

Branding As A Discursive Strategy: Marketization Of Higher Education In The Private Universities Of Pakistan

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Abstract

Universities are using marketization as a discursive strategy to reshape their academic pursuits through the implementation of marketing tactics in education while considering their socioeconomic conditions into account. In this regard, the present study investigates the prospectuses' discourse about the instillation of business strategies in education. The researcher collected prospectuses of private universities of diverse backgrounds to explicate the marketing tactics and their variations in academia. Through Black's Pragma stylistic model, the researcher identified how private universities are manifesting stylistic variations by considering the pragmatic factors to persuade the maximum number of students to enrolment. The findings show that Pakistani private universities are increasingly commoditising their language in prospectuses to enhance the number of inductions; however, the inculcation of the corporate sector's vocabulary reveals that promotional strategies help students decide between the selection of particular university maintain a good reputation in the educational sector. In this context, linguistic features exhibiting discursive and social practices were analysed in the present study. However, the imposition of marketization seems difficult to exclude as it has been accelerated worldwide to encounter financial challenges in the competitive academic environment. Resultantly, universities are required to work within the boundaries of business academia although such trending marketization should not be followed at the cost of academic activities which is the prime purpose of education.

Keywords: Branding, Discursive Strategy, Marketization, Higher Education, Private Universities and Pakistan.

1. Introduction

This study aims to examine the prevalent persuasive linguistic strategies employed in Pakistani university prospectuses. The prospectuses are considered an important marketing tool for students because they can persuade them to choose a particular university. This study attempted to understand how language is used to achieve persuasive goals in the Pakistani context. In this regard, linguistic patterns and communication strategies synthesize linguistic analysis for promotional texts of university prospectuses. Pakistani universities project their positive image through the¹ marketization of higher education and prospectuses are contemplated as “forceful and pioneering texts” (Bano & Shakir, 2015). Moreover, this study illuminated the subtle nuisances and socio-pragmatic implications behind persuasive messages of discourse so it contributed methodologically to advance the scope of the field. The language of prospectuses shows socio-cultural values and can be used as a “decision making tool” (Abbas, 2014). The present study investigated the language of Pakistani prospectuses to explore the hidden agenda through linguistic variation categorically aimed at persuasion. By combining two genres i.e. Pragmatics and Stylistics, this study examined how persuasive language is used to influence potential students and stakeholders into decision-making. Due to the impact of marketization, private universities are massively launching ‘market campaigns’ to persuade the maximum

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number of students (Alam et.al, 2016) which Levidow (2000) called “Self-defense”. In this regard, the promotional genre is offered by universities to achieve their persuasive goals while convincing potential customers of the future (Mehmood et.al, 2016). Fairclough (1994) argues that boundaries are crumbling between “telling” and “selling” because universities show an inclination to develop good reputations through commercialization. This study explored the influence of discursive practices on the persuasive nature of university prospectuses in the Pakistani context.

Fairclough (1993) examined prospectuses of British universities of different time periods i.e. started from 1967-8 which revealed information about “take-it-or-leave-it” and he stated that the content of prospectuses was transformed according to the competitive market. In this context, promotion became the main objective of universities. Fairclough (1993) argued that universities started selling themselves in response to a competitive academic environment which boosted them to attract potential applicants. He stated that the transformation of content resulted in a sudden increase in students’ enrolments such as Lancaster University transformed university prospectuses and got a 15% surge in applicants as compared to the previous years. Consequently, the promotional function of prospectuses turned out to be an indicator of success for universities which is reflected through the transformation of language to achieve persuasive goals. In addition, Fairclough (1993) indicated a ‘historical shift’ in textual features for aims and objectives of prospectuses under the influence of a competitive market. In this context, Fairclough (1993) indicated the link between advertising genres and textual features of 1993 prospectuses for successful promotional activities. Adding to the previous point, Fairclough (1993) also mentioned that the persuasive language of prospectuses resulted in a shift of ‘authority relations’ and these promotional activities converted readers to customers. In this regard, those ‘clients’ are positioned to have authority which contradicts the old conventional authority of universities on potential students and promotional content generated hybrid discourse of prospectuses. This chapter demonstrates the background of the present study which sheds light on the role of the Pakistani private universities in the context of marketization. It illustrated the discursive practices of branding which is used strategically by the private educational sector in Pakistan. Moreover, this chapter provides the rationale of the current study, significance and problem statement, underlying objectives of the research, research questions and delimitations of the present study.

1.1 Significance of Research

The current research is a valuable contribution in terms of theory and practice as it sheds light on the sub-branch of linguistics called pragma stylistics. It is significant because it combines two genres, stylistics and pragmatics, and the application of collective pragmatic theories and stylistic features to the university prospectuses to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the understudied or unexplained phenomena than stylistics or pragmatics can do alone. The present study is important for its theoretical value and contribution to the knowledge in the collective interdisciplinary field in particular and to the field of linguistics in general. Furthermore, the practical contribution of this study is to elucidate the manipulation of linguistic characteristics for ideological purposes in the language of the university prospectuses. The current study illustrates the feasibility of Black’s (2006) pragmatic stylistic framework for the analysis of the language of university prospectuses which is a non-literary text. It shows how pragma stylistic features project a certain desired interpretation of the language use in prospectuses of Pakistani universities.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Most private universities of Pakistan publish prospectuses with the commencement of the academic year to make the readers aware of the new disciplines, additional facilities and growing academic environment. Pakistani private universities are using marketization as a discursive strategy to project their individual identity and the language of university prospectuses is in close proximity to promotional directories being informational as well as

persuasive. The evolving trend of marketization has changed the educational discourse for various reasons such as commercialization and intense competition among private universities (Shahnaz, 2020). Consequently, the experts and specialist informants are massively modifying the university prospectuses by manipulating linguistic features in the literature of higher education (Nasir & Shakir, 2015). The unstable economic situation of Pakistan is the prime reason to encourage private universities for market-driven contributions as it would not have been possible for the state to give a grant to the cost of higher education as private universities operate with their indigenous means (Shahnaz, 2020). Consequently, private universities started competing with each other by persuading the maximum number of students as customers through advertisements and campaigns under the influence of marketization (Alam et.al, 2016). Levidow (2000) termed this market campaign as a “Self-defense” strategy. The concept of branding private universities has received immense significance which might influence the potential candidates to decide on value branding (Alam et.al, 2016). The notion of providing quality education is taken as an outdated trend which was once required for the good reputation of university (Akhtar & Kalsoom, 2014). In this context, universities started advertising their name, promoting their services and devising new marketing tactics to generate revenue (Juhni

& Salleh, 2009) which helped them to acquire a good name in the competitive market (Jawad et.al, 2012). In the Pakistani context, private universities are bound to undergo the process of branding to earn a prestigious name in the market and to attract the maximum number of students to overcome financial constraints. Therefore, it is vital to know how specialist informants use the language of university prospectuses for promotional purposes to attract students and manipulate the linguistic features for discursive marketization. It is significant to know how linguistic resources are used and manipulated for the promotional content of the university prospectuses in the Pakistani context.

2. Literature Review

Marketization is demonstrated as the market-based provision of higher education according to the market reforms dependent on the requirements of academia, university pursuits, and students' research expenditures are managed through market cost mechanisms (Wolf, 1993). The term 'Marketization' exhibits ideological meaning and it is self-explanatory (Furedi, 2010). The decade of commercialization and neoliberalism has enhanced the powerful encroachment of marketization around the globe and higher education has become part of an accelerated process gradually since the 1990s (Raiz et.al, 2017). Furthermore, the university sector has benefited from the current market reforms and it is contemplated as a radical process due to excessive proliferation in social realms (Bertelsen, 2008; Engwall & Weaire, 2008; Fairclough, 1993). The International funding associations which aim to credit loans to Pakistan have also affected university education and the policy-making process (Ahsan, 2005; Ali, 2013) which accelerated the efficacy of market practices (Rawat, 2011; Andrabi, Das & Khwaja, 2008). Behind discursive practices of marketization, the institutional docket is to create the name of the brand which encodes market reforms and ideology to achieve the desired purpose of the organization (Wedlin, 2008). Consequently, educational institutions are massively promoting their names through advertisements on electronic and print media; and to achieve the desired objective they imitate corporate practices to make the institutions functional according to the market mechanisms (Kwong, 2000). A paradigm shift has been observed in the practices of university settings by amending educational policies (Wedlin, 2008). According to Ashburn (2007), the commercialization of education has been considered the most useful technique and is found in discursive practices of universities manifesting diverse backgrounds these days. In this context, students became customers, enrolment opportunities as access instead of selection and courses were taken as products (Mok, 1999). Consequently, pamphlets, prospectuses, brochures and social websites are used as modern strategic tools which aid the educational institutes for promotion.

2.1 The Marketization of English as a Global Language

Marketization manifests mushrooming growth and reflection of market ideologies to the reforms of market-based aims of constructing an image of a brand as part of the institutional program (Wedlin, 2008). In the current time of advanced technology, universities are using marketization as a discursive strategy for corporate practices to run the academic business world. 'Marketization' is a term with ideological orientation and its meaning is devoid of self-evident (Furedi, 2010).

Recently, the thriving discipline of business academia has accelerated the process of marketization in higher education globally. Consequently, private universities are putting their endeavour to market their educational products in globally recognized and commercialized places under highly competitive academic environments worldwide.

Marketization has become a dynamic process which intervenes in academic business to promote the identity construction of private universities. In multilingual societies, the English language has an official status due to hegemony and the proliferating legitimation as a global language. It gives an inclusionary and exclusionary role which encourages linguistic diversity worldwide. In modern times, speakers who belong to the scholarly conventions of Anglophone are considered the most appropriate candidates for jobs in Pakistan (Shahnaz, 2020) and they are considered successful who have acquired the profile of an academic "globe-runner" and ultimately belong to "academiococrat" (Dendrinos, 2004).

In academia, the utilization of technology and international publication have naturalized the state of affairs therefore English markets itself as the "international currency of science and technology" (Dendrinos, 2004).

Pennycook (1994) and Phillipson (1999) have confronted that power structures are not separated from the market value which affects the contraction and the widespread of languages (Cenoz & Jessner, 2000). Besides this, it cannot be devoid of cultural politics as the projection of culturally neutral because modern elitism and economic factors require a language which leads its speakers without any manual effort. It is one of the main reasons that English has quite a dominating role which sheds light on the important fact that many scholars have been excluded from the academic discourse at the global level because they are not proficient in the English language which leads to the economic loss (Dendrinos, 2004).

The English language is of paramount significance not only in technology and academic circles but its boundaries are touching other disciplines like media, arts, economy, management and so on. According to Phillipson (2001), "English as a global language is interlocked with globalization in its various manifestations". Linguistic diversity has been promoted and its respect is cultivated due to sociopolitical implications which confront the efforts to preserve its promotion as a commodity worldwide (Dendrinos, 2004).

The power struggles, sociopolitical conditions, cultural dynamics and historical traditions gave rise to the dominant position of the English language around the globe.

Currently, there are different terms to elucidate English and it exhibits the idea, that "different ways of saying are different ways of meaning" and the meaning arises from the aforementioned factors.

Recently, assimilationist ideologies are connected with discourses as followed in Western countries. On one side, it is immensely happening to echo promotionism and on the other side, different communities' express linguistic diversity and their identification are required in the mighty-growing 'fast capitalism' and the spread of excessive novel communication modes, advanced technology and many other resources encourage the deflation of semantic and social space for language systems. There are some socially-sensitive issues for the discourse which reflect the English language as a commodity at the global level relevant to literacy education. According to Dendrinos (2004), it is logical to provide chances for citizens to be literate in a powerful language and equip them with discursive practices so that they can perform pursuits in future.

Lo Bianco (2000) has highlighted the danger of "naturalizing or 'normalizing' or naturalizing English literacy and language with consumer capitalist society".

Dendrinos (2004) has used the term working language for English and it is considered as playing the mediating or (counter) balancing part for the synchronized impact on the British and American English culture and language. In the same context, Fairclough (1995) investigated particular texts to utter linguistic-based evidence for the commercialization of public discourse in England. Furthermore, Dendrinos (2004) accepted Halliday's perspective that language and culture co-evolve and cannot be separated from their structural conditions.

2.2 Discursive Marketization in Private Universities of Pakistan

According to Levidow (2002), the marketization process has left ostentatious effects on the academic business world of higher education or state regulations since 1980 same as other business pursuits. Though it is considered a wide-ranging and radical process currently passing through the social orbits and there is no exception for the university set-up (Bertelson, 2008; Engwall & Weaire, 2008; Fairclough, 1993). Wedlin (2008) pointed out that university policies and discursive practices have paradigm shifts which bring change in the rhetoric and lexical resources due to the marketization process which entertains them. This fundamental shift of marketization not only influenced universities as competing bodies rather it not only inclined them to give priority to the promotional culture by retaining their sustainable growth in academia but also maintaining their academic reputation too (Santoro & Snead, 2013; Barnett, 2011; Jarvis, 2007; Newman & Jahdi, 2009; Coulter & Mandell, 2012; Saichai & Morphew, 2014; Anctil, 2008; Hartley & Morphew, 2008; Fairclough, 1993, 1995; Kotler & Fox, 1995; Morphew & Eckel, 2009).

According to Fairclough (1993; 1995), the informational content of promotional material dispirited the promotional discourse and student-centred approach in the past. Currently, universities are increasingly using marketing strategies to participate in the competition of a high marketplace (Bok, 2003; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Moreover, it is convenient for the university authorities to talk about the marketization agenda regarding higher education parallel to academic governance problems (Shahnaz, 2020). It has been noted that private universities are competing high by scrutinizing self-promotional marketing techniques and attitudinal markers are being identified in the About Us texts by the private universities in Pakistan. In this context, universities are opting for managerial protocols being part of the business academic world like a competition of rank-wise performance, quality and auditing control, putting pupils' experiences and owing commendatory place in league tables (Furedi, 2011; Molesworth et al., 2011)

2.3 Marketization in Higher Education

The academic world of education has been massively influenced by marketization exactly like other business pursuits that originated in 1980 (Levidow, 2000). Fairclough (1993) has analysed the language of British university prospectuses to understand the concept of marketization and stated two major reasons for the discourse operated through market reforms; First of all, it is the prime requirement of the technological society of modern times to train professionals, thus, academia encounters excessive pressure which encourage them to manage students as customers. Secondly, educational institutes face financial constraints to run the departments in accordance with market-driven style. Consequently, educational organizations are in dire need of funds for modern learner-oriented skills to meet the intense competition in the world of academia (Fairclough, 1993). Therefore, these factors inclined them to actively take part not only in the promotion of educational culture in the ongoing competition rather build their credibility and sustain their academic proliferation as a priority (Santoro & Snead, 2013); Barnett, 2011; Jarvis, 2007, Newman & Jahdi, 2009; Coulter & Mandell, 2012; Saichai & Morphew, 2014; Anctil, 2008; Hartley & Morphew, 2008; Fairclough, 1993, 1995; Kotler & Fox, 1995; Morphew & Eckel, 2009). According to Williams (1981), visuals are also used for promotion to attract potential students rather than texts only in modern advertisements as post-

modernism has changed the function and forms of market discourse. Fairclough (1993, 1995) mentioned that informational content was preferred for promotional purposes in the past which never supported promotional discourse. However, modern marketing tools have been used strategically to participate in market-driven competitions (Bok, 2003; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). According to Wernick and Featherstone (1991), the demands of culture and society are shaping promotional culture and, in turn, consumer culture in modern society. Moreover, the top management of universities considers marketization as their top priority exactly in the same way as they see curricular governance issues. In this context, they approach many advertising agencies, and marketing groups and concentrate on advertising campaigns (Carlson, 2010; Anctil, 2008; Urciuoli, 2003; Toma et al., 2005). In the intense competition, universities are putting efforts to acquire their self-identity on the international university rankings (McCaig, 2015). Nowadays, the accelerated process of marketization has persuaded the prestigious academic world to participate in the fervent competition to get enormous academic proliferation through the imitation of the conventional ways of selling products to potential candidates which are inspired by the market reforms (Hemsley-Brown, 2012; Coulter & Mandell, 2012; Yang, 2013; Santoro & Snead, 2013). According to Chen (2016), marketization has been associated with the behaviour of the government which intends to encourage the private sector by selling assets and services to them due to financial issues. Consequently, the government bodies attempt to minimize the costs of higher learning by supporting the private educational sector which enhances the economic efficacy of education in the social context (Chen, 2016). Similarly, universities are increasingly using promotional strategies to construct their independent identity as part of self-promotion and good reputation (Morrish & Sauntson, 2013; Harvey, 2015). In recent times, universities have been working as business entities and they have shaped themselves according to the corporate sector by imitating the latest marketing strategies and transforming the status of prospective students to 'consumers' (Han, 2014; Ashehave, 2007; Xiong, 2012; Osman 2008; Woodall et al., 2014). In this context, marketization plays a key role in boosting social and economic conditions so universities are introducing different forms of marketization i.e., commodities, tuition so on (Chen, 2016).

2.4 Rationale of Higher Education Marketization

The massive increase among competitors in the private sector of education has forced universities to follow discursive practices of marketization so that a maximum number of students can be persuaded for enrolment to encounter financial matters. Moreover, all these marketing strategies have accelerated the concept of 'branding' as it captures the attention of potential students which, in turn, leads to the generation of great revenues. Consequently, the majority of the students show a willingness to become part of 'branded universities and the ratio of students' enrolment remains higher as compared to the rest of the universities (Shahnaz, 2020). In addition, universities are massively exercising research projects and contracts to enhance financial resources to manage all the expenses for the smooth functioning of a "hybrid organization" (Chen, 2016). The purveying of consistent changes in the domain of education arouses the concept of competition which ultimately evolves the process of commoditization. It provides the rationale for educational organizations to consider the needs and priorities of customers through incentives and opportunities to collaborate with the external environment (Watson, 2019). However, this revised concept of marketization with educational policies gave rise to a "customer-based philosophy" that boosted the idea of profitability to operate the educational organizations on the monetary grounds for the long run through successful market practices; although the market-oriented philosophy developed over time (Watson, 2019). According to Twist (2016), these practices mediate between private and public fields accountable to the public and became part of numerous commercial pursuits.

2.5 Endeavor for potential students

The enrollment of the maximum number of students is the main objective of all universities and they put all their endeavours to achieve their target (Shahnaz, 2020). Many scholars

have examined the marketing practices for students' induction (Judson, James & Aurand, 2004; Goff Patino, Jackson, 2004; Ivy, 2001; Kettle & Ciba, 2001; Ellis & Moon, 1998; Tapp, Hicks, & Stone, 2004; Cubillo et al., 2006). In this context, there is immense competition for universities to offer courses and assuring them provide quality education and highlight the university's prestige through marketing techniques (Cubillo et al., 2006; Osman, 2008; Mautner, 2005; Osman, 2008; Xiong, 2012; Askehave, 2007; Molesworth, Nixon & Scullion, 2009). Moreover, the identity of the university established through marketing tactics creates a sense of ownership of the university (Wilkins, Shams & Huisman, 2013; Mael & Ashforth, 1992). According to Drill and Teixeira (2000), the discursive aspects of marketization encourage innovative practices for the new offers and services beneficial for the students. The pedagogic rights are developed between the main stakeholders i.e. parents and students who have confidence and trust in the educational organizations (Bernstein, 2000). He further argues that these 'pedagogic rights' can be valued only when inequalities of power are eradicated from the education system which is a provocation for society as these inequalities are excessively found in the educational system.

In addition, a good reputation establishes a strong bond and commitment on the part of students to own their university (Wilkins, Shams & Huisman, 2013; Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Furthermore, the overall refinement and cultivation of a supportive environment through the university's identity sway the students' attitude and possession about the university (Jimenez-Castillo, Sanchez-Fernandez, & Iniesta-Bonillo, 2013; Cameron, 1999).

3. Research Methodology

The current study employed qualitative research methodology which falls under the interpretive research philosophy (constructivism). It is considered the most common research methodology which permits the researcher to comprehend the meanings and interpret the social context (Lee & Lings, 2008).

3.1 Theoretical Framework

The researcher has employed Black's (2006) pragma stylistic framework on the prospectuses' discourse of the Pakistani Private universities and this study contributed theoretically to advance the scope of the field as pragma stylistics is an unexplored area in the Pakistani context as well as contributed practically through the illustration of linguistic manipulation for ideological perspectives. Moreover, this study also unearths the hidden agenda through the exploitation of linguistic resources by the private universities of Pakistan. In other words, the present study is sensitized to demonstrate how discursive structures of marketization are employed to acquire persuasive goals and ideological perspectives to direct readers' minds by the private universities in Pakistan.

3.2 Tools of data collection

The researcher collected the prospectus data from the private universities of cities

i.e. Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Lahore, Multan, Mianwali, Karachi and Sialkot. The observation has been used as a data collection tool as the present study followed a textual research design.

3.2.1 Observation

The researcher has used observation as the primary source of data collection. It is a systematic and purposeful way to observe a phenomenon as it occurs in a natural and controlled situation (Kumar, 2011). The current study employed textual analysis so the researcher remained a passive observer to find the textual variations embedded with discursive practices in the language of prospectuses. The researcher is also interested in observing how students process information

provided in the university prospectuses.

4. Data Analysis

The current study mainly focused on textual analysis so the researcher thoroughly immersed and examined the language in the prospectuses genre by reading the texts several times for deep understanding. The sample of this study is university prospectuses of private sectors of Pakistan. Bhatia (2004:7; Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010; Hui, 2009) stated that diverse contexts along with cultures must be investigated to see the commonality and generic structure in that typical genre. Within the wide scope of the present study, the selected sample supported the researcher to probe the commonalities and variations of linguistic practices in the prospectuses of diverse backgrounds. Prospectuses set out as an advertisement tool of the university and are considered a typical publicizing agenda. According to Fairclough (1993; Askehave, 2007; Hui, 2009). The researcher analysed the academic circle by highlighting the constituents of advertising and interdiscursivity due to the promotional nature of the university prospectuses. The researcher is interested in investigating how private universities are increasingly manipulating linguistic resources and using marketization as a discursive strategy to meet the requirements in the current scenario of commercialization and globalization. Although there is a plenitude of examples employed in the prospectuses' discourse of the Pakistani private universities, the researcher has mentioned few of them in the current study as stated below:

i) Academic Policies of the private universities

All stakeholders demand promising commitments from the concerned universities and the academic policies are clearly mentioned in the prospectuses to maintain the quality of academic programs. In this regard, curriculum and other parameters are also explicated through the process of internalization. According to Askehave (2007; 725), these contents are usually promotional in nature as a marketing technique to meet the university requirements in terms of policy and benefits to strive in the competitive market. Keeping this issue into consideration, private universities are struggling to reveal the educational challenges in a conducive and favorable environment. For instance,

Table 1: Academic Policies of the private universities

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “GAUS, a new generation university, is committed to nurturing talent, strengthening academics & research by adopting unique, innovative practices to continue redefining the academic excellence” (GAUS).• “AKU ‘s goal is to be “on the frontiers of scientific and humanistic knowledge, radiating intelligence and confidence, research and graduates, into flourishing economies; progressive legal and political systems” (AKU).• “The university is dedicated to providing faculty, staff, and students with the environment and infrastructure that help them, develop their potential

- “Our strategy of aligning core integrated values with our up-to-date curriculum is the key to making a difference with others. We are committed to creating a learning environment conducive to student’s holistic development” (IIU).

- “The main objective of the university is to provide high quality, comprehensive educational, training and research opportunities that produce highly qualified graduates and responsible citizens who can meet the needs of all sectors of human activity” (AUIC).
- “Here we are committed to producing leaders of tomorrow, skilled professionals, entrepreneurs and experts of every field who are well versed with the changing dynamics and are well-prepared to emerge as winners in the upcoming trials of Industrial Revolution 4.0” (UMT).
- “The University of Mianwali introduces modern curriculum, good student engagement, paramount professional training, effective faculty development, local and International collaborations, spacious building industry partnerships, immense research endeavours and much more” (UM).

It is demonstrated that university prospectuses explicate the academic policies to introduce curriculum, teaching and learning policy, research activities etc. to update the potential students. Moreover, the chunks such as “on the frontiers of scientific and humanistic knowledge” outline the present academic policy in the educational environment of Pakistan. The above-mentioned data represented that private universities are defining their academic policies from the double-folded angle i.e., commercialization and educational grounds. Consequently, universities are incorporating marketization strategies to upgrade the curriculum with the promotional nature of the content to encounter the challenges of the 21st century as explicated the best academic policies and techniques. According to Fairclough (2008), universities strengthen their bond with the state through the revision of academic policies and marketing strategies. In this context, universities consider promotion as the main tool for communication in the present time of modernization.

ii) Highlighting Credentials in the Prospectuses

According to Hui (2009), universities are attracting students through distinctive selling points, like university traditions, achievements of excellence, international expansion and recognition, logos, mottos and slogans under the influence of globalization.

The aforementioned data showed that universities are using the communicative function of language from two angles i.e., it gives a detailed account of how universities are well-acquainted with the needs of students and how these educational institutes persuade the students to fulfil their requirements. This approach has been imitated from the corporate sector which makes customers realize that the company is well aware of their needs and then convinces customers that the only solution to their requirement is purchasing the product through numerous pressurizing techniques.

It is also revealed that excessive evaluative adjectives such as “excellent”, “leading”, “global” were employed in the prospectuses of the private universities similar to the context of advertisements. The private universities repeatedly mention their academic accomplishments to reveal their excellence through statistics which makes them reliable and different from others.

• Accreditation

The universities are frequently checked by the accrediting body to maintain the quality of education and ensure standards for the students. In this regard, universities are required to demonstrate their accomplishments, ranking and accreditations, and contracts of mutual agreements with other renowned organizations to show their prestige and statistical figures for strength, expansion and excellence which differentiate them from other educational institutes. These achievements support universities in constructing their independent identity because accredited bodies are recognized at both levels i.e., National and International. Consequently, students can have advantages in terms of revised curriculum, and practical experiences in the classroom because of the accreditations of their respective universities. In this way, accredited

universities can maintain their standards for the inducted students as placed in vibrant positions as compared to the competitors. Three accreditations are the value contribution for the faculty as they are instructed to contribute intellectually and remain agile participants in designing and delivering the contents of the curriculum which is an illustration of delivering quality education.

Table: 2 Examples manifesting Accreditation in the prospectuses

- “ Ibadat International University (IIU) is a federally chartered dynamic university in Islamabad, the Capital of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan” (IIU).
- “ GAUS is a chartered university under the Grand Asian University, Sialkot ACT (Act. Of 2021) from the Government of Punjab, Lahore and duly recognized by HEC, Islamabad” (GAUS).
- “ The university was established through a charter issued by the Governor (K.P.K) on 30th August 2001 and is recognized but the Higher Education Commission (former UGC), Islamabad”(QU).
- “HEC granted NOC via letter No. 16-64/HEC/A&A/2010/401 to Abasyn University to open its campus at Islamabad” (AUIC).

One of the major advantages of accredited universities is the international acceptance of degree programs as a huge number of students desire to pursue their higher education abroad mainly because of fully funded scholarships. These accredited partnerships ensure the quality education of universities to fit into the standards of the dynamic professional field being the prime source of sustainability in all the disciplines of academia categorically in the context of higher education in Pakistan.

- **International Recognition / Ranking**

The private universities advertise their affiliation, collaboration, ranking and accomplishments frequently in the prospectuses. In this context, universities prioritize to mention statistical figures to show their upgradation categorically at the International level. According to Zhu (2000), bureaucratic written documents, and departments like finance and accounting use quantitative descriptions. The statistical figures add authenticity to their credentials. There are awarding bodies to rank universities such as “HEC, (THE) World University Ranking (WUR and many other national and International bodies through statistical data” Shahnaz (2020). For instance:

- “In view of our concerned efforts, HEC has raised our category to W-3. Recently, the Department of Management Sciences got the unique honor of getting the “XI “category by the National Business Education Accreditation Council of HEC for BBA and MBA programs” (QU).
- “Our internationally accredited academic programmers and teaching hospitals produce graduates who go on to study and work at renowned institutions in their home countries and abroad” (AKU).
- “Iqra University is placed in category “W-4” by the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan” (IU).
- “Abasyn University was the only university in KPK which was awarded category ‘W’ at the

inception which was the highest category to be awarded to any institution in the old ranking system by HEC. By the grace of Allah and the support of sponsors and staff, HEC has upgraded category 'W' to 'W3' in the new ranking system" (AUIC).

- "The University of Management and Technology is among the leading universities not only online in Pakistan, but also in Asia as per the QS Asia Ranking" (UMT).

Table 3: International Recognition / Ranking

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "We provide lot of opportunities for students to interact with others from different walks of life by organizing field trips, workshops, guest speakers, and conferences (National & International) to get an opportunity to learn more about the world around them" (IIU). |
|---|

The private universities of Pakistan emphasise the ranking and consider international ranking as a plus point to convince students about the reliability of the university therefore it is taken as mandatory in the introductory part of prospectuses in the Pakistani context. It is revealed that private universities focus on the rankings to create a major difference with others and this information is usually provided in the introductory part of prospectuses. In this regard, UoL claims to collaborate with the International educational bodies and also mentions the W-4 category announced by HEC. Similarly, UCP and UMT assert that they also fall in the highest category provided by HEC i.e., W-4. The majority of the universities such as UoL, UCP, AKU etc mention that they provide international exposure to the students as a valuable contribution to the country. Furthermore, students can also confirm the rankings of universities through HEC's websites.

iii) Demonstration of Faculty and their Credentials

The Pakistani private universities focus on arranging highly qualified professionals to be part of a team and most of the universities prefer to hire foreign faculty members to attract students and create distinctiveness from the other universities to encounter the challenges of the professional and academic world therefore universities made huge investments to hire professionals for the students of modern society. According to Saichaie(2011), the teachers are a mirror view of the educational institutes; advanced facilities which can fulfil the requirements of modern students and skilled professionals are the main sources of attracting students as they prefer to learn from highly qualified and experienced faculty members. Furthermore, universities consider their faculty as the foundation of educational organization, which provides a tone for promotional genre under the context of 'branding'. Most private universities provide comprehensive details about the faculty with educational background, research publications, experience and accomplishments. For instance:

Table 4: Demonstration of Faculty and their Credentials

- "The finest resource that UCP brings into the education space is its highly qualified and professionally experienced faculty members. These faculty members have brought knowledge of pedagogies, education processes, methodologies and experience in research. The faculty members work ceaselessly to inculcate complete positive transformation across processes, departments and the entire student body. We have highly qualified and experienced faculty who are committed to accomplish our missions and goals" (UCP).

- “AKU’s faculty includes award-winning researchers who are among the most influential in their fields globally” (AKU).
- “Studying with our faculty will help your skills, perspectives and insights to enhance your employability and career prospects” (IU).
- “Our programs for faculty development ensure a dynamic and futuristic environment for teaching and research” (AUIC).
- “It is a great honor and huge achievement to have over 35 PhD faculty members, along with over a hundred of MS/M.Phil on board for teaching and research activities at the campus” (UMT).
- “The faculty and staff at the University of Mianwali is dedicated and capable of converting the challenges into opportunities, practicing their excellence in teaching, learning and research; fulfilling the needs of community” (UM).

According to Han (2014), the qualities of faculty members are explicated as “advertisement models” i.e. the excessive use of adjectives such as like ‘talented’, ‘highly committed,’ ‘world class’, ‘young and energetic’, ‘highly qualified faculty,’ ‘well-qualified’ and ‘dedicated’, ‘a superb and competent’; Bhatia (1997: 187) termed as the commercial “celebrity endorsements”. The language of prospectuses is designed for promotional goals by focusing on the unique selling points incorporated with the power to persuade students (Bhatia, 1993). In this regard, text producers excessively use adjectives to create a promotional genre and positive image of the respective university. In this context, Pakistani private universities prefer to advertise their faculty to illustrate that they have competent faculty to teach students through the latest facilities and they have all the capability to groom them professionally elaborating they are aware of the needs of the modern students and the present time. Elaborating the concept further, most of the private universities highlight the statistical figure pertaining to PhD doctors in the different departments aligned with the compulsion of HEC as it is the main attraction for the majority of the students and they strongly believe that the strength of the university is directly proportional to the number of PhD doctors they have; however, universities are increasingly highlighting the figure of PhD faculty to give an impression of highly skilled professionals for the coaching of knowledge seekers. Moreover, the faculty members are directed to work on research funding through collaboration with external references or stakeholders for the sustainable growth of the university which makes it independent as it is considered a pre-requisite to survive among the competitors. In this context, universities advertise the accomplishments of their faculty members to impose supremacy on others and receive rewards from the students in terms of high enrolment (Mehmood et al., 2016) which is the mode of maintaining integrity and reliability (Teo, 2007). Moreover, the use of future tense such as “will” shows willingness and sort of prediction to boost the confidence of students as a device of persuasion to join the university if they intend to receive benefits provided by the respective university (Shahnaz, 2020). The universities are recognized as the source of academic excellence based on research productivity mainly from the faculty members, students and collaboration of teachers and students which make universities the origin of innovative research projects and provide recognition to the universities in the competitive domain of academia, therefore, universities prefer to highlight the description of faculty members, their educational background, experiences, accomplishments to convince students that these members can contribute to transforming students into high intellectuals which ultimately supports university to improve its ranking not only National but also on the International levels too.

4.1 Rationale behind Commoditization

The Pakistani private universities aim to persuade the maximum number of students despite their various backgrounds and it has been observed that private universities show flexibility on admission prerequisites without restricting them to rigid criteria for enrolments. For instance,

universities encourage a maximum number of students to apply even those who are result awaited for a previous degree and they are just required to submit the undertaking form while applying for admission to the respective university. It clearly shows university intends to grab the applicants while facilitating their induction into the university through flexible criteria and procedures. The above-mentioned data shows that nominal illustration is scarcely employed which is evidence of flexible requirements for students' enrolment. In other words, it can be said that private universities are more inclined towards quantity i.e. number of enrolments rather than quality i.e. merit-based enrolments. The data also revealed that potential students are from varied backgrounds they might have cultural and religious differences but there is no compulsion on the part of the university to accommodate them by all means for induction into the university. In other words, private universities aim to target a large number of applications for admission irrespective of their backgrounds or differences.

5. Discussion

With the incorporation of Black's (2006) pragma stylistic framework, the researcher has explored the prevalent linguistic strategies in the prospectuses of Pakistani universities. Aligned with previous research studies (Fairclough, 1995, Zhu, 2000; Toe & Askehave, 2007; Osman, 2008; Hui, 2009), greeting (welcoming), informing and captivating (persuading) potential students are the core objectives of universities around the globe. Black (2006) argues that universities are excessively adopting linguistic manipulation for their hidden objectives to attract the maximum number of students. In this regard, text producers have started designing promotional content to overcome the financial challenges that prevailed in Pakistan. The researcher has also coined the ways which are used by private Pakistani universities to amalgamate the persuasive strategies of the corporate sector with the educational endeavours of academia by skilfully transforming the discourse of prospectuses for modern students. Furthermore, it was also investigated that authoritative discourse is no longer the tradition of the present time but rather conversational discourse or dialogical discourse which was evident from the analysed data. Similarly, the researcher has examined the linguistic variation encoded marketization of university products and students as customers for private universities in the Pakistani context. These discursive practices are synchronized with the growing business culture in academia irrespective of cultural, religious or geographical differences. According to Shahnaz (2020), linguistic resources such as evaluative adjectives, slogans, repetition of acronyms etc are massively used for persuasive purposes to convince students to select universities equipped with modern tools and professional training suitable for students of the present time. This study is inspired by Fairclough's (1993) phenomenal work on the prospectuses' discourse of the British universities which has exceptionally investigated the transition phase of three different time periods between authoritative and conversational academic discourse and indicated a step towards commercialization in the domain of academia.

6. Conclusion

The researcher analysed that Pakistani private universities are exploiting linguistic resources to earn a good reputation in the private educational sector as marketization is considered a prerequisite to survive in the competitive academic environment. In this regard, the academic discourse of prospectuses has been modified according to the recent trends of commoditization as revealed from the analysis and it seems that universities are prepared to spend more on the promotional content among the competitors. However, a dynamic shift has been observed in the prospectuses' discourse which explicated the collaboration of business and academia through the manipulation of linguistic resources and corroboration of corporate sector vocabulary to increase the number of enrolments in private universities; although marketization is not the main agenda of private sector but it might be required to encounter the financial, social and economic constraints prevailing in the educational sector.

6.1 Prospects for future research

The present study applied pragma stylistic analysis on the university prospectuses to analyse the linguistic choices, language manipulation, variations of discourse patterns and communicative strategies for promotional purposes. The researcher also incorporated pragmatic and stylistic features as interpretive tools to examine the persuasive tactics of the private educational sector. In this regard, the researcher has collected prospectuses from the purview of the Pakistani context. The samples were limited in this study due to their qualitative nature so it is suggested for future researchers to conduct research to enlarge samples so that results can be generalized. Furthermore, it is also recommended that pragma stylistic analysis can be employed in the comparative study of the Pakistani prospectuses with the prospectuses of foreign countries to identify the academic divergences and implications of the discursive practices as marketization has affected the educational sector worldwide. Additionally, the transformation of academic discourse into promotional discourse can also be observed diachronically.

As the proliferation of marketization has been observed in the educational sector, future researchers can also conduct interviews with potential applicants on how they process the promotional discourse of universities in the current scenario. Adding to the previous notion, future researchers can use research tools such as questionnaires and interviews to get data about the requirements of prospective students like what they expect from the prospectuses, what they exactly look for and how they feel inclined to take admission in the respective university. In this context, students' perspectives can be worth considering by the text producers to get an in-depth understanding of their inclination, grasp the information and view the text as sufficient for their commendatory decision. Similar to the above concept, it can provide insight into the implication of promotional material to achieve the intended communicative purpose. However, the turnover ratio of several enrolments in universities due to the promotional nature of prospectuses can also be observed and compared diachronically.

Over and above, future researchers can advance the horizon of pragma stylistics on the promotional content of private universities such as admission advertisements, CVs, pamphlets etc). Future researchers can also compare the prospectuses of government and private universities to observe the impact of marketization on the government sector which is a non-profit educational sector but the academic world accepted the discursive practices of marketization around the globe so it might have influenced the government educational sector too. It is also recommended to analyse the other major parts of the prospectuses such as mission statements, objectives, and accreditations of the universities by considering the influence of marketization on the educational sector which can contribute to making unique objectives of universities to sustain the pressure of intense competition categorically in the private sector.

The advanced technology made official websites an easy source of acquiring information and future researchers can also work on the turnover ratio of students getting admission to the respective university. Besides the necessity of social media, universities' official websites cannot be overlooked and private universities are increasingly using dynamic and emerging resources for their independent identity. The prospectuses are still considered the most authentic and reliable source of information as required by the students but private universities have started distributing flyers, pamphlets, brochures etc because of the long length of university prospectuses.

Considering the proliferation of marketization, the researcher has analysed the hybrid prospectuses' discourse as informational and promotional genres collaborated in the academic discourse under the impact of globalization. The present study highlighted the promotional nature of prospectuses and discursive strategies of the private universities of Pakistan to overcome the 'ever-shrinking source' of funding categorically for the private educational sector. Furthermore, the current study also answered the question of maintaining financial pressure raised by private universities when inquired about their marketing tactics; private universities are required to explicate the commercialized version of education. The prime objective of educational research is to determine the functional role of education. In this context, the

researcher provided the solution through prime definitional objectives to demonstrate how market ideas and practices have infiltrated to construct independent identity and discursive practices of the private universities in the Pakistani context. In addition, the practical and theoretical implications of the research findings contributed to imagining the universities' discursive strategies of marketization in the future as prerequisites to survive among the competitors. There, the present research is worth considering for universities to sensitize their hybrid discourse by explicating the commercialized version of education in the competitive global and academic market.

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