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Women's Portrayal In Pakistani Print Advertisements: A Comparative Study Based On Semiotics

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Abstract

This study investigates how Pakistani still advertisements portray women and construct certain ideology. This qualitative research employs semiotic method to analyze the content. With stratified sampling technique, six advertisements have been selected all together that appeared in different magazines and in social media campaign of different products during the year 2019 taken mainly from Duniya Sunday Magazine, Weekly Akhbar-e-Jahan and social media pages of particular products. The selected advertisements analyzed the representation of Pakistani women in given time period with the help of semiotic analysis, whereas, the psychological lens is used to unveil the meaning and message constructed by specific signs within the advertisements. This study has examined the advertisers' practice in depicting and constituting female identity in Pakistan, where most of the advertisements reveal Pakistani women as independent, confident and modern beings. This study will develop inferential and critical comprehension among masses regarding science of signs; also it would be significant for experts and policy makers who can retrieve Pakistani cultural elements while executing advertisements in future.

Keywords: Semiotics, Still Advertisements, Traditional, Portrayal, Modern, Ideology.

تلخیص

اس تحقیقی مطالعے میں پاکستانی میڈیا میں شائع ہونے والے اشتہارات کا جائزہ لیا گیا ہے۔ جہاں اشتہارات میں خواتین کی عکاسی اور اس سے منسلک نظریات کو زیرِ تحقیق لیا گیا ہے۔ جس کے لئے علامتی تجزیے یعنی علم علامات کو بطور تحقیقی نظریہ اپنایا گیا ہے۔ لہٰذا اس مقصد کو بروئےکار لانے کے لئے سال ۲۰۱۹کے اخبارات اور سوشل میڈیا مُہم سے چھ اشتہارات کو منتخب کیا گیا ہے۔ منتخب کردہ اشتہارات کی سطحی جانچ علم علامات سے کی گئی ہے جبکہ نفسی تجزیے کو باریک بینی سے استعمال کرتے ہوئے نتائج اخز کیے گئے ہیں۔ اس تحریر میں منتخب کردہ اشتہارات میں خواتین کی تشخص کی عکاسی اور اس سے جُڑی خواتین کی شناخت کا تعلق علم علامات کی بنیادوں پر دیکھا گیا ہے۔ نتیجتاً یہ معلوم ہوا کہ پاکستانی اشتہارات میں خواتین کا تشخص ایک مضبوط اور خودمختار عورت کے طور پر دکھایا گیا ہے جو دورِ حاضر کی سوچ کی عکاس ہے۔ مزید یہ کے ایک عام عورت کی خودمختار عکاسی کو معمول

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کا حصّہ بنا کر پیش کیا گیا ہے جو کے پاکستانی معاشرے کے برعکس ہے۔ یہ تحریر پاکستانی پرنٹ اشتہارات میں دکھائے جانے والے خواتین کے تشخص کو نہ صرف بیان کرتی ہے بلکہ خواتین کے کردار میں موجود بنیادی تعمیری اور ثقافتی رجحان پر بھی روشنی ڈالتی ہے۔ یہ تحقیقی تحریر قارئین میں علم علامات سے منسلک تخمینی اور تنقیدی سوچ پیدا کرتی ہے۔ ساتھ ہی ساتھ یہ تحقیق تفریحی صنعت کے شعبے سے تعلق رکھنے والے ماہرین کو مستقبل میں پاکستانی ثقافت اور خواتین کے تشخص کی بہترین عکاسی کو واپس بہال کرنے میں مدد فراہم کرے گی۔

کلیدی الفاظ: سیمیاٹک تجزیہ، پرنٹ اشتہارات، روایتی، عکاسی، جدید، نظریہ

Introduction

Advertisements are known to be the public announcements, using any medium by advertisers to promote their product. Apart from public announcements advertisements also play their role in shaping and developing one's nature and thoughts with regard to life and deliver certain messages through different semiotic, visual, and printed text in order to aid specific idea sometime consciously and sometimes unconsciously (Yakin & Totu, 2017). Eco (1979) writes that the science of 'semiotics' studies all the cultural elements as a part of communication, he further states that semiotic and communication has a strong relationship because of similar ideas like verbal, non-verbal, symbol, codes, etc.

It has been observed that the advertisers are obsessed with gender depiction when it comes to advertisements. The portrayal of gender in certain ways establish the definite positions for them in society which in results influence the public psychology for these specific roles. The excessive use of gender roles by advertiser maintains the general relationship between the genders and their representation. Consequently, it influences the society. Jha et al., (2017) states that the relation between body representation and media goes side by side, particularly the representation directly influences the attitude of the audience on a large scale. Such image creation of any specific gender does not only teach the public but also later become their identity. Tsotra (2004) & Gauntlett (2008) claim that media represents men and women in a defined way and such constructed identities regarding masculinity and femininity are extremely strong that it cannot be disregarded.

Gill & Gill (2007) states that gender depiction can also be defined as order of the attitude of certain gender, which further helps the society to infer and interpret the civil realities. Goffman (1979) describes that advertisements never look strange to the audience because of the particular use of codes that defines gender and their role in the advertisement. Further Goffman (1979) explains the role division and ranking, relative size of the gender, the intimate or feminine touch, reutilization of the roles and body display.

When one looks towards the portrayal of masculinity in the advertisements which shows confident body posture, open and wide eyes, conscious and alert, tight grip over things, rational, strong and effective. On the other hand, feminine depiction in the advertisements is bit divergent such as wearing intimate dresses, behave like a child, caressing towards the objects, mostly sitting or roaming around bed, seems busy in the kitchen, deal with the home chores, looking confused sometimes, seems happy and fragile when come in some skincare products. In most of the cases seems seductive, careless, playful, and available. Krijnen (2020) defines such roles are the depiction of submissiveness and powerlessness of the women in front of the men. Mendes & Carter (2008) states that in advertisements women are encouraged to hunt for beauty and shown submissive rank when handling sex appeal roles.

Sugiharti (2018) describes that semiotics analysis assumes the underlined meanings of the signs used by the content creators in the advertisements. Advertisements utilize certain narratives and myths to promote certain ideology as a result the narratives become social reality and eventually the myths become the part of peoples' general believe. In order to depict such signs advertisers can use anything like any object, colour, dialogue, dressing and even the gender, the use of these sigs connects the denotative meaning with connotative meaning that further develops the social and cultural relevancy. Pramudita et al., (2019) explains this phenomenon like the use of a young model in the advertisement of a beauty product also inculcates a connotative mythical idea of feminine beauty.

Numerous scholars of structuralism have contributed immensely to the domain of critical discourse analysis. Peirce (2006) in his theory of signs or semiotics focuses on logic as a central component of his theory, he laid stress on the theory of signs as it provides aid in discovering the pragmatic meanings behind the objects and ideas. In his early account of semiotics, he explained the significance of infinite chain of signs, as the connections between signs unlock the complete picture of a narrative and hidden ideologies prevailed in the society. Dwita (2018) has mentioned that Peirce theory of semiosis is a useful tool to unfold the concealed ideologies presented in the form of visuals, colours, symbols and code, as the connection of the signs helps a reader to interpret the absolute notion and the cultural manifestations established and promoted by the advertisers in the visual display of arts. Yakin and Totu (2014) conclude that semiotic approach is a best approach to comprehend cultural manifestation in the process of communication. This paper presents a comparative study between skincare and non-skincare advertisements by using semiotic analysis to examine the portrayal of women and it also explores the culture or ideology they promote.

Review of Literature

Humans are able to communicate in both verbal and non-verbal manner by using signs, sounds, symbols or paralinguistic means to transmit a message. However, there are some

cultural identities in connection with signs and symbols within these cultural orientations; the semiosis (sign processing) takes place (Bezuidenhout, 1998).

Semiotics is a branch of structuralism; Saussure, Pierce and Barthes are prominent figures of this conceptual school (Mc Daugall, 2012). Saussure's semiology deals with linguistic elements while determining something in terms of signs, signifier and signified whereas Pierce added to it with aim at expanding the research of semiology beyond the linguistic sign used in human communication, for him besides verbal, 'non-verbal' cues also comes under the study of sign in order to comprehend something pragmatically (Bezuidenhout, 1998). Chandler (2002) writes that Pierce's theory of sign focuses on trichotomy system, among them first is 'sign' that are individual elements, second is 'object' which is something created by sign and third is 'interpretent' it is a meaning created with the combination of signs and object, which is previously unknown and abstract, this relation is known as 'semiosis' by Pierce without it communication is not possible, Pierce put stress over the logical thinking, for him signs make people to think and join meaning to the things that exist in the environment, because inferential meanings are always there that are sometimes created consciously and unconsciously by the users (cited in Yakin & Totu, 2014). In this way structuralism aimed at defining the framework that gives meaning to a network as found in texts (images, clothes, stories, dance moments-Anything that beyond its physical properties carries meaning) (Mc Daugall, 2012).

Language has a strong influence on individual and their behaviour, particularly in the fields of marketing and advertising language including verbal and non-verbal has equal importance while conveying certain massage with intention to influence people, even visual and graphics in advertisements have strong impact on the consumer (Kannan & Tyagi, 2013). Language used in media is a combination of written, verbal, non-verbal, and aesthetic communication and its prompt connection to meaning. One can comprehend this language by deconstructing this assemblage of meaning (Mc Daugall, 2012). Yakin and Totu (2014) conclude that semiotic approach is a best approach to comprehend cultural manifestation. Perci claims that semiotics aims at analysing media texts as organized whole, he emphasis over the importance of various elements and their placements within the context, as it must be studies as a whole, not just a part of larger picture because each individual element creates certain meaning whereas meaning created by such social apparatus like media usually shapes the culture of particular society (Bezuidenbout, 1998).

In 1796, the term ideology was introduced to refer to a science of ideas (Noth, 1991 cited in Bezuidenhout, 1998). Later advertisements become active vehicle to promote certain ideology to represent, theories, beliefs and opinions with in a particular culture. Moreover, the term 'ideology' was echoed by semioticians as something generated, by signs that represent the advertisement, its message and prompt specific deeds, habits, or institution for example multinational companies propagate not only their product but

certain ideology of capitalism using specific signs. Like motor car, clothing, perfume (Bezuidenbout, 1998).

On the other hand, print media is considered as an effective tool to shape public opinions. It does not only educate them but reveal unknown information as well. Various researches have shown that print media especially newspaper advertisement is one of the powerful tools that not only develop general trends in society but also affecting people's deep thinking, as a results adapting public's general perception, beliefs and attitudes (Afshan, 2018). Ali (2010) also claims that pictorial representation of gender and the employed language in media has a great and ever-lasting influence on the targeted audience which shapes their attitudes and behaviour towards certain ideologies.

Mirza (2018) states that 'Gender' is a well-known term used in various studies such as psychology, education, sciences and media studies. There are so many factors society has attached to specify the gender and its role, such as physical appearance, personal traits, and behaviour which creates stereotypes and further leads to evaluate both genders accordingly. Mischel (1966) is of the opinion that interaction with typical models such as movies, T.V, & books in the initial phase shapes or strengthens perception regarding sexual orientation unconsciously; however, with time it's becoming a well-known subject in media and communication in terms of advertisements.

What is Gender? The concept has been widely discussed since 1970s, Oakley (1972) defines 'Gender' as a matter of culture instead of biological, it's a social classification into 'masculine' and 'Feminine' (cited in krijnen & Bauwel,2015). Williams and Best (1990) in their study found that adventurous, active, and aggressive tracts are affiliated with masculinity whereas affectionate, attractive and curious traits are connected with feminity (Cited in Krijnen & Bauwel, 2015). These arrangements regarding gender are culturally organized for example, in western society it's a firm belief that girls admire light colours especially pink whereas boys mostly like the colour blue (Cited in Krijnen & Bauwel, 2015).

Curran and Park (2000) pointed out US ideological domination over media which is leading it to media imperialism & that is further converting into cultural imperialism by depicting Westernization, Capitalism and American culture, hence media is creating a homogenous view of life, which controlling minds of targeted viewers. Krijnen & Bauwel (2015) after reviewing an enormous amount of academic work on portrayal of women in media, found two strands, among them one focuses on the portrayal of women in new media industry while second put stress over the representation of women in advertisement and popular culture.

Gender representation is an important topic in academic researches of media from decades because meanings connected to certain gender are socially constructed using

both cultural and psychological approaches thus it creates double meaning where one refers to the simple numerical analysis of the presence of certain gender in media while other is more complex and involves particular ideology behind the representation of the gender (Krijnen & Bauwel, 2015, Karlsson et al., 2021).

Goffman emphasis that commercial photography of any society is an important tool to know what kind of culture has created/generated by displaying the gender, on the other hand commercial photography or still advertisement has persuasive function, it is meant not to persuade only to buy the product but has influence over the ideologies of targeted audience, Goffman further states about feminine gender display in advertisements as a symbol of feminine touch, as we see her depicted fragility or delicacy while touching something for example touching a perfume bottle, a wine glass or her face, in his one of the researches, he came to the point that men is a gender which is mostly situated in public spheres whereas women are more often placed in advertisements like cosmetics, household detergents (Cited in Krijnen & Bauwel, 2015).

Gill (2007) is of the opinion that media has transformed the concept of 'women' into 'superwomen' who is good wife, mother, friend, lover, boss, or employee, moreover an available and self-assured sexual creature, all this promoting a normative view to see a particular gender. Technically, Signorielli (1997) states that the only medium where woman presence is higher than man is in magazine advertisements where the ratio is 82% women to 18% men (Toffoletti et al., 2021; Krijnen & Bauwel, 2015).

Ali and Shehwar (2011) found in their study that most of the advertisers have used bodily charm of women to promote their products related to women care and cosmetics. While reviewing the related literature none of the comparative study has been observed in order to find women's portrayal in modern or traditional attire in both female oriented and non-female oriented kind of advertisements. In this way the current study is filling this gap by comparing women's portrayal in still advertisements of skincare and non-skincare products by using semiotic as a tool. It also applies psychological lens to investigate certain ideologies that advertisements contain, particularly in the locale of Pakistan.

So the present study aims to unveil women's identity/portrayal in Pakistani still ads in both skincare and non-skincare products. It also explores whether particular portrayal is aiding certain culture or not. In order to achieve the above mentioned objectives, following hypotheses are composed for the study.

Research Questions

1. How are women portrayed in Pakistani still advertisements, either in modern or traditional attire?

2. Do Pakistani still advertisements promote certain ideology or culture regarding women's portrayal?
3. Is there any difference between the portrayal of women in advertisements of skincare and non-skincare products?

Research Methodology

There are wide varieties of advertisements across the print media, and it is hard to study all of them. Therefore, in order to explore the given research questions still advertisements of skin-care and non-skincare products are observed. As qualitative research provides an in-depth analysis in cases where social communication is observed (Neuman, 2014), so in current study, with qualitative method, semiotic analysis has been chosen as an analytical tool to analyse Pakistani still ads. For this purpose, sample selected with the help of stratified sampling in which female sub-strata are identified as either modern or traditional women into two groups.

Theoretical Framework

The current research employs 'semiotics' under the light of Peirce's theory of sign (semiosis) as theoretical frame work to analyze the presentation of different signs present in still advertisements. In this connection psychological lens has been deployed to comprehend the inferential meanings behind.

Analysis of Advertisements

The main objective behind the analysis of these commercials is to highlight the projection of women in Pakistani print advertisements and to explore the ideological aspects at the back of its production. The focus of this research is on semiotics such as gestures, dressing, setting moreover, how all of these elements create certain ideology for the viewers. In this analysis still advertisements are being used from both the categories of skincare and non-skincare products in order to find whether both kinds of advertisements portray woman in similar manner or not.

The first enclosed advertisement in the appendix is taken under skin-care ads category. The model (Sarwat Gillani, a well-known model and actress) in the present advertisement of skin white, skin care product is particularly wearing a white T-shirt which is a symbol of modernity and indicates western culture of clothing. In jewellery items, she is only wearing a wrist fitted bangle in delicate golden colour which is not only complimenting her shirt but hand as well. The way she is touching her arms with fingers, depicts that this product favours soft skin of women. A mild smile on her face shows that she is enjoying her body appearance and feeling satisfied with this product. The model's gaze

particularly facing camera lens that portrays her confidence while having this outlook. So the overall appearance of female model in this advertisement signifies her as modern woman. There is no such thing called traditional in it like 'dupatta, traditional jewellery design or colour'. It is marked that Pakistani advertisements portray woman in modern attire, which has been identified after the semiotic analysis of the chosen advertisement.

The second advertisement is about a non- skincare product. It's a culinary item, particularly cooking oil. The model (Amna Sheikh, a famous model and actress) here is dressed in 'net' shirt of light yellow colour that depicts the colour of product whereas she has paired her net shirt with sleeveless inner which is a strong depiction of modern woman. On the other hand, the design of the wristlet and earrings wore by the model in golden colour portray the elements of eastern culture. Whereas her bold makeup and direct eye contact with camera lens shows her confidence and independency. Moreover, the slogan of the product says *'suno dil ki awaz'* with hashtag *#meri awaz* symbolizes the feminist approach. So in this advertisement most of the signs promote modern concept of glamorous woman. It can be said that this non-skincare product also depicts that Pakistani print ads portray women in modern attire.

Further referring to the appendix no. 3, this advertisement comes under skincare products named as English Ubtan Turmeric Cream, which is particularly a part of an Eastern culture, mostly used by women at the time of their wedding to beautify their skin. The model in this advertisement is wearing a shirt in bright yellow colour with white embossed print. This is not only depicting one of the events of Eastern culture of marriages, that is 'Mayon' but also complementing the packaging of the product. Moreover, her light makeup also shows her up as the bride of the 'Mayon'. Similarly, her shocking pink nail paint portrays festivity; because it is the colour that usually girls wear on occasions to celebrate the festivity in Eastern culture. On the other hand, the model is looking intently in the camera lens which shows her confidence over her outlook and product as well. Hence all signs in this advertisement giving her traditional look and supporting that Pakistan still ads report Pakistani women in traditional attire

The fourth advertisement in the given appendix is of a non-skincare product. Hashmi Ispaghol is featuring 'Nadis Hussain', a renowned model of Pakistani media industry. In this advertisement she is holding a glass full of Ispaghol, her smile and eye contact with camera while having Ispaghol is demonstrating her confidence over product. The makeup look is soft but depicting modernity with smoky eyes and nude lips moreover silver ring in her ring finger is also a sign of modernity. On the other hand, her white dress with sleeves and dupata is a strong sign that demonstrate Eastern culture of clothing. It can be said that because of the presence of dupata, model's outlook is supporting the idea that Pakistani still ads portray women in traditional attire.

Referring to appendix no. 5: Dove Pakistan is another well-known name that produces skincare products. In the still advertisement of Dove shampoo, the model is carrying a box, written 'dove' on it and pushing it up which shows that she is satisfied with the product. Her bright smile on her face with nude makeup look and open hair signifies that she is enjoying the texture of her hair and the loose curl in it which is enough to make her look beautiful, the presence of 'kajal' is an element of Eastern outlook whereas her camera focused eyes depicting her confidence and independency. Moreover, her sleeveless top in white colour is a strong demonstration of Western outlook, here white colour is not only complimenting the packaging of the product but also supporting the claim of the company regarding the use of pure ingredients in the product, whereas her slim and curved back aiding the concept of slim and smart woman. Therefore, the presence of different signs prove that Pakistani ads depict females in a modern attire.

Appendix no 6 is an advertisement of a non-skincare product. In this advertisement of Lipton green tea, the female model (Hareem Farooq, a well-known name in Pakistani media) is wearing a jogging suit in neon green colour which is also a colour of the product; it is paired with high pony tail that depicts a concept of modern appearance of a woman while going for jog. Further, her pink lips are giving her a natural look with nude makeup, her gentle smile giving her a delicate look. Similarly, her eyes and her body posture; where her left hand is on her back and with right hand she is holding a cup of green tea, depict her confidence and independency. All these signs are contributing to develop a sense of modernity. Hence such presentation proves the idea that Pakistani still ads represent Pakistani women in modern outlook.

Discussion

This study analyses the representation of women in Pakistani still advertisements. Ali and Shehwar (2011) write, it is obvious to portray women in modern and glamorous attire in most of the advertisements of skincare products and cosmetics. The current study explores whether in non-skincare and cosmetics products the women are still portrayed as glamorous and modern or not.

It has been observed that in the advertisements of traditional Eastern products such as Ubtan and Ispaghol, the elements of traditions are there such as dupata, colures, designs of shirt and body postures, as Ryan and Deci (2000) also agree that Eastern societies are mostly identified on the basis cultural elements use by people while dealing with the social environment (cited in Faiza & Farooqi, 2013). But still a little touch of modernity has also found while analyzing the advertisements of traditional products i.e. nude lips, open hairs and light jewellery.

On the other hand, most of the advertisements have portrayed women in a modern outlook in terms of dressing, makeup, jewellery and body posture. Iftikhar and Islam (2015) also found in their study on TV commercials that most of the advertisements portray women as glamorous and constructing her identity from traditional to modern.

After the comparison between two categories of advertisements it has been found that Pakistani still ads are also involved in constructing certain ideology regarding modern women. The use of renowned models with specific appearance is influencing the ideology of its viewers. In this way such iconic, glamorous and modern representation of a woman is misleading and hiding the actual indication of Pakistani traditional woman (Iftikhar & Islam, 2015).

Conclusions

This research has explored how different print advertisements in Pakistan develop woman's identity. As Ali and Shehwar (2011) writes in their study that most of the Pakistani ads related to cosmetics and skincare product portray women as glamorous and modern. So the present study has analyzed advertisements of non-skincare products with skincare, in order to seek the difference in women portrayal. This study has analyzed three ads from both the categories with two perspectives i.e., either Pakistani still advertisements portray woman in traditional attire or in modern attire.

It is explored that in the current era most of the print advertisements have acknowledged the idea that Pakistani still ads mostly focus on the modern outlook of their female model after application of semiotic tool of content analysis. While with the help of psychological lens it has also been found that print media especially advertisements are not only presenting or promoting their product but also are engaged in the production of certain ideology with the science of signs. As Chandler (2001) states that semiotics makes us aware about the representation of the woman in media that is continuously being watched by number of people every day but no one knows the framework behind, which is involved in the construction of its meaning (Cited in Iftikhar & Islam, 2015).

The current paper is concluded on the argument that Pakistani still advertisements combine the elements of modernity and glamour with the concept of traditional women. Most of the present Pakistani ads place great importance in portraying females as a symbol of modern and glamorous society which is hiding the real identity of traditional Pakistani woman.

Advertisements like Skin White, Dalda cooking oil, Lipton green tea, Dove shampoo (including skincare and non-skincare products) have completely transformed a traditional woman into a modern woman. To answer the first research question that is "how women

are portrayed in Pakistani still advertisements?" it is identified through semiotics analysis that most of the signs are depicting the reality of modern society whereas advertisers are seen to be less focused towards the representation of traditional elements of Pakistani women. The second research question is "Do Pakistani advertisements promote certain ideology or culture regarding women's identity?" in the given analysis of the advertisements, it is found that most of the advertisements promote modern women even in non-skincare products by using some renowned female models. In this way advertisers are influencing the targeted audience with the idea of modern world which is more inclined towards western culture such as boldness, confidence, independency and Western clothing sense. As the third question is about the difference between depiction of women in skincare and non-skincare advertisements, it is observed that almost all advertisements portrayed women in modern attire but only two products that are Hashmi Ispaghol and English Ubtan Turmeric Cream used some of the traditional elements for their female model such as "dupata, multiple colours, shirt with sleeves, jewellery in golden colour" which describes that the portrayal of female identity in advertisements is somehow linked with the cultural background of the product. For example, Ubtan is a part of Eastern culture more specifically culture of sub-continent, in this way the advertisement of English Ubtan Cream observed the idea that female modal in Pakistani still ads gives a traditional impression but still the advertisement contained some of the elements of modernity. So it is concluded that there is no difference between both the categories of advertisements in terms of woman portrayal but the difference is based on the cultural background of the product.

By analyzing the advertisements, it is concluded that some of the still ads in year 2019 contained obvious theme of liberal and modern women. Additionally, it is perceived that such theme of modernity is promoted as an essential part of female identity.

Recommendations

Semiotics studies is a wide research area in the field of media discourse analysis. Print advertisement and figurative language go hand in hand in the field of media. This area can be experimented through various research designs and comparisons in future studies. A different approach targeting a single figure of speech can also be used by the future researchers to get an in-depth analysis of the language. A comparison between the regional and local newspaper advertisements can also be done to unveil the hidden messages behind the gender representation in a certain way. These views can also be researched through surveys and interviews of the selected audience.

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