



## Constructing Consumer Behavior: A Critical Analysis of Television and Online Advertisements

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine how Bengali advertisements persuade people to purchase products such as pizza, body lotion, sarees, juice, masala, noodles, and shoes. To support this analysis, I have applied Jean Baudrillard's concept of hyper reality, which shows that people buy products not merely out of necessity, but also to represent their social class, glamour, prestige, power, beauty, brightness, and identity. In this hyper real world, women are expected to be slim, flawless, and well-shaped, children are encouraged to use baby lotion for softness, traditional biryani is portrayed as being cooked using Radhuni masala, and juice is associated with women. In such a hyper real environment, all roles and expectations are shaped by consumer companies. Here, individuals are assumed to purchase products according to their social status and financial capacity. This study contributes to a better understanding of how consumer behavior is shaped through television, print, and online advertisements.

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### KEYWORDS:

language, representation, consumerism, hyper reality, sign, image, advertisement etc.

### INTRODUCTION

According to Iram et al. (2023), advertising is a potent and effective tool for influencing consumer purchasing decisions. To influence consumer behavior, advertisements employ carefully constructed representations of images, language, and symbols<sup>1</sup>. Stuart Hall explains that language and media don't just reflect reality but actively construct meaning, shaping our understanding of the world through signs, symbols, and images<sup>2</sup>. From a sociolinguistic perspective, language does not function solely as a tool of communication; it is also deeply connected to social and cultural phenomena. Since the late twentieth century, the portrayal of people, products, and lifestyles in Bangladeshi advertisements has undergone significant transformation. Today, advertisement is widely used as a persuasive tool to influence people to purchase various products through social media platforms such as Facebook, Reels, YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram, and offline print media etc. French

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philosopher, Jean Baudrillard viewed consumerism not as meeting needs, but as a system driven by creating desires through signs and symbols (sign-value)<sup>3</sup>, where objects signify status, prestige, and identity, not just utility, leading to limitless, meaningless accumulation and "hyper reality"<sup>4</sup> where simulations become more real than reality, fostering a society obsessed with difference and Conspicuous consumption. Here, I have used Baudrillard's theoretical approach to explore how Bangla advertisements encourage people to desire and purchase particular products. In this article, I demonstrate how language representation in advertisements is embedded within consumer culture, where people purchase goods not only to satisfy their needs but also to construct status, prestige, and identity. For this reason, I have chosen several Bengali advertisements and analyzed how the Bangla language is shaped through visual images and representation.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Ahmed Chowdhury (2023), in his article titled "Advertising, Gender, and Consumer Culture in Bangladesh," demonstrates how television advertising functions in the creation and promotion of women's consumer culture. While

<sup>1</sup> Symbol as sign reflects on images

<sup>2</sup> image means pervert reality

<sup>3</sup> refers to the symbolic, social status

<sup>4</sup> Hyper reality is a concept where simulations and representations of reality become indistinguishable form, or even more "real" than, actual reality.

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it is important to understand how women are represented in media, especially in television advertisements, the aspect of the influence of media in the production and reproduction of consumer culture is deemed important too. Consumer culture is often identified as the societal culture associated with the consumption of goods, material and nonmaterial, and services. According to Slater (1999), the study of consumer culture is often understood as the analysis of texts and textual practices that shape individuals' consciousness, wants, and desires within the context of social relationships, structures, institutions, and systems. It also involves examining consumers' attitudes toward specific goods and the ways their emotions and practices are shaped in relation to those commodities. (Kotler and Keller, 2006). In his study titled *"Advertising, Language and Culture,"* Tejumaiye reviews whether language and culture should necessarily function as primary determining factors in advertising messages. While some scholars argue that language and culture are not central determinants, others contend that they are significant aspects of people's lives that cannot be ignored and therefore should be considered in advertising communication. The study is grounded in culture-oriented theory and the high-context versus low-context communication models. It concludes that advertising neither debases language nor culture; rather, it promotes them. Nevertheless, the debate concerning the relationship between advertising and culture remains unresolved.

Advertisements are recognized as a potent feature of media that spreads ideas worldwide; they are also held accountable for creating unrealistic wants and needs through slogans like power, glamour, and beautification (Collin, 2011). Usman, in his study titled *"General Attitude towards Advertising: Cultural Influence in Pakistan,"* examined how cultural factors influence the general attitude of Pakistani people toward advertising. The study aims to analyze the impact of culture on people's attitudes toward brand advertisements, considering aspects such as product information, social integration, and hedonism/pleasure, while also taking into account cultural dimensions like power distance and masculinity. However, the above studies do not demonstrate how advertisement functions as a tool of consumption, and to create a hyper real world where the buyer is treated as a passive actor rather than an active participant, particularly in the context of Bangla advertisements.

### Visual Media Representation and Consumer Culture in Advertising

To support this argument, I have purposively selected some Bangla advertisements, focusing on how the Bangla advertisement is represented on television and online platforms.



Advertisements inevitably affect our day-to-day existence and play a crucial role in our social lives. It aims to promote items and products, but nowadays, we constantly see images of people selling products (Khan & Allil, 2010). In this image, a woman is portrayed with an idealized appearance, accompanied by the message that Radhuni is one of the key ingredients for cooking biryani. Purposively, the advertisement conceals marketing, casting, artist, and production costs. Not only Radhuni, but various other ingredients are also highlighted to make the biryani appear authentic. Each company attempts to emphasize its own traditional identity through its advertisements. Consequently, these visual representations are directly linked to influencing consumers in the market. To present the dish with a traditional vibe, various cultural narratives are employed, which are conveyed through television and online platforms. By appearing realistic, the advertisement evokes nostalgia and cultural associations, creating a simulated experience that is more potent than any single authentic recipe, much like the constructed realities found in Disneyland<sup>5</sup>.



Advertisements portray femininity as beautiful and flawless, but since women cannot meet this unattainable level of perfection, feeling inadequate and unsatisfied is now commonplace (Krawczyk & Thompson, 2015). Above image, I have selected from the Aarong brand website clearly portrays three women in a natural setting, wearing new dresses and carrying two full bags of apples. As Baudrillard's approach things are presented by sign, picture or image to attract their desire customer, this image provides same meaning. In consumer society, items are brought to signify status, identity, and belonging rather than real status. In

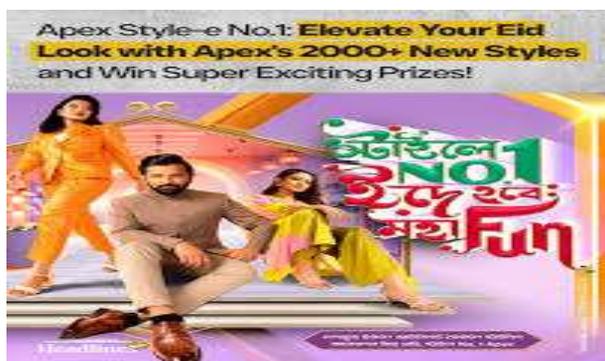
<sup>5</sup> Imaginary to make us believe the "real" outside is authentic.

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unconscious way it creates social hierarchy among people. This image clearly depicts a social class inhabited by wealthy individuals. It creates the illusion that purchasing this product will allow consumers to associate themselves with that class. In reality, such a class is constructed and does not exist independently; it is a creation of the consumer world.



Here, a foodie reel has been selected that promotes a 50% discount on the first order along with free delivery. This image frequently appears on mobile screens while users continue scrolling online. The pizza advertisement represents a particular social class, primarily targeting the younger Generation Z audience, and depicts the distribution spaces as calm and orderly. The boys and girls featured in the advertisement are presented with neat and clean appearances and gestures. Moreover, some of these advertisements are produced by well-known media artists, which further enhance their influence on younger audiences.



According to Stuart Hall's images shape our mind to understand products, identities, and society. This advertisement features two well-known actors, Tahsan Rahman Khan and Tasnia Zamil Farin whose celebrity status significantly influences younger audiences to purchase Apex shoes and related stuff products. In this advertisement, they are portrayed as embodying nobility, style, and economic power. Celebrities wield power through dress by becoming trendsetters, leveraging high visibility to shape consumer behavior, and creating brand prestige via endorsements, turning fashion choices into powerful cultural and commercial statements that influence millions globally

through social proof, emotional connections, and artistic expression. This advertisement effectively conveys this message in an authentic manner.



A woman model has been portrayed in a saree discount advertisement to promote sales; however, she is presented without any flaws or complexity. Diversity and realism are carefully avoided in this representation. Although women as social entities are independent and closely connected to their self-identity, the image in this advertisement depicts the woman as more artificial than natural. Here, the female image is signified not as an individual but as a symbol of the product within the consumerist world.



This image reinforces the notion that a woman needs to be white or brightened in order to be considered beautiful. It promotes a stereotype in which dark skin is constructed as a problem that must be corrected or lightened. The product name *Glow and Lovely* itself carries ideological meaning: “glow” signifies brightness or fairness, while “lovely” refers to beauty and attractiveness. Through this naming and visual representation, women are associated with an artificial standard of beauty that is presented as natural, producing a hyper-real image that does not genuinely exist in the real world. This advertisement features a renowned model, Sabila Noor. The decision to cast her is driven by her face value, that is, the sign value<sup>6</sup> of her image, which is strategically used to attract consumers and enhance the product’s market appeal.

<sup>6</sup> refers to the symbolic, social status



This visual image is presented with colorful juice alongside a modestly dressed woman. The woman is represented as decent and pious, particularly in relation to the occasion of Ramadan. Although Muslims traditionally break their fast with water or lemon juice, the advertisement depicts cucumber juice instead, indicating a deliberate shift influenced by consumer culture. In this way, consumerism is carefully decorated through the female form. Moreover, the advertisement constructs the woman as the ideal and perfect figure responsible for serving Ramadan within the Muslim family, while the role of men is noticeably and deliberately excluded.



This image signifies the use of baby lotion for children from birth to six years of age in order to keep their skin soft. However, in traditional Bangladeshi culture, children did not use lotion in earlier periods. Such advertisements have been broadcast since the late twentieth century, reflecting the growing influence of consumer culture on childcare practices. This advertisement signifies women and children as commodities, using their images to appeal to consumers and reinforce societal notions of beauty and care.



This picture portrays a family scene in which a father and two children are eating noodles, while the mother is positioned as someone engaged in reading. The Bengali tagline, “Ma ke dey ektu extra somoy,” translates as “giving mother a little extra time.” This slogan suggests that the product saves time by reducing the mother’s domestic workload. However, it also reinforces the assumption that cooking and caregiving are primarily the mother’s responsibility, while the father’s role remains limited to consumption rather than participation in household labor. This image directly influences the younger generation by normalizing noodle consumption and presenting it as an easy and time-saving food choice through advertising discourse.



The image prominently displays yellow Frooto juice, held by a model, emphasizing the product through visual appeal. The image is visually dominated by the color yellow, which signifies the ripeness and freshness of the mango flavor. The female model in this image is constructed as a symbol of purity and freshness, turning her into an artificial representation rather than a realistic portrayal. Through this depiction, traditional stereotypes are reinforced, associating women’s beauty and happiness with the color yellow and the qualities it signifies in the advertisement. However, the ultimate purpose of this image is to promote consumerism, as depicted in TV advertisements.

### CONCLUSION

In this research, I have focused primarily on how Bengali advertisements are used to persuade the consumer class, where people purchase products not out of necessity, but to enhance their social class, status, prestige, and identity. As Baudrillard calls it, the vast consumer world creates a hyperreal environment, in which people are encouraged to

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buy products promising to make them slim, flawless, genuine, bright, soft, and pure. In reality, such a world does not exist. Yet, in consumer world Bengali advertisements play a pivotal role to create such unreal world. The above advertisements show how women and children are represented as products rather than as individual entities. Within this consumer world, women are depicted as marginalized, submissive, and passive. The findings of this study emphasize the need to explore how advertisements contribute to the creation of a consumer society and the proliferation of cultural discrimination in Bangladesh.

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