. Beauty advertisements incorporate multiple dimensions of objectification, including cognitive objectification, where women are portrayed as passive or mentally absent subjects, literal objectification, where they are treated solely as physical entities, and dehumanisation, where their essential human qualities are disregarded. Collectively, these representations strengthen systemic gender hierarchies by normalising the reduction of women to surface-level value.

Although such practices have attracted considerable criticism globally, comparatively limited scholarly attention has been directed towards these layered forms of objectification within the Pakistani media environment, which remains insufficiently theorised. Existing literature has largely concentrated on Western manifestations of objectification as a singular phenomenon, with limited engagement with its cognitive, literal, and dehumanising dimensions. Sarhandi et al. (2021) and Johaed and Hossain (2023) emphasised the urgent need to contextualise objectification within Pakistan's patriarchal, consumerist, and postcolonial media framework, where ideals of fairness and femininity are strategically commercialised. This highlights the need to examine how beauty advertisements on Pakistani television function beyond merely promoting products.

Accordingly, the present study is centred on examining how advertisers employ cognitive objectification, literal objectification, and dehumanisation as deliberate marketing mechanisms in televised beauty product advertisements in Pakistan. Through a focused analysis of these dimensions, the study seeks to address the identified research gap. It also aims to strengthen theoretical understanding and inform future policy directions concerning ethical media practices, while critically challenging visual representations that render women symbolically invisible despite their heightened visibility on screen. This contribution is particularly significant for advertising psychology and media studies, as it provides deeper insight into the strategies through which advertisers sustain cognitive and literal objectification in beauty-related advertising discourse.

Literature Review

Objectification of Women

According to objectification theory, women are frequently devalued primarily on the basis of their physical appearance (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Within visual media, particularly advertising, the objectification of women in sexualised contexts has been persistently reinforced. Nussbaum (1995) described sexual objectification as a process in which individuals are treated as instruments for sexual use, thereby denying them autonomy, emotional depth, and personhood. Existing scholarship has further shown that advertisements repeatedly centre attention on women's bodies, closely associating femininity with eroticism and nudity (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). In this regard, Biefeld et al. (2021) argued that greater levels of exposure and idealisation are strongly linked with intensified sexualisation.

The theoretical foundation initially concentrated on sexual objectification, where women are reduced to bodily appearance and positioned as objects for male gratification (Calogero et al., 2005; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). More recent scholarship, however, has broadened this framework by differentiating among cognitive objectification, literal objectification, and dehumanisation, three interconnected yet analytically distinct processes that operate within advertising discourse to influence audience perceptions and shape broader social realities (Kteily & Landry, 2022; Loughnan et al., 2015). Literal objectification refers to the explicit representation of women's bodies, or specific body parts, as commodities or inanimate objects. By contrast, cognitive objectification functions at a more concealed psychological level and involves mental processes that diminish women's subjectivity. This perspective remains grounded in the objectification

theory proposed by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), which posits that women's self-perception often becomes internalised through the observer's gaze. In other words, women begin to view themselves from an external perspective, a process that further extends into self-surveillance and continuous bodily monitoring.

Literal objectification may also be understood as a direct manifestation of dehumanisation, whereby women's bodies are transformed into marketable commodities or visual props. This is particularly evident in advertisements that fragment the female body by isolating specific features, such as legs, lips, hair, or the torso, instead of portraying the woman as a complete human subject. For example, Ullah and Khan (2014) observed that such representations, by turning the body into a spectacle, legitimise the female form as an object intended for visual consumption. A frequently employed rhetorical strategy involves linking a woman's sexualised body to an unrelated product, thereby implying that the product either grants access to, or symbolically embodies, an idealised woman. Research further suggests that this commodification contributes to the construction of unattainable beauty standards, which may intensify body-related anxiety and dissatisfaction among viewers.

The literature on literal objectification consistently identifies women as commodified entities, reducing them to isolated body parts while simultaneously stripping them of humanity and agency. McComb and Mills (2022) argued that the sexualisation of women, combined with selective visual or communicative emphasis on specific body parts, remains a central advertising strategy designed to capture consumer attention. Similarly, Drake and Radford (2021) found that women in advertisements are frequently presented as assemblages of body parts intended for visual consumption by audiences. Such pervasive portrayals generate substantial social consequences by perpetuating and reinforcing sexist attitudes within society (Rudman et al., 2021).

In contrast, cognitive objectification involves the mental reduction of women to objects of thought, function, or utility, effectively negating their agency and subjective existence (Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2012; Zurbriggen, 2013). This cognitive framing is especially significant within advertising, where women are not only visually but also narratively positioned as passive instruments designed to fulfil consumer desires (Ward, 2016). Bernard, et al. (2018) further explained that when an individual is processed primarily through visual attention and memory, she is no longer recognised as a whole person but instead perceived as a collection of separate parts or symbolic objects. A substantial body of scholarship has maintained that women in Western cultural contexts are routinely represented in objectified forms (Bartky, 1990; Langton, 2009), effectively lowering their status from complete human beings to

fragmented bodily elements. In a similar vein, Gervais et al. (2020) examined the cognitive objectification of women and found that women were more frequently recognised in relation to isolated body parts than men.

By contrast, male bodies were more commonly processed as integrated wholes rather than as fragmented components. Previous studies consistently support the argument that women are cognitively devalued while being more strongly sexualised than men (Bartky, 1990; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Langton, 2009; Nussbaum, 1995, 1999). A critical understanding of both overt literal objectification and internalised cognitive objectification is essential for analysing the pervasive and harmful consequences of advertising on women's lived experiences and psychological well-being. The existing literature on women's objectification in advertisements therefore informed the development of the first research question of the present study, situated specifically within the context of Pakistan's mainstream advertising industry, as follows:

Q1: How do Pakistani television beauty advertisements employ visual and narrative strategies to cognitively and literally objectify women by fragmenting their bodies and equating their value with specific aesthetic parts?

Dehumanization of Women

Although Nussbaum (1995, 1999) suggested that objectification may assume either positive or negative forms depending on its purpose and context, subsequent scholarship has strongly emphasised that the objective treatment of women frequently functions as a form of dehumanisation (Bartky, 1990; Papadaki, 2010). This process is closely associated with the erosion of human status and the denial of personhood (Boccatto et al., 2015). The deliberate sexualisation of women, coupled with an excessive emphasis on physical appearance, further intensifies perceptions of dehumanisation. Previous studies have indicated that a strong focus on women's bodily appearance contributes to the psychological acceptance of assumptions that women lack intelligence, bravery, human essence, and moral integrity, thereby reducing them to the status of objects (Agadullina et al., 2022; Alleva & Tylka, 2021).

The media plays a highly significant yet complex role in the dehumanisation of women. The repeated appearance of women on magazine covers, such as Rolling Stone or Maxim, alongside the routine sexualised display of female bodies in advertisements, continuously reinforces dehumanising representations. This pattern persists even when the advertised products, including beer, automobiles, or fast-food items such as Hardee's hamburgers, bear no logical connection to women's bodies, thereby intensifying their treatment as visual commodities. Such

portrayals can produce deeply harmful consequences. For example, Rollè et al. (2021) identified a positive association between sexist beliefs and negative attitudes towards women, including the use of degrading language and conceptual associations that liken women to animals or inanimate objects.

The dehumanised portrayal of women produces two major consequences. On one hand, it restricts and suppresses women's human attributes; on the other, it reinforces the internalisation of dehumanised perceptions within the wider social structure (Tavris, 1992). In this context, Kteily and Landry (2022) proposed a dual model of dehumanisation. The first-dimension concerns uniquely human traits that distinguish humans from animals, while the second concerns human nature, reflecting the deeper and more essential qualities of humanity. The literature demonstrates that both dimensions are closely linked with objectification and dehumanisation processes (see, for example, Bartky, 1990; Boccato et al., 2015; Papadaki, 2010).

Another important mechanism through which dehumanisation is reinforced in advertising is the use of violent and aggressive representational strategies. Earlier studies have particularly examined this issue in relation to minority groups. Lang (2020) found that the dehumanisation of specific groups, especially within contexts of war and political conflict, often functions to justify violence. When applied to women, however, this process becomes directly tied to their sexualised representation, which may normalise sexual aggression. Venditto et al. (2022) argued that women are frequent targets of direct sexualisation, and that portraying them in highly sexualised ways increases the likelihood of gender-based violence because they are perceived as less human and emotionally deficient (Demoulin et al., 2021).

Accordingly, the literature on the dehumanisation of women consistently establishes a strong connection with objectification (Beaman & Gurung, 2024; Gothreau et al., 2023), particularly in relation to sexualised portrayals involving bodily fragmentation (Ligman et al., 2024). Such representations not only reinforce stereotypical images through internalisation but also contribute to harmful mental health outcomes while normalising fragmented, sexualised, and objectified portrayals of women. This persistent pattern of sexual, stereotypical, and animalistic representation provides the foundation for a distinct research question in the present study, which seeks to examine how homogeneous beauty standards suppress women's individuality and construct them as passive agents of beauty products. The question is as follows:

Q2: In what ways do these advertisements dehumanize women by promoting a homogeneous beauty ideal that erases individuality,

promotes passivity, and positions them as passive recipients of product-driven transformation?

Methods

This study employed Schreier (2012) framework of Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA), an approach that emphasises the development of customised category systems alongside interpretive engagement with both textual and visual materials. Schreier's methodological model is particularly appropriate for the present research for three principal reasons. First, it provides substantial flexibility in handling multimodal data, which is essential for analysing television advertisements that combine audio elements, visual imagery, and narrative cues. Second, the approach prioritises coding consistency and analytical transparency, both of which are crucial for ensuring methodological rigour when examining socially embedded phenomena such as objectification and dehumanisation. Third, Schreier's emphasis on inductive category construction enables the identification of emerging thematic patterns without restricting the analysis to pre-established theoretical assumptions.

A total of 30 Pakistani television advertisements broadcast between 1 January 2022 and 30 June 2025 were selected through purposive sampling. These advertisements were drawn from multinational beauty brands and chosen on the basis of their visibility, repeated appearance during prime-time broadcasting slots, and thematic relevance to gender representation. Each advertisement was fully transcribed (see Supplementary File 1) and subsequently divided into scenes representing coherent symbolic, textual, or narrative units. The data were publicly available and contained no personally identifiable information. As is common in qualitative research, the sample size was guided by the principle of saturation, that is, the stage at which no additional themes or meaningful insights emerge from the dataset (Fareed et al., 2022).

The analytical procedure was conducted in seven stages. The first stage focused on the formulation and clarification of the research questions. The second stage involved data selection and segmentation, during which the thirty television advertisements were divided into scenes according to visual and narrative transitions. Following this, the researcher proceeded to the development of the coding framework, where an initial category system was generated inductively from a pilot set of five advertisements. This preliminary framework was subsequently refined through insights drawn from objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) and the broader literature on gender representation (Gill, 2006).

To enhance the robustness of the coding framework, pilot testing was undertaken in which the coding scheme was applied to an additional set of

advertisements and further revised to ensure conceptual precision and alignment with the study objectives. Subsequently, all 30 advertisements were manually coded using structured coding sheets, allowing the systematic and consistent application of thematic categories across the dataset. In line with Schreier (2012) methodological guidelines, intercoder reliability was established through the collaborative coding of a subset of advertisements by a trained second coder. Any discrepancies were critically discussed and resolved, leading to further refinement of the codebook and strengthening analytical coherence. The resulting codes were then consolidated into broader analytical categories, including cognitive objectification, literal objectification, and the dehumanisation of women in Pakistani television advertisements. This procedure closely follows Schreier's recommendation that intercoder agreement is especially suitable for QCA, where coding categories are conceptually grounded and consistently applied across interpretive units. In contrast to software-assisted approaches, manual coding facilitates closer textual and visual engagement with the material, thereby enabling a deeper interpretation of embedded gendered meanings and representational structures.

Results and Findings

The Body as a Fragmented Product: Value through Aesthetic Parts

The perception and cognitive processing through which women are viewed in fragmented forms, with emphasis placed on isolated body parts rather than the whole person, constitutes a significant mechanism of cognitive objectification in advertising. Within this framework, the female body is presented as the principal source of a woman's value and social worth. The occurrence of cognitive objectification has frequently been examined through the lens of visual attention and memory bias (Winn & Cornelius, 2020). For instance, in a perfume advertisement, the camera repeatedly zooms in on a woman's lips, neck, and hands without ever presenting her full body or face in a meaningful and integrated manner, thereby exemplifying bodily fragmentation in advertising discourse. Furthermore, women's confidence and social standing are often explicitly linked to the use of beauty products. Such portrayals diminish female agency and imply that personal development and public influence are dependent upon the product itself.

In Pakistani television advertisements, women's bodies are similarly fragmented through camera angles that isolate specific physical features, such as cheeks, arms, and necks, transforming them into aesthetic symbols. For example, Capri soap commercials frequently employ close-up shots of glowing cheeks, privileging physical transformation over personal

identity and reducing women to individual body parts. This visual strategy implies that a woman's worth resides primarily in her appearance. More broadly, Pakistani advertisements commonly avoid full-body shots and instead concentrate on fragmented visuals of lips, arms, backs, and flowing hair, thereby constructing a visual hierarchy in which body parts supersede the individual as a whole. Such segmentation obstructs holistic perception and fosters cognitive fragmentation within the viewer's interpretive process. The camera often zooms in on models applying soap to their arms and cheeks, further accentuating glowing skin and outward beauty.

This fragmented mode of representation centres on external appearance rather than holistic individuality, effectively reducing women to a collection of physical attributes. Pakistani television advertisements frequently present close-up shots of luminous cheeks and smooth facial features, with advertisers using soft, diffused lighting to accentuate skin texture and produce an idealised image of beauty. These glowing visual effects are designed to emphasise the efficacy of the product, implicitly suggesting that flawless skin is synonymous with desirability. In many cases, the camera pans slowly from the model's feet upward to the head, while coordinated dress and movement reduce her presence to a visual embodiment of the product's qualities. The combination of slow camera movement, soft lighting, and playful expressions results in a sensualised portrayal. Through this fusion of visual aesthetics and body language, beauty is framed simultaneously as an object of pleasure and as a means of external validation.

For instance, advertisements for Pond's Charcoal Face Wash attribute the transformation of dull skin into clear, radiant skin to the product's activated charcoal formula. The product is positioned as a remedy against environmental stressors, such as pollution, thereby implying that external intervention is necessary for the maintenance of beauty. By presenting the product as indispensable for beauty and confidence, such advertisements encourage dependency on external solutions while downplaying intrinsic personal qualities. This logic is especially evident in before-and-after transformation shots, which serve as a recurring visual strategy. In facial beauty advertisements, particularly those focusing on cheeks, eyes, lips, and smooth skin, attention remains concentrated on the exact facial areas where the product is applied. The woman's transformation following product use becomes the central visual narrative. For example, in an advertisement for Ujooba Beauty Cream, the model describes home remedies as "too much effort", positioning the product as a superior means of achieving physical transformation. A similar appeal is evident in advertisements for Tashi Beauty Cream, which promise radiant glow and dark spot removal as pathways to enhanced beauty and confidence.

These fragmented transformations extend beyond cosmetic enhancement and symbolically represent social mobility, relational fulfilment, and self-assurance. The use of luxurious floral imagery further reinforces transformation as a marker of strength and desirability. This narrative framework suggests that women's empowerment is conditional upon their ability to attain glowing and radiant skin, thereby implying that confidence originates from external beauty standards rather than internal qualities. Moreover, the approval of specific body parts by others becomes a defining measure of women's worth within these advertisements. Such praise functions as a reward mechanism that encourages conformity to beauty ideals, reinforcing the notion that social acceptance is achieved through appearance. Slogans such as "Unstoppable beauty" imply that beauty yields social advantages, while phrases suggesting that glowing skin "shines on everyone" directly associate beauty with external validation.

Success is likewise linked to physical appearance through depictions of romantic admiration, social media popularity, and professional achievement. Advertising frames appearance as a core component of identity formation. In a L'Oréal shampoo advertisement, the model displays smooth, lustrous hair while asking, "Want to know the secret?" This rhetorical strategy suggests that beauty drives confidence, desirability, and attraction. The transformation associated with the shampoo positions the product as the source of self-assurance, implying that empowerment is made possible through physical enhancement.

Similarly, in a Palmolive Naturals advertisement, the model highlights the transformation of her skin from dullness to softness and radiance, explicitly linking this change to renewed confidence and enjoyment of social outings. In TRESemmé Keratin Smooth Shampoo advertisements, the phrase "salon smooth hair at home" suggests that smooth hair is essential for both personal and professional readiness. Likewise, Sunsilk shampoo commercials portray women as confident, successful, and socially active across multiple professional and personal roles, with bouncy, smooth, and shining hair presented as central to these feminine attributes. The recurring emphasis on "salon results" reinforces the idea that meeting beauty standards leads to social approval in Pakistani television advertisements, thereby supporting the notion that beauty maintenance is necessary for acceptance and success. Figure 1 presents selected examples from Pakistani television advertisements illustrating both cognitive objectification and literal objectification.

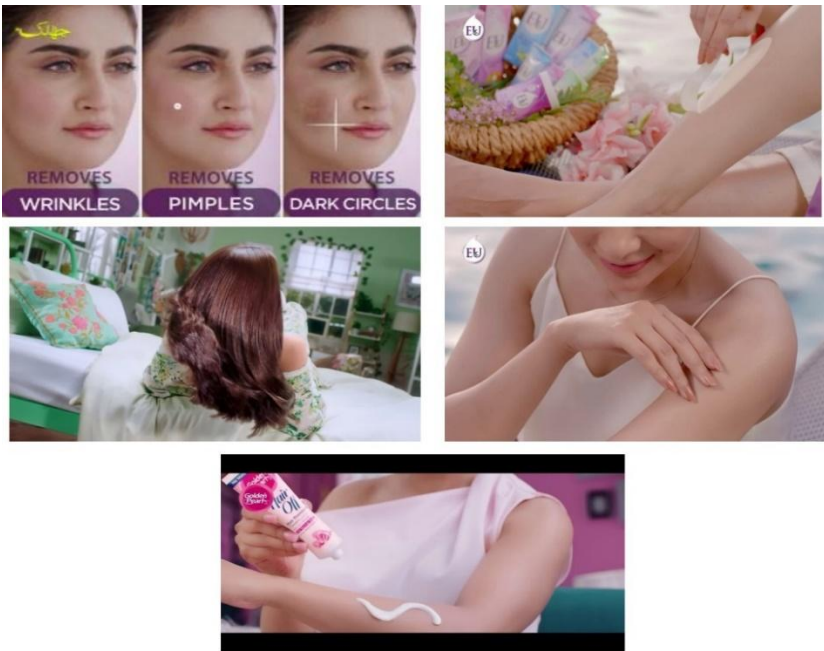


Figure 1: Women's depiction as fragmented body parts in Pakistani advertisements

The Erasure of Self: Conformity, Passivity, and the Collective Ideal

Women in these advertisements are not merely objectified; they are also stripped of their individuality and recast as collective embodiments of prescribed beauty ideals (Haslam, 2006). The central emphasis remains on homogeneous and often unrealistic standards of attractiveness that erase personal distinction and diversity. Rather than presenting beauty as an individual or context-specific attribute, advertisements construct it as a standardised and universally applicable ideal. Models are frequently shown in coordinated clothing, similar make-up, and identical glowing skin tones, thereby reinforcing conformity rather than uniqueness. Such portrayals imply that a woman's social worth is contingent upon her ability to align with a pre-defined beauty norm. Instead of acknowledging diversity in appearance, identity, and expression, these visual narratives privilege uniformity and, in doing so, undermine individuality.

Women in these advertisements are commonly assigned passive roles in relation to beauty products, with little to no indication of personal decision-making or agency. The narrative structure frequently depicts women as passive participants whose transformation is entirely attributed to the product. For example, models are often dressed in pastel outfits that visually correspond to the colour of the soap or cosmetic being promoted, symbolically linking their appearance to the product itself. Their

synchronised body language, carefully controlled poses, and uniformly glowing skin further reinforce the representation of collective beauty. Beauty is thus framed as something to be acquired through consumption rather than an inherent or individually expressed quality.

In several cases, Western-style clothing is explicitly associated with confidence and attractiveness. Models are frequently presented in fitted dresses, body-hugging outfits, and high-knee garments, while traditional Pakistani attire is notably absent. This visual choice suggests a symbolic replacement of local cultural identity with Westernised beauty norms. The repeated emphasis on phrases such as “Gulabi glow” further advances a singular and homogenised beauty ideal. Here, the product is positioned as an agent of transformation, while the woman herself becomes the site upon which that transformation is externally imposed. Models appear in elegant dresses ranging from pink-themed styling to overtly Western-influenced designs, including fitted trousers and deep-neck tops, with camera angles deliberately enhancing their figures. Statements referencing “beautiful faces” reinforce the idea of a collective standard to which all women should aspire. The repeated depiction of identical glowing skin tones further suggests that women are expected to conform to this singular visual ideal, thereby minimising uniqueness and presenting beauty as universal rather than individual.

Rather than portraying women as active agents in their own transformation, advertisements frequently cast them as passive recipients of change. They are rarely shown planning, thinking, or engaging in meaningful action; instead, they simply apply a product and are instantaneously “perfected” by it. This mode of representation removes initiative and agency, reducing women to subjects acted upon by external forces. The persistent focus on glowing skin throughout these advertisements reinforces the notion that beauty is standardised and that all women are expected to achieve the same appearance. In this narrative logic, nourished and radiant skin becomes a universal marker of attractiveness. The advertisements further diminish individuality by depicting transformation as something achieved with minimal effort on the part of the woman. The model’s glowing skin is consistently presented as the direct outcome of product use rather than personal care practices, lifestyle, or individual traits. As a result, transformation is framed as a passive process, externally delivered through consumption. Women are thus positioned as recipients of beauty benefits rather than active participants in self-expression or self-development.

The visual design of these advertisements is also clearly oriented towards an external gaze. Women are frequently dressed in fitted, glamorous outfits that bear little relevance to the product itself, thereby prioritising desirability over self-expression. The association of Western

clothing with confidence and beauty standards is especially prominent, as models are shown in sleeveless, deep-neck, and body-contouring attire rather than culturally specific Pakistani dress. Fabric choices and strategic camera angles are used to accentuate bodily figures, while hyper-aestheticised settings, often featuring dark or softly lit backgrounds, intensify focus on physical attraction rather than personal identity. The resulting uniformity in model presentation further strengthens the impression of a collective beauty standard.

Lighting techniques play a particularly significant role in idealising the female body. The glow effect commonly used in beauty advertisements enhances and stylises the model's physique, creating an idealised visual form that aligns closely with the product's claims. In this process, natural human variation is subtly transformed into perceived imperfection, while wrinkle-free and luminous skin is elevated as the norm. Close-up shots of glowing facial features and smooth skin isolate specific body parts, reinforcing objectification by implying that a woman's value lies primarily in her appearance. Soft and polished lighting contributes to an emotional response associated with perfection, luxury, and desirability. Within the beauty industry, glowing skin is repeatedly presented as a signifier of attractiveness and status. Visual effects intensify this association by constructing radiance as a cultural norm of beauty. Close-up images of luminous cheeks and polished skin emphasise the shine attributed to the product, reducing the woman's identity to isolated physical features and suggesting that her worth is measured through appearance alone. The aesthetic use of soft light further pressures viewers towards ideals of physical perfection.

Ultimately, these advertisements depict transformation as something done to women rather than something achieved through them. Women apply a cream or shampoo and are subsequently redefined without effort, reflection, or personal narrative. The focus remains on the product's effect rather than the woman's experience, journey, or individuality. This form of storytelling reinforces dependency on external beauty solutions while marginalising women's subjectivity. The repeated emphasis on glowing and clear skin as the ultimate marker of attractiveness suggests that all women should strive to meet the same standard. Phrases such as "Pick, click, glow" further promote a standardised beauty routine that suppresses personal uniqueness and encourages conformity. In this way, advertisements systematically diminish individuality by presenting beauty as a collective achievement rooted in physical transformation rather than personal identity.

Discussion

The selected television advertisements clearly illustrated patterns of

cognitive objectification, literal objectification, and the dehumanisation of women within the Pakistani media context. Based on these analytical categories, the study also identified several avenues for future research, particularly concerning the ways in which advertisements construct women's confidence through beauty-based transformation. By explicitly linking self-worth to glowing skin and external validation, these advertisements perpetuate rigid beauty standards while simultaneously diminishing women's personal agency. Advertisements centred on facial beauty, in particular, present radiant skin as the ideal marker of attractiveness, thereby reinforcing expectations that women must conform to specific physical attributes in order to achieve success.

The use of celebrity endorsements and glamorous visual aesthetics further positions beauty as a symbol of status and prestige. In addition, these advertisements connect beauty with social recognition and approval, promoting dependency on external validation through aspirational imagery and persuasive messaging. These findings are consistent with Höck (2023), who demonstrated that beauty appeals in advertising emerge through an integrated interplay of visual communication and symbolic messaging. Similarly, the persistent portrayal of glowing skin as the ultimate feminine goal reinforces traditional gender expectations through product-driven transformation. Skin colour, in particular, emerges as a central component of beauty standards in these advertisements because it is directly tied to women's self-perception and concerns about appearance. This finding aligns with Mady et al. (2023), who similarly found that skin colour significantly shapes women's self-concept.

The advertisements also demonstrated cognitive and literal objectification, as well as dehumanisation, by portraying beauty as the basis of confidence, social approval, and even social media success. Shampoo and soap advertisements, for instance, clearly objectified women by connecting feminine worth to physical transformation. Advertisements focusing on skin, complexion, facial appearance, and colour associated product outcomes with confidence, public validation, and social acceptance, while directing attention exclusively to the body part relevant to the product. These findings concerning the fragmented representation of women are consistent with Bernard et al. (2018) as well as Heflick and Goldenberg (2014), both of whom found that women's holistic individuality is often marginalised in advertising, while specific body parts, such as hair, eyes, lips, and skin, are prioritised as essential elements for consumer attention. The present findings therefore provide strong support for the theoretical frameworks of both cognitive and literal objectification.

Cosmetic advertisements, including those for hair removal products and perfumes, similarly focus overwhelmingly on the model's beauty,

reinforcing the notion that women's value is fundamentally tied to appearance. Through aspirational visual framing and product-centred narratives, these advertisements sustain restrictive beauty standards and encourage dependency on cosmetic products. These findings are in line with Amalia et al. (2023), who examined women's beauty in relation to ideal body standards and the social value attached to appearance in advertisements. Likewise, the results correspond with Lou and Tse (2021), who found that advertisements frequently employ female models with conventionally attractive physiques to promote product consumption and reinforce dependency on marketed beauty solutions.

Moreover, these advertisements facilitate visual consumption, where sensual movements, fragmented camera shots, and bright, flawless skin collectively reinforce dominant beauty standards and external dependency (Adebola, 2024). Their strong emphasis on product-led transformation and segmented body representation not only promotes reliance on external products but also suppresses individuality. Beauty is repeatedly linked with social influence and acceptance, thereby privileging appearance over agency. This result also supports the findings of Tiippana (2022), who explored the critical influence of media on young girls' self-perception and internalisation of beauty norms, particularly from an early age.

Conclusion

These findings led the study to conclude that the objectification of women simultaneously constitutes a process of dehumanisation. Literal objectification, in particular, operates through the fragmentation of the female body into isolated and commercially valuable parts, thereby reducing women to a composition of selected physical features in advertising discourse. Furthermore, such fragmentation serves not only to enhance visual consumption for audiences but also to promote product desirability and normative beauty standards, which together contribute to the sexualisation of women. The sexualised depiction of fragmented female bodies encourages the internalisation of sexualised self-images among viewers, including women themselves. On one hand, this process reinforces women's reliance on external affirmation and beauty products; on the other, it constructs women as sexualised objects continuously reproduced through advertising. Consequently, advertisements and prevailing beauty standards operate reciprocally in sustaining the sexualisation of women's fragmented self-image, their objectification, and their dehumanisation.

The study is, however, limited in scope, as it focuses exclusively on Pakistani television advertisements. Although these advertisements frequently appear to emulate Westernised representations of women, they

remain constrained by local cultural and religious boundaries. As a result, the findings cannot be generalised beyond this specific context. Additionally, the absence of interviews with relevant stakeholders, female models, and women viewers further limits the depth of the analysis. Accordingly, the study recommends that future research should complement content-based analyses with interviews or focus group discussions in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between objectification and dehumanisation. Such an approach would be particularly valuable for examining the impact of these advertisements on younger female audiences and the long-term implications for self-perception and identity formation.

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