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MARKETISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE PAKISTANI UNIVERSITIES' ADVERTISEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

In today's dynamic educational landscape, universities have shifted their role from centers of learning to corporate institutions. This study focuses on Pakistani universities, delving into the marketization of higher education and investigating the sociocultural impact and discursive strategies in their advertisements during admission drives. The purpose of this study is to reveal how Pakistani universities position themselves in the competitive educational market. Furthermore, it aims to explore the commodification of knowledge by Pakistani universities for financial benefits. Advertisements by universities, both in print and social media, serve as the initial motivation for student admissions. Universities compete for student enrollment by embedding sociocultural norms intertextually and discursively in their advertisements. Previous studies focus on genre analysis techniques to analyze advertisements; however, this study adopts a broader approach towards understanding the marketization of higher education. The study employs a qualitative method by analyzing 30 advertisements, selected through purposive sampling, and utilizes the Fairclough 3D model as the research framework. The analysis reveals that advertisements aimed at attracting prospective students are highly discursive, serving both promotional and informative purposes. Various strategies are employed, foregrounding the history, ranking, buildings, and faculty of the universities by using adjectives and nominals as grammatical choices to project quality and prestige. Furthermore, the appeal to students is enhanced by the quantification of programs, faculty members, and history to demonstrate credibility. Overall, university advertisements create asymmetrical power dynamics, portraying the university as authoritative and students as dependents.

Keywords: educational landscape, corporate institutions, discursive strategies, commodification, marketization, intertextuality.

INTRODUCTION

In this neoliberal world, universities attract students as customers and commodify knowledge, to be sold on students in the free market discourse. The 21st-century Universities have transformed their status from the "pinnacle of learning" into business entities (Shahnaz & Qadir, 2020). According to Whitt (1998), Knowledge is regarded as the commercial exchange in the marketplace. To treat students as customers and knowledge/information as commodities, modern universities are using strategies of marketization, competing for the clients and benefits that are students, tuition fees, research grants, and higher education is advertised as a product to sell to the students that are potential customers (Shahnaz, 2021). Market forces of demand and supply and language policies of institutions demand the process of marketization. The economic policies embedded in the global ideology extend the concept of the market to all spares of social life, education, language and urban space (Rojo, 2018).

Mok (2000) summarizes five manifestations of marketization of higher education: the adoption of a fee-charging principle; diversification of educational

services by the non-state sector; creation of market-driven courses and curricula; revenue-generation activities; and the introduction of internal competition, the latter being the main concern of this study. Language repertories have been changed in order to enter the global market of capital, people and resources (Rojo, 2018).

Discourse of Marketization

According to Fairclough (1993) discourse of marketization and its discursive practices as a process, transform public discourse in a positive way. The use of language, in broader including written, spoken and semiotics, plays a pivotal role in marketization for any institution because it is a socially theoretically informed way, a form of social practice (Fairclough, 1993). In the past universities were known, as the best planners to free the flow of information from hegemonic powers but now universities are under the influence of state interests to prioritize the state's economic and cultural interests (Xiong, 2012). Educational institutions have adopted business modules in the educational landscape in which students have been transformed into customers (Bunce, Baird & Jones, 2017). Most universities administer those programs which have a high demand for students (Natale & Doran, 2011). Marketization in higher education is defined by Kwong (2000) as the "adoption of free market practices in running schools' by practices of 'cutting production cost, abandoning goods not in demand, producing only popular products and advertising products to increase sales and the profit margin". To cope with the competing market, universities use the best communication skills to attract students as their customers. In terms of communication policies universities make use of effective advertisements in print media as well as new media to report admission information regarding subjects they are offering and eligibility criteria for selection of students in the concerned program, faculty, history and location.

To dig out the discourse of marketization, researchers have used genre analysis techniques. Genre is the use of language for a communicative purpose (Thomson, 2014, swales 1990). The communicative purpose of the genre is the most important factor in genre identification and genre description (Bhatia, 2013,1993) Genres are culturally loaded and in Malinowski's (1960) terms genres help in the survival of social groups (Swales, 1990). It helps society to achieve its goal due to its dynamic nature and broadens the scope of discourse analysis from the linguistic perspective of the text to the socio-cultural perspective (Bhatia, 1993). According to Swales (1990) (a) genres as types of goal-directed communicative events; (b) genres have schematic structures and most strikingly (c) genres as disassociated from registers or styles. The first two points are more relevant to the current study.

There are multiple researches carried out on the discourse of marketization like (Palmer & Posteguillo (2023), Whitmer (2019) Erjavec (2004). The most influential figure who shaped this discourse in terms of the marketization of universities is Fairclough. In his work, Fairclough (1993) reflected upon the discursive practices of the discourse of marketization in later capitalist society in general and universities in specific. In his work, he has applied his three-dimensional model to the University advertisements. This shows how text in the university advertisement affects discourse practices and sociocultural practices. Other works related to the discourse on the marketization of universities are Xiong (2012), Han (2013), Kim & Chul (2017, Feng (2019), and Teo (2019). These articles reflect upon the attraction of job seekers and students to universities through advertisements. Similarly, studies on the branding of universities which is a related theme to marketization have been conducted, by Osman (2008). The studies use genre-based analysis to investigate how Universities function more as a corporation than institutions. Shahnaz (2021) using the Bhatia Model of applied genre analysis, analysed Pakistani university's prospectuses and concluded that the marketization of universities is a need in today's globalized world.

The problem that this research aims to address is to understand the socio-cultural context and the discursive strategies used in Pakistani university advertisements for marketing higher education and to explore the impact of this on the perception of education. This study is motivated by the rationale that advertisements for admissions in print media and on social media are the first thing that attracts students. After that students go for brochures and website searches, that provide further details, to explore more about the university. Furthermore, university advertisements are shorter, usually one page having a different ideological impact than other text related to university advertisements. Previous research only analysed genres of the text related to university advertisements.

Marketization of higher education in Pakistan:

In Pakistan, universities advertise admissions for undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate programs through multiple sources like social media, Google ads and print media. These advertisements target a specific audience by promoting distinguishing features of the university. This strategy is called the discourse of marketization by Fairclough (1993), which targets specific audiences in competition with other universities through discursive practices and a generic structure of the advertisement. Along with academic services i.e. imparting knowledge and information according to the needs of the day, universities also struggle for increasing budgets. To ideologically affect the mind of the audience and to establish power relations, universities advertise their infrastructure, history, faculty, facilities etc. through proper genre. The current research aims to explore the socio-cultural effect of the universities' advertisements as a marketization strategy. To investigate this problem, I will use the Fairclough 3D model to analyse university advertisements to explore the marketization technique of Pakistani universities during the admission drive to answer the following question.

How do Pakistani universities position themselves in the market through advertisements and commodify education to attain market competitive goals?

Research Methodology

The purpose of this research is to find out the marketing strategy of universities, for advertising different programs during admission drives. This corporate practice is a social phenomenon occurring in a natural environment. The qualitative method best suits this research because according to Cresswell (2012), qualitative methods deal with in-depth data collection in the natural setting. To analyze the data, Fairclough's (2001) three-dimensional (3D) model is used. Data is collected through the Google image search engine by purposive sampling. A total of 30 advertisements were selected for analysis. For qualitative analysis, 20–30 samples are enough to analyze a social phenomenon in a natural setting (Cresswell, 2012). Advertisements of all those universities are selected which have the potential to offer admission in multiple programs. These advertisements were analysed manually and then coded as Uni 1, Uni 2, Uni 3 and so on.

Theoretical framework:

For sociocultural context analysis, Fairclough (1993) is used to look at how the specific move pattern of advertisement genre of universities affects the sociocultural context of the students. Fairclough's (2001) 3D model of critical discourse analysis analyses text in three steps 1) description, which is textual analysis including micro-grammatical and macro analysis 2) explanation, which look for discursivity and intertextuality 3) explanation, which tells us about the broader sociocultural context and power relations. The detailed framework is given as under:

Fairclough three-dimensional model:

The model states, that there is no direct relation between the text and the sociocultural practice. It is the discourse practice that links the text with the sociocultural practice. Fairclough (1989) states that our society operates through different discursive layers, and between these layers, there are certain discursive practices such as dominance, power and bias.

Analysing any text through this model will include the following three steps:

Description: It is related to the superficial features of a text. In the description, we only analyse features and traits of a text and we have no concern with the meaning of a text. The features include vocabulary, grammar and textual structure. Experiential, relational and expressive qualities are present in the text, which are presented and projected through the mentioned features. The words are selected by the producer from among the sea of words to serve the ideological purpose (Fairclough, 1989).

Interpretation: In this step, we find the meaning of a text according to the context. The meaning is from a sociocultural and sociopolitical perspective—the text functions as a source from which meaning is derived according to discursive practices. Context is of two types, i.e., situational context and intertextual context. The situational context deals with how the text was produced or what need was felt for text production. In contrast, intertextual context deals with hidden historical events or series of events that are backgrounded in the text (Fairclough, 1989).

Explanation: In this part of the analysis, investigation of discourse practice is done from why? And how? Moreover, it leads us to the social effect of a text.

Data analysis:
The data is analysed in three steps according to Fairclough's (2001) 3D model. In the first phase i.e description, the analysis focuses on the text of the advertisements which helps to interpret the data to find out ideological cues and the effects of text design on large sociocultural contexts/ practices. Data for analysis is tabulated as under:

S/No	Name of the university	Code
1	Quaid-e-Azam University Islamabad	UNI 1
2	University Of Agriculture Faisalabad	UNI 2
3	University of Karachi	UNI 3
4	COMSATS University Islamabad	UNI 4
5	Bahauddin Zakariya University	UNI 5
6	International Islamic University	UNI 6
7	Bahria University	UNI 7
8	University of Peshawar	UNI 8
9	University of Sindh	UNI 9
10	Islamia University Bahawalpur	UNI 10
11	Government College University Faisalabad	UNI 11
12	University of Lahore	UNI 12
13	City university of science and technology, Islamabad	UNI 13
14	Abdul Wali Khan University Maradan	UNI 14
15	University of Central Punjab	UNI 15
16	Forman Christian College University Lahore	UNI 16
17	National Defence University	UNI 17
18	University of Punjab	UNI 18
19	University of Management and Technology	UNI 19
20	Sarhad university, Peshawar	UNI 20
21	Qurtaba university of science and technology	UNI 21
22	Gomal University	UNI 22
23	University of Baluchistan	UNI 23
24	Foundation University Islamabad	UNI 24
25	University of Education Lahore	UNI 25
26	Air University Islamabad	UNI 26
27	Hazara University	UNI 27
28	Islamia College University Peshawar	UNI 28
29	National University of Modern languages	UNI 29
30	Kohat University of Science and Technology	UNI 30

Table: 1

Description:
Advertisements are highly discursive in nature and their macrostructure i.e generic structure is discussed below. Focusing on the choices of vocabulary and grammar used, the major promotional strategies found in the admission advertisements of the universities is found in the title portion. The name of the university is mentioned along with its monogram. This feature is present in all the advertisements considered for analysis. The title is mostly in bold letters and has a larger font size than the rest of the text in the rest of the text in the advertisement. Colour effects both of the text and the background are unique in order to make it more visible. Along with verbal communication purposes, it has visual effects which Kress & Leeuwen (2021,2006) talk about. In their book "Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design" they talk about the use of unique framing, angle, and distance, as well as the use of colour, texture, and shape to have a purpose in communication and creating meaning. E.g.



Fig 1: UNI 24

In the given figure only two texts are in yellow colour i.e., "Open" and "SCHOOL OF SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY" for the rest the yellow colour is used for the background in different shapes. According to Fairclough (2001) University establishes its identity with the statement "school of science and technology" as well as communicating with the audience with the word "open" to inform them about the application status with the visual effects. The same effects i.e colour and font size are found in all advertisements with few exceptions where along with English, Urdu is also used i.e., UNI 6, UNI 27. The titles are nominalized, and only heads are used.

Along with the title, all the advertisements selected contain a description of the session for which applications will be entertained, with the session name and year. This depicts a status of urgency and time frame for the application process. It has its interpersonal role, communicating with its audience to apply within the prescribed and mentioned time.

Very few universities have used slogans. The slogan shows the desired long-term goals and aims of the universities. slogan statements reassure the legitimacy and demands of the growing market. The vocabulary and grammatical choices used in vision statements are mostly nominals and noun phrases with adjectives used as boosters. these are given as under:

In pursuance of excellence (UNI 03)
Top-class education in a vibrant environment driven by research and innovation (UNI 30)
The home to high achievers (UNI 14)
Home to discovering and empowering knowledge (UNI 7)
Tomorrow starts today at Ripha (UNI 20)
Thousands dream one place (UNI 19)
The centre of your future (UNI 15)
Discover yourself/ inspire posterity (UNI 12)

As described above, through these statements' universities persuade students for admission. These statements have high experiential and expressive values along with high communicative cues. These statements are mostly noun phrases with a single exception i.e. UNI 03 which is a prepositional phrase. There is no regularity in linguistic choices of vocabulary and grammar but mostly adjectives and imperatives are used in these phrases.

Alternatively, some of the universities have used descriptors as a promotional strategy. These include the ranking of the university nationally or internationally, the number of programs available for admission and years of service since the establishment of the university. The use of digits is prominent in this portion. If we talk of ranking UNI 02 describes it in this way "ranked top 10 Asian university and top-notch university of the country offering 194-degree programs". This statement communicates the credibility of the university with figures along with the use of the adjective "top". It shows a strong claim i.e. "top-notch university of the country". The statement encompasses both ranking and no of programs in a single phrase. Similarly, the service of the university is shown by the number of years since its establishment. E.g., "158 years of excellence" (UNI 11) or "100 years of glory" the common grammatical structure is (quantifier + noun + preposition + noun). The last noun is the nominalization of the adjective. Such kind of statements communicate the history of the university. Mentioning its history shows its quality service and most old universities use such promotional strategy consistently. Contrary to this few of the well-established universities have shared the QS ranking using a passive structure focusing on ranking agency e.g. "ranked 378 by QS world university ranking 2022" (UNI 1) while others have mentioned this ranking categorically " No. One in Pakistan, 3rd in south Asia, 24th in Asia" the world " ranked" is hidden for the purpose to highlight ranking mentioned in ordinals.

Apart from these specific features which have specific vocabulary for distinguishing themselves in the market, the rest of the vocabulary and grammatical structure are common in all advertisements. Mostly noun phrases and verb phrases are used, whose interpersonal function is to inform the audience about the entities advertised like names of the programs offered and about the processes.

The overall textual organisation is highly discursive in nature divided by colours and font size. Each portion of different communicative purposes has a clear-cut demarcation. The common structure drawn from the 30 samples is shown in Table 2.

Move	Function
1. Overview of the service provider Step 1. University Name Step 2. University slogan or motto	Identifying the service
2. Presenting the location of the service Step 1. Description of the campus Step 2. Description of the campus location/city/ country	Locating the service
3. Describing the academic services Step 1. Overview of the departments Step 2. Description of administration Step3. Religious and ideological affiliation	Describing and justifying the service
4. Establishing credentials Step 1. Accreditation Step2. International recognition/ranking Step 3. Research productivity	Endorsing the value of service
5. Offering 'extra' services Step 1. Providing essential details Step 2. Indicating value	Attracting reader attention

Table: 2

Interpretation:

interpretation deals with the text in relation to the discourse practice of text production and text consumption (Fairclough,2001). interpretation helps to highlight the context of the situation and the intertextual context that lies within the interdiscursivity of the text. The analysis of the discursive event as a social practice may refer to different levels of social organization i.e., the context of the situation the institutional context and the wider social context (Fairclough, 1993).

Data analysis shows that in advertisements text production is highly discursive in nature, as shown in Table 2. University advertisements, being discursive, serve a hybrid purpose of promotion and information dissemination. There are multiple promotional genres in the advertisements of the universities like the history of the university, ranking of the universities, location of the university and no of programs offered as well as no of faculty members. The use of these genres depends upon the availability of the feature. it is found that those universities which have a historical background have less focus on other strategies while those universities which have no history focus more on building, location, facility scholarships etc. making the advertisement more discursive. e.g., 'up to 75% tuition fee waiver in MS program (UNI 24)' These advertisements are communicating the ideal version of the university on a single page. The recurring patterns of vocabulary, grammar and themes in university advertisements have ideological implications leading to power relations and the agentive nature of the university which is discussed in the "Explanation section".

Just like other corporate sectors universities identify themselves with unique strategies. Identity construction is strongly linked with brand image and desirable results (Sevier, 2001; Temple, 2006). Some universities name themselves after famous personalities e.g., Quaid-I-University Islamabad (named after the founder of Pakistan), Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan (named after the founder of ANP), Bhaudin Zakriya University, Forman Christian College (named after Charles William Forman). Some universities name themselves after cities. For example, UNI 30 (Kohat University of Science and Technology). Some name themselves after affiliation/partnership with other state institutions. For example, UNI 26 (Air University Islamabad, named due to affiliation or influence or public-private partnership with Pakistan Air Force).

Few of the universities name themselves after the location where they are located. For example, UNI 9 (University of Sindh, named after the province) and UNI 12 (University of Lahore, named after the city). Very few of the universities show religious identity. For example, UNI 6 (International Islamic University, Islamabad).

Adjectives and nominals are excessively used in these advertisements. it gives a sense of security to the investor i.e., students in terms of a bright future and quality education which is on sale. UNI 02 describes its ranking as "ranked top 10 Asian university and top-notch university of the country offering 194-degree programs" and establishes its position in front of the audience with the gradable adjective "top". Here this university compels the students to presuppose all the positive images of the university. all that description which occupies space is packed within this gradable adjective. This helps in changing the decision of the student about admission to any other university by comparing the ranking of the university. These presuppositions are built within the mind by the economic use of the language which assigns a bundle of information to a single part of the sentence and an adjective serves this purposefully (Odilovna & Otabek, 2022). Similar proper adjectives change the world view of the audience about the university e.g. "top 10 Asian universities". Similarly, nominalization along with adjectives act as persuasive devices. It transforms processes and actions into entities e.g. "In pursuance of excellence" (UNI 03) or "The home to high achievers" (UNI 14).

Promotional strategies within the universities use quantification by using numbers to describe QC ranking, history, no of programs etc in the case of ranking it shows credibility, for no of programs its shows the diversity of the university and in terms of QC ranking it shows prestige. The use of numbers somehow resonates with the readers and creates a sense of reliability (Shahnaz, 2021).

Discursivity in the advertisements, described above, shows high ideational and interpersonal value. In terms of ideational value, we can say that the university defines itself with and to create a brand image as high as possible. The advertisements have high interpersonal values created through a unique selection of colours vocabulary and grammar described in the description above.

Explanation:

The last final step of the three-dimensional model is interpretation. It deals with the portrayal of discourse as a part of the social process. The relation of social processes and social practices with the discourse is dialectical (Fairclough, 2001).

The analysed university advertisements show that high marketization trends have been incorporated into higher education, highlighting the strengths of the University while hiding the limitations. This corporate behaviour of the university is shaped by the demanded subjects and in turn, those advertised programs of universities affect the preferences of the students who seek admission. To attract students towards these programs for admission universities take help from advertising features like history, building, student capacity, scholarships, qualified faculty and constructed ideologies packed in slogans, motos and vision statements. Broadly we can say that neoliberal ideologies shape universities as a corporation instead of custodians of education. These universities' advertisements cover the broad context beyond educational needs due to marketization and neoliberalism (Marginson, 2011). This helps them to attract students, secure funding and enhance their competitive position.

These advertisements target the Pakistani dream of success which is to get a market-demanded degree from a prestigious university to earn money. They only advertise those programs which are popular among students (Kim, & Uhm, 2017) This dream compels universities to portray themselves as shopping malls, their different departments as shops and knowledge as a commodity. In this respect, universities describe themselves with adjectives, location and Qc ranking to show their prestigiousness. In return, students filter their desired universities on comparing the mentioned descriptions. This consumerist framing aligns with broader societal trends and economic forces, where education is increasingly viewed as a personal investment and students as customers seeking a return on their investment.

Power dynamics are evident in the advertisement through the asymmetrical relationship between the university and the target audience. The university represented as an authority and expert, exerts power by defining the desirable qualities and attributes of education. Meanwhile, the audience is positioned as dependent on the university's offerings, creating a

power imbalance that reinforces the university's market position.

It is essential to consider the societal implications of such discourse. The marketization of universities can lead to increased competition, unequal access to education, and a narrowing of educational goals and outcomes. Furthermore, it may perpetuate existing social inequalities, as students from privileged backgrounds are better positioned to pursue education as a consumer choice.

Conclusion:

Due to the fluidity of the market and the new capitalistic norms, universities behave like a corporate sector that invests in themselves to draw capital out of the market. For this purpose, they target the audience i.e. students as potential customers, through their unique strategies of marketization. These marketization strategies are implicitly embedded in their text production which meet the needs and psyche of contemporary society. Society and the marketization strategy of the university are in a dialectical relationship with each other and shape each other. They not only impart education but also try to raise funds for running different educational programs and promote themselves as autonomous bodies, free from state control. As evident from analysis to cope with these challenges Universities portray themselves as agents of education and exercise power through systematic means of admission within specific time frames. The agency comes through the strength, universities have, i.e. strength in the form of history, QC ranking, no of the programs offered and location of the universities. These strengths are part of the university advertisements. The more these qualities are present in a university the more it can cash it and people are willing to invest with them in the form of a fee for the desired academic program.

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