

A QUALITATIVE STRUCTURALIST ANALYSIS OF THE PROMOTIONAL DISCOURSE OF *MERA BRAND PAKISTAN*Hajab Fatima^{*1}, Nazia Anwar², Ansa Aziz³^{*1,3}MPhil Scholar, English, University of Gujrat²Assistant Professor, English, University of Gujrat¹hajabcheema@gmail.com, ²nazia.anwar@uog.edu.pk, ³ansaaaziz01@gmail.comDOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20155079>**Keywords**

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Abstract

Mera Brand Pakistan campaign provides an interesting and powerful example of how government policy, the culture of consumption, and national identity all go hand in hand. *Mera Brand Pakistan* is a common promotion, but also a profound construction of an ordered conception of national identity and national patriotism through a choice of Pakistani products, language, symbols and narrative. A structuralist approach to theory is adopted to identify the construction of meaning through sign systems of different orders and degrees that comprise the message. In the current study, data has been drawn from actual promotional advertisements, addresses by politicians, social network discussions and main stream media reports. The collected data has been analyzed by using Claude Lvi-Strauss' structural approach to myth, Roland Barthes' concept of myth, and Ferdinand de Saussure's Theory of Linguistics. The analysis reveals how *Mera Brand Pakistan* constructs an ideology in which the recodification of economic nationalism appears as a commonplace experience of normal everyday living, rather than simply a promotion or merchandising exercise, elevating the brand and ordered sign systems linked to nation, patriotism, consumption and an illusion of patriotic consumption.

1. INTRODUCTION

We are today in a global era of brand naming, in which branding goes beyond an economic strategy to nation-building. Countries have adopted branding as a tool to instill a sense of national identity among their citizens, to build export markets, and to grow the domestic market. In addition to creating revenue and profit, *Mera Brand Pakistan*, an extensive campaign in Pakistan, is used as a framework to bring together three major components: language, power and identity. It must be understood that "*Mera Brand Pakistan*" is not marketed merely as a brand or slogan but is presented as patriotic rhetoric that

equates consumption with patriotism. While "Made in Pakistan" was once an endorsement of economic viability and quality control; the slogan now means more than that, it is used as an appeal to pride, identity, and community. But pride, identity and community- coming from where and how? Through which linguistic and structural dynamics does it create meaning? Such questions cannot be answered using only market research or analysis. They must be explored through ethnography and interpretative analysis to understand how language is used within broader discourses.

For analysis of the persuasive discourse of the "*Mera Brand Pakistan*" campaign, a structuralist

viewpoint has been considered. From a linguistic perspective, structuralism holds that meaning of words or utterances is constructed through the association and difference of their signifier rather than through inherent signification. Consequently, instead of asking the question, “what impact does *Mera Brand Pakistan* create on market share, customer reaction and profitability? The study tries to investigate the kind of meaning is constructed through the language and imagery of the *Mera Brand Pakistan* campaign?” has been explored. How do opposing structures create notions of nation, identity and consumption? How does an economic logic become constituted as a patriotic tale? The current study seeks to enhance scholarly understanding of how state-sponsored campaigns function as cultural texts that shape social consciousness, in addition to serving as instruments for policy. This research reflects the increasing awareness among consumers in Pakistan of finding products made in Pakistan through advertising. Thus, it seeks to link cultural studies with discourse analysis. Although the majority of literature on national branding describes market-based economic outcomes or marketing strategies as means by which to build a nation brand through advertising, there are few examples of literary criticism of national branding efforts as ideological texts (i.e., literary representations). This research has explored how symbols and language create an interrelationship that produces a particular perception and behavior in the public. A structural study of “*Mera Brand Pakistan*” provides lessons for bigger issues of identity, authority, and culture in modern Pakistan rather than only highlighting its own flaws. This helps to show how formal conversations permeate the sphere of daily activities and transform basic acts, such as acquiring goods, into displays of citizenship and dedication.

1.1 Research Objectives:

- To identify and interpret key signifiers, symbols, and linguistic features in the marketing rhetoric of “*Mera Brand Pakistan*”.
- To examine the role of Saussurean structural linguistics postulates in constructing

national identity and consumer nationalism in *Mera Brand Pakistan* advertisements.

1.2 Research Questions:

- How do the structural relations between signs and symbols contribute to construct meaning in the marketing rhetoric of *Mera Brand Pakistan*?
- How do Saussurean postulates of structural linguistics operate in *Mera Brand Pakistan*'s advertisements to construct national identity and consumer nationalism?

1.3 Delimitations of Study

Several limits can be attributed to this research project. First, the study focuses only on textual and visual materials. There is no information about people's behaviors during shopping nor how the economy would be influenced by purchasing choices. The text used here only cover news publicly released on major national news media, campaign information, speeches and posts on social media from political figures concerning the campaign. Second, another limitation can be attributed to the theory which has been used to analyze the situation. Structuralism is not as critical as a further analysis that could include approaches such as critical discourse analysis and post-colonial theory.

2. Literature Review

The evidence provided by studies in nationalism, structuralism and advertising speech clearly illustrates the importance of language and symbols in the construction of public opinion and ideological stories. The above-mentioned studies conducted in linguistics, cultural studies, media discourse and nationalism, are relevant as they present a theoretical and empirical framework on which campaigns construct meaning by means of signs systems. This part provides a critical literature review on related studies, emphasizing structuralism theory, myth and ideology, advertising rhetoric, as well as connection of nations and consumer identity.

2.1 Construction of Meaning and Structuralism

Ferdinand de Saussure has greatly influenced how language and meaning are studied today; the

philosophical basis for structural analysis can be found in Saussure's linguistics. The Course in General Linguistics argues that "language is a structure of signs working together, where meaning is negotiated by the signs; the meaning of a word arises from its relation with other words within the system of a language, and not from the relation with the referent in the world" (Saussure, 1916/1983). According to Saussure, every linguistic sign consists of a signifier and a signified. The signifier refers to the form that the sign takes, or, if the sign is words, then it is the word itself. The signified is the concept that the sign signifies.

A vital part of Saussure's approach to meaning construction lies in his idea of difference. Words create meanings, and for words to create meanings they require reference to other words; the only way that a word acquires meaning is through contrast. Saussure notes that every linguistic element of an item of linguistic value has meaning solely on account of being contrastive with all the others, that is to say, because it is not any of them" (Saussure, 1916/1983). The different meaning that arises from systems of signifiers explains the diverse meanings created in advertisements. Later research in discourse analysis has sought to expand the scope of the use of Saussure's approach. Scholars have demonstrated that advertising has revealed that advertisers rely heavily on the constant repetition of signifiers and the formation of symbolic relations among the signifiers to evoke particular meanings in audiences' mind and for certain products (Cook, 2001; Williamson, 1978). Several studies have shown that advertising campaigns develop chains of closely related terms (e.g. Pride, quality, heritage, innovation) which then influence the interpretation that the audience gives to the product being offered (Myers, 1994). Different systems of signifiers form structure, this can be compared to the idea that the relationships between different signifiers build meaning.

2.2 Cultural Narratives: Myth and Ideology

Roland Barthes took the ideas of Structuralism into Cultural Studies by using his ideas about Semiotic and Myth Theory to explain ideas in

Discourse Studies. His work on Semiotics and Myth has been widely used in various types of research within Discourse Studies. Barthes' Mythologies looked at how everyday-objects and everyday-practices in culture are given social and political meaning (Barthes, 1957/1972). According to Barthes, Myth is a second order semiotic that uses a first-order sign as a signifier (or Significand) of a broader Cultural concept or idea. Through this process, Political concepts and Cultural standards are presented as natural and unavoidable realities through which we view our world.

Barthes' concept has been used in previous research to establish how Media and advertising create Myths that shape the way we view society. For example, research into branding efforts suggests that promotional slogans have often taken everyday objects and created Myths of National Pride and Identity from those objects (Williamson, 1978; Goldman, 1992). Many studies examining "Made in" labelling efforts have indicated that this type of labelling elicits sentiments of pride and patriotism, which create an idea of national solidarity greater than the actual facts of the merchandise (Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2002). These findings suggest that the process of establishing Myths through Promotional Speech often serves to create normalized ideas of Ideology.

2.3 Cultural Interpretation of Binary Oppositions

Another important structuralist idea relevant to promotional writing is the notion of binary oppositions. An anthropologist named Claude Levi-Strauss argued that the human mind organizes meaning through opposing concepts such as nature/culture, tradition/modernity, or purity/pollution. (Levi Strauss, 1963). The presence of binary oppositions allows people to make sense of cultural messages. Empirical work on political discourse and advertising has also identified the widespread presence and use of binary oppositions within promotional writings, through which to convey simplistic messages and shape the audience's views. For instance, investigations into national marketing campaigns

identified a tendency of constant oppositions, such as the contrast between tradition and modernity, the manufactured versus the authentic, and locality versus the international (Askegaard & Ger, 1998; Holy, 2004). These oppositions create a hierarchical distinction between certain moral and cultural frameworks which influence the audience to take side. Binary oppositions often work as a means to persuade. Through contrasting imported goods to either dependence or cultural contamination and local goods to tradition, heritage and nationalistic self-pride, a convincing story is built which affect the viewers.

2.4 Promotional Conversation and Media Representation

Media discourse studies point to the critical role of representation in producing social meaning. In Stuart Hall's cultural theory of communication, the media is involved in producing meaning instead of reflecting reality through linguistic and imagistic language as well as through narrative structures (Hall, 1997). In representation theory Hall explains representation as the construction and circulation of cultural meaning. Studies examining promotional rhetoric in the media demonstrate that media outlets such as newspapers, television stations, and online websites are central in disseminating campaign messages (Fairclough, 1995; Machin & Mayer, 2012). They demonstrate that promotional messages often recirculate throughout various media platforms while simultaneously being situated in broader social and political contexts, thus bestowing credit and dominance to the program and making the promotion of ideological messages much more effective. Research on digital media has also investigated how social networks such as Instagram and Twitter have transformed promotional communication. Using textual and visual semiotics to promote their campaigns, candidates and institutions are able to address citizens directly in their Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram posts and updates (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; Zappavigna, 2012). This hybridized form of communication appeals to the affective, imagistic and ideological dimensions of

experience simultaneously, thereby elevating the persuasive potency of the promotion.

2.5 Consumerism and Nationalism

This study of government culture and politics revealed an attention toward both nationalism and consumption culture. The most well-known work is arguably that of Benedict Anderson in which he elaborates on nations as imagined communities. Anderson suggests that a national civic identity has come about through shared symbols, stories and behaviors and practices though the peoples of a nation have never met in person (Anderson, 1983). Many researchers point to consumer culture as the way in which people express national belonging. Many economic nationalists say that their respective governments attempt to forge products of their homeland as patriotic and sovereign symbols (Billig, 1995; Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2002). Research examining underdeveloped countries indicates government promotions to encourage buying local products and support local industry in an effort to use fewer imported goods. Studies have also shown consumers as receptive if they sense that their nationalistic sensibilities align with a patriotic marketing effort (Shrimp & Sharma, 1987). Patriotism marketing is a method of making purchase a civic affair, directly correlating ownership of an item to the nation's dignity.

2.6 Research Gap

The field of national branding, specifically within Pakistan, has not gathered much scholarly attention when compared to topics such as structuralism, media discourse, and nationalism. For Pakistan, the main issues discourse-based studies have focused on are media discourse related to social issues, gender, and political declarations, rather than the ways hierarchical sign/symbol systems are used in state advertising efforts in order to articulate ideological discourses. The "Mera Brand Pakistan" campaign represents an interesting point to explore the issue of language, images, and narrative patterns, within the creation of ideological signification. "Mera Brand Pakistan" is essentially an ideologically charged, nationally run advertising effort designed to foster local businesses, along with patriotic consumption.

This study seeks to build upon prior research in order to improve understanding of Pakistani advertising discourse, and analyze the concept of national branding using a structuralist theory of communication and semiotics. Based on these research findings, the current study is significant due to prior works which state that language and symbols are very important in formulating ideological discourses in state-run advertising campaigns. The research on semiotics, nationalism and structuralist theory provide frameworks that may be very beneficial in analyze ways the signal systems, binary opposition and mythic patterns create the communication/meaning processes. In relation to the issue, this analysis utilizes the previous works, and delves into the construction of compelling message of “Mera Brand Pakistan” that creates linkage between economic action and identity of a nation.

3. Methodology

This is a qualitative research study using semiotic and textual analysis based on structuralist theory. A qualitative research design is appropriate in this context because the aim is to interpret meanings rather than to calculate frequency or magnitude; that is to say the study’s purpose focuses on the way language is used as a sign system affecting culture and ideology.

3.1 Data Sources

Data were collected from several sources in order to achieve a broad and diverse corpus. Primary data include:

- The official *Mera Brand Pakistan* website, including information such as summaries of the campaign, its aims and public messages.
 - Transcripts of political speeches at the public launches of the campaign, particularly speeches made by key politicians.
 - Social media posts from the Prime Minister and others campaigning for the cause, especially descriptions and photographs on Instagram.
 - News reports and commentary on the campaign published by major national news sources, e.g. Go Nation, Dunya News
- These sources were chosen because they reflect the narrative of the campaign at both the official and public levels and across a range of genres.

3.2 Analytical procedure

Three processes are interrelated. Firstly, identified signifiers have been selected by focusing on the prominent themes, group of symbols and recurring language elements. Secondly, to comprehend how meaning is systematized through opposition, binary oppositions and thematic frameworks has been identified. Thirdly, Barthes’s semiotic approach has been used to evaluate mythological structures, looking at how the discourse normalizes and presents ideological creations as common sense.

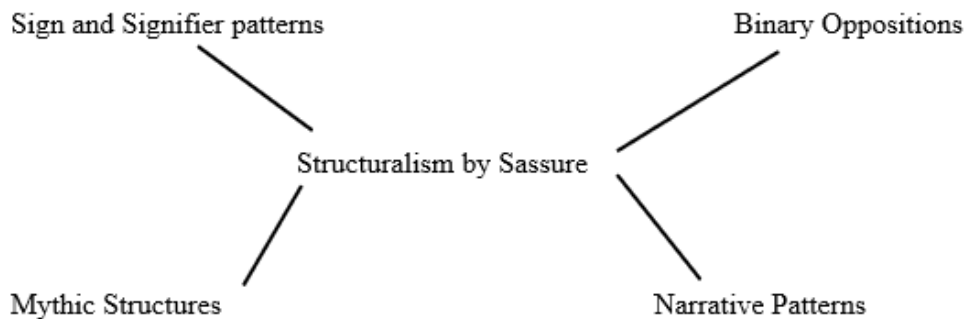


Figure-1: Elements of structuralism by Sassure

3.3 Data Collection

In order to create an appropriately representative and comprehensive, yet diverse, corpus of

discourse used in the campaign, data was obtained using a systematic process from many complementary data sources. The primary source of this data was the official website for “*Mera Brand Pakistan*,” containing objective information relating to objectives, marketing materials and the campaign’s storyline, thereby, demonstrating the official language and ideological framing of the campaign (i.e. providing an unequivocal reference towards economic independence, national pride and excellence). Key phrases were identified and used as examples of lexical and symbolic patterns that recur frequently including, “Empowering Pakistani Brands” and “Building the National Economy”.

The speeches made at the public launch events are another source of information about how political language is utilized to promote the campaign’s ideology. The newspaper texts and official government documents are the material sources collected for this analysis. The speeches are another way to look at political discourse used in promotion through stories, us/them pronouns, and affective words to fortify the campaign ideology. In example of how they used such features, speeches spoke of future economic independence, and said buying local goods was the responsibility of a good citizen. The third group of data used by the campaign were social media postings, typically captions or images of campaign related material posted by either the Prime Minister or other individuals affiliated with the campaign to Instagram. The posts are textual and visual: words are used to describe emotions such as pride, belonging and progress and the images displayed business owners, a green palette, national flags, and smiles. They serve to provide an interaction mechanism to engage directly with those being targeted with symbolic images, which illustrate both who has participated in the campaign and how the campaign itself uses such a wide variety of methods to convey its message. The fourth is composed of texts from national media sources and commentary such as Go Nation and

Dunya News. Articles concerned with campaigning and its effects on politics were selected; the frame of economic nationalism was of great importance. Newspaper articles, and particularly those describing the reception and reaction of the public, is beneficial in demonstrating how campaign rhetoric is framed and disseminated into the public sphere. This source was coded for repeated narratives, quotations by public figures, and frames that support the campaign’s ideology.

4. Data Analysis

An analysis of the advertising discourse of “*Mera Brand Pakistan*” has revealed considerable purpose and methodology regarding how advertisements use language (i.e., words), symbols, and narratological structures to produce meaning. Through the alternative lexical items (words), oppositional structures (opposing thematic elements), and mythological structure themes found in multiple data sources including the official website, political speeches, social media postings, and press reports; advertisers developed an ideological discourse that expresses a cohesive narrative. Economic nationalism is integrated into the means by which economic behavior is defined and portrayed in daily life, wherein the act of consuming locally created products is viewed by consumers as a socially responsible and patriotic choice.

4.1 Signifiers and Semantic Patterns

All campaigns that target the same demographic from multiple platforms have similarities that help connect them and provide both literal and figurative association. For example, there are common phrases used by each campaign (such as “Empowering Pakistani Companies”, “Celebrating Our Heritage Through Innovation”, “Strengthening Pakistan’s Economy”) on the official websites of the campaigns that represent the vision of each organization through its mission statements; therefore, those words not only describe the desired activity, but also perform a function ideologically. For example, using the word “heritage” implies pride in your history and culture; using the word “empower” implies that

you have the power to develop and create your homeland; and using the word “strengthening the economy”, implies that your buying habits affect your local community and the entire country significantly. Likewise, most political figures also use similar language regarding buying from Pakistani companies, such as “Buying from Pakistani companies is an expression of your support for your country”; or “This isn’t just about national pride, it’s also about your role in building this amazing nation.” From a structural perspective, these repeated symbols exist in relation to one another. The word local has its meaning through its opposition to the implied word foreign and therefore through contrast; in the same way, the word empowerment derives its meaning from its antonym, dependency. Therefore, meaning is derived from differences, which follows Saussure’s model of signifier and signified. Every part in the text, when contrasted with other parts, functions as a part of a larger semantic system where national identity is inextricably linked to consumer behavior and moral responsibility.

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In buying Pakistani products a person feels proud and connected to their country. On the other hand, buying a foreign product makes them feel guilty for abandoning their nation and traditions.

This situation is an example of opposing forces also known as a binary. It also applies to how we distinguish between “original” and “fake”. In this case foreign products are labeled as fake while local products are considered original or real. These binaries evoke feelings like guilt and pride. Buying local products gives us pride whereas buying foreign products makes us feel guilty and ashamed of neglecting our own country. These two are opposing forces to binary politics. For example, a political speech might say: We relied on foreign products for years but now we can regain our pride by buying local products. Binary concepts like local vs. Foreign and new vs. Old are used to make readers feel proud of their country and nationality and to help rebuild the nation. Media campaigns focus on themes, like economic independence and regeneration. The repeated use of opposing forces helps readers understand the topic in a way and think logically.

4.3 Mythic Structures

Roland Barthes suggests the campaign’s language functions as creating myths that is the second order of signification that helps naturalize ideological and cultural meanings. This is evident when the civic and moral virtue are frequently associated with “Made in Pakistan.” While the “Made in Pakistan” is first order signification it transmits second order myth that implies civic virtue, patriotism and national pride. Thus, a photo of young businessmen smiling and surrounded with locally made products on social media is captioned with: “Proudly Pakistani, proudly ours,” which transmits notions of economic development, national identity, and communal feeling simultaneously. Furthermore, Political discourse of linking the consumer’s decision to a patriotic and civic gesture, treating the patronage of local products as an individual responsibility and as a civic duty helps the persistence of the mythic frame. Visual semiotics is used to support and augment the mythic signification.

4.4 Narrative Patterns

The campaign establishes a standard set of story themes across mediums to frame public opinion

on economic responsibility and national character. Most speeches and Web pages have the triadic time structure, where they invoke past weakness and dependence, then call attention to the chance offered by the campaign, and finally offer a vision of future strength, pride and self-sufficiency. Apart from providing campaign coherence, this structure also positions the campaign as a moment of transformation in the history of the national economy and culture. Newspapers further reaffirm this concept of the campaign through framing and headlines as well as by positioning local purchasing of goods as patriotic and tactical efforts towards national recovery.

4.5 Interrelationship of Signs, Oppositions and Myth

The interaction of these signifiers, binary oppositions and mythic construction also result in a consistent campaign structure. Opposition of the signifiers (such as pride, quality, heritage) against not local, imitation and disloyal alternatives provides them with meaning. Binary oppositions are also identified to structure the narrative in such a way that an individual's purchasing is presented as culturally and morally superior. This presentation becomes natural, naturalized, moral and credible as a result of the campaign's mythic character. These building blocks result in an intelligible narrative which links the morality, nationhood and individual behavior towards the market. Generally, the article proves that 'Mera Brand Pakistan' is indeed an effective ideological literature as against an outright celebration of goods and products. The discourse produces meaning by connecting the personal action to national requirement, transforming complex realities of economy into the simpler narrative of morality and generating support of public opinion to buy products out of patriotism.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Qualitative structuralist analysis of the "Mera Brand Pakistan" campaign suggests that this project is a layered system of meaning, more than simply a marketing campaign. Meaning making on each of these nodes (political address, news, official

website, social media) are constantly creating and transferring signifiers, double resistances, narrative textures and mythological substrata; terms such as 'pride', 'heritage', 'commission' and 'invention' are juxtaposing individual consumer preferences with the nation. It's important that all these instances highlight the benefits of buying local: environmental impact and community support, and this is conveyed in various forms of media and uses. The brand campaign, is constructed in binary oppositions, for example pride and shame, real and fake, indigenous and multinational; These conflicting dichotomies appear to simplify complex social and economic realities, by establishing the choice between national and foreign goods as a moral imperative. By organizing these distinctions in its framework, the discourse generates approval of the moral order where nationalism is expressed as a consumer choice. These patterned distinctions are a clear example of Lvi-Strauss' discovery, in which the mind constructs a meaning for the world by distinguishing objects as members of contrary categories.

The discourse of the campaign is to a large degree dominated by Barthesian myth: first order connotations such as 'Made in Pakistan' are turned into second order cultural myths where consumerism is aligned with patriotism and nationalism. The myth is reinforced by the visual semiotic and the use of the colors of the national flag, local entrepreneurs and symbols of tradition and modernity. The story is narrated in such a way that economic patriotic action becomes seen as easy; correct; desirable and patriotic. The campaign 'Mera Brand Pakistan' demonstrates what Barthes called that myth builds a social imaginary of what culture feels like natural; everyday; inevitable and unavoidable; by placing its own structures and rules outside history. The narrative structure furthermore strengthens the perceived 'truthfulness' of the campaign. It strengthens the citizens' part in their national advancement by framing the act of local consumption within a larger narrative of past slavery; awakening present and success of the future. The narrative approach enables the campaign to link itself with a historical

imaginary and the simple act of daily consumption with the advancement of a nation.

This interpretation has consequences that reach beyond the nature of consumption and the activities of marketers. At the structural level, it makes it clear how government funded programs are used as an ideological text which changes people's perceptions, beliefs and sense of self, and clearly outlines how the language of publicity makes sense of things by articulating people's actions in relation to the group's beliefs. The study of the power of language and signs in both the creation of new values and in changing the sense of self is relevant to those interested in communication, culture, media and sociology.

In sum, *Mera Brand Pakistan* shows the structuring of the systems of meaning inherent in promotional discourse by way of its credible ideological argument that constructs economic nationalism as normative through the use of sign systems, antagonistic principles, narrative structures and mythic components in building its message. The combination of the language, the sign and story allow for making ordinary acts of patriotic behavior possible, and through the interpretation offered by structuralism it is clear how to establish the interrelations among language, ideology and culture and the creation of public opinion through abstruse or complex mechanisms with the assistance of a state-run project.

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