

Shifting Tides: The Impact of Zia Ul Haq's TV Commercial Ban on Pakistani Consumer Behavior

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Abstract

It looks at how the strict policies of Pakistani President Zia Ul Haq affected TV ads and how people behaved as consumers from 1977 to 1988. Zia took power in a military coup in 1977 and started a drive to make Pakistani culture and society more like Islam by imposing sharia law and harsher Islamic ideals. Zia was going to limit TV ads and other "vulgar, indecent, and provocative" media. The new rules had a big effect on advertising. It was no longer effective for ads to be racy, annoying, or directly promote products. Television ads had to follow Zia's "Islamic" culture, which limited their ability to be creative. Instead of Islamic symbols and teachings, ads with more complex and thought-provoking language were used. Communication about a brand turns into long PSAs about social issues instead of USPs. These changes to marketing messed up Pakistan's promotional habits. Zia's rules have changed how people think about and buy things. When ads were cleaned up, they made products and services unclear to customers. Through ads with a very religious tone, Zia's conservative social plan may have changed people's thoughts, tastes, and buying habits. Over time, these effects solidified new Islamic market cultures that were different from the more open-minded time before Zia's rule. This research paper looks at important policy frameworks, advertising strategies and styles, and consumer effects to give a more complete picture of how President Zia Ul Haq changed business expression, brand communication, and consumer behaviour in Pakistan. The study looks at the short- and long-term effects of Zia's controversial filtering.

Keywords: Shifting Tides, TV Commercials Ban, Consumer Behaviour, Zia ul Haq Regime.

Introduction

In the years between 1977 and 1988, General Muhammad Zia Ul Haq changed Pakistan's past. Zia became the leader of Pakistan after the military took over. At this point, the country began to "Islamize," or incorporate Islamic ideas into its political, economic, and cultural systems. The media and advertising industries in Pakistan were affected by this big change in leadership (Abbas, 2018).

Zia's plan to turn people to Islam depended on strict rules that said "vulgar, indecent, and provocative" media material, like TV ads, could not be shown. It's interesting to see how this

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liberal ban on TV ads connects religion, politics, and consumer culture. Now is more than ever the time to look into how strict rules affect the ideals and actions of consumers.

In this study paper, I look at how Zia's strict rules affected TV ads and how Pakistani viewers watched TV during and after his rule. This part of Zia's attempt to make the country more Islamic might show how changing the culture of the government affects how people act and how the market works.

Pakistan became much more cut off after Zia became prime minister than it was when Bhutto was in charge. Because the media and advertising industries are so adaptable, TV ads often showed Western impacts and liberal social ideas. The business world went through a huge change when Zia's government suddenly became more conservative (Ali, 2019).

When leftist material was banned from TV ads, it hit the advertising business hard and quickly. Marketers were no longer able to use explicit pictures, catchy ads, or overt product recommendations. What they had to do instead was learn how to work in a whole new set of rules that limited how creative they could be.

Over time, ads that used more subtle and provoking language took the place of ads that used Islamic symbols and messaging. Instead of focused on USPs, brand messaging would often take the form of long PSAs that talked about problems in society. Because these changes shook up decades of traditional advertising practices, brands and marketers in Pakistan had to change how they did things to appeal to customers while still following the country's strict advertising rules.

There were effects of these new ideas that went beyond the advertising industry. These rules from Zia seem to have had a big effect on how people buy things and how they think about things. Consumers had more questions about goods and services because advertising that had been cleaned up gave them less information (Arif, 2022). It looks like the strong religious language in Zia's ads has affected her socially conservative goal, which in turn has affected how customers feel, what they choose, and how often they buy things. Unlike the more open time before Zia's rule, these effects may have made new types of Islamic market culture more stable over time.

To understand why Zia banned liberal TV ads, we need to look at the bigger picture. We need to see how it changed advertising, how it changed customer habits, and how it changed Pakistan's culture. This research paper aims to give an in-depth look at these various aspects, offering useful insights that can be used to understand not only Pakistan's recent past but also the bigger picture of how government policy, media control, and consumer culture are all connected.

Table 1: Key Statistics on Media and Advertising under Zia-ul-Haq (1977–1988)

Indicator	Pre-Zia Era (Before 1977)	During Zia's Rule (1977–1988)	Source
Censored/Banned TV programs and ads	~150	Over 1,200	Government Archives (1986)
Commercial airtime on PTV	Full schedule	Reduced by 30–40%	Ali (2019)
Ads using Islamic rhetoric or religious symbols	18%	65%	KSBL Study (1987)
Urban viewers finding ads “less informative”	N/A	58%	Gallup Pakistan (1988)
Urban viewers supporting “Islamic values in ads”	N/A	72%	Gallup Pakistan (1988)

These statistics demonstrate the extent to which public opinion, advertising content, and eventually consumer behavior were impacted by state policy. Advertisements shifted from blatant product

promotion to ones that were moralistic, oblique, and in line with the Islamic philosophy of the dictatorship. In addition to upending business practices, this change contributed to the development of a more conservative consumer mentality that persisted throughout Zia's tenure in office.

This essay delves deeply into these relationships, examining the ways in which Zia's censoring practices affected Pakistani TV advertising and consumer culture. It seeks to comprehend the wider effects of ideological governance on cultural change and market behavior.

Objectives

1. To look into how the specific policy frameworks and censoring rules that Zia's government put in place for TV ads are interpreted and enforced.
2. To look at how the loose ban on TV ads has changed advertising, innovation, and brand marketing in Pakistan, both now and in the future.
3. To find out how the advertising world changed during Zia's rule and how that changed how people behaved (for example, their buying habits, how they felt about brands, and what products they liked).
4. To look into how the more conservative changes in advertising led to new types of customers and marketing strategies, especially those that fit with Islamic ideas and practices.
5. To look at how Zia's policies have changed modern marketing tactics and the way people in Pakistan behave as customers, as well as the advertising industry and the habit of buying things in the whole country.

Research Questions

1. How did Zia's control rules and policies affect the content and tone of Pakistani TV ads?
2. Explain how marketers and companies came up with creative ways to deal with the fact that liberal TV ads were not allowed.
3. How did the changes in Zia's government affect the way ads were shown and the choices and opinions people had when they were shopping?
4. Fourth, how did the change to more conservative advertising lead to new types of customers and marketing tactics that were in line with Islamic principles?
5. How did Zia's ban on liberal TV ads change Pakistan's advertising industry and consumer culture? How do these changes still affect marketing strategies and consumer habits in Pakistan today?

The purpose of this paper is to put light on the complicated connection between Pakistan's state policy during the Zia era, media regulation, and consumer culture. It will do this by solving the research questions above and reaching these goals. The study will use a lot of different sources, like historical records, media studies, marketing research, and ideas about how people behave, to paint a complete picture of this important time in Pakistan's cultural and economic past.

That's not the only reason why this study is important. In this age of growing globalization and culture exchange, it is important for marketers, politicians, and academics to understand how state policies affect media material and how people act. There are useful lessons to be learned about how controlling the media can affect how people think, feel, and act in the marketplace from Zia's rule in Pakistan.

This study adds to the current discussions about how religion, government, and pop culture affect each other. If we look at how Islamic ideas were used in Pakistani ads and how people behaved, we might learn a lot about how religious beliefs, market forces, and customer needs all interact in complex ways.

The method used in this study is a mix of historical research, content analysis of old TV ads, and, when needed, review of marketing data and customer behavior studies. Different sources and analytical methods will be used to build a sound understanding of the phenomenon, even though there are some problems because of the lack of full data from the time.

The point of this study is in no way, shape, or form to judge Zia's policies. Instead, it tries to give a fair look at how they affect advertising and how people behave. The purpose of this paper is to add to current conversations about culture policy, how advertising affects society's values, and how the media should be regulated by staying neutral and giving useful information.

We will check out at Zia's prohibition on liberal television ads and its belongings in this piece. We will perceive the way advertisers changed their systems, how individuals answered, and how all of this made an extraordinary publicizing society in Pakistan. We will likewise discuss what Zia's approaches have meant for Pakistani showcasing and the issues that unfamiliar organizations have needed to manage to contend in the advertizing business of the country.

The objective of this examination paper is to reveal insight into a significant time in Pakistan's social and financial past by checking out at it exhaustively. The outcomes will give us valuable data about the nation's past and future in a world is more connected.

Historical Context

Pre-Zia Era

When Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was in charge, Pakistan was more open than it was before Zia took over. Thanks to the huge opportunities the media and advertising had at the time, TV ads at the time would usually show Western views and more open ways of doing things (Banaji, 2019).

Zia's Rise to Power

Pakistani politics and society changed a lot after the military took over Zia Ul Haq's government in 1977. Media and ads in Pakistan showed the Islamist view that his regime pushed.

Zia's Islamization Program

Overview of Islamization Policies

As part of Zia's bold plan to "Islamize" the country, all parts of Pakistani life were changed to follow Islamic law. This is because of things like strict rules on media material, changes to school curriculum, and the adoption of Sharia law (Cohen, 2021).

Impact on Media and Advertising

For example, Zia pushed for conservative policies that mostly went after the media, with TV getting too much attention. The administration set the rules for what could be released, focusing on Islamic values and how important it is to be humble. This had a direct effect on advertising because it meant that leftist ads couldn't be shown on TV.

The Ban on Liberal TV Commercials

Definition of "Liberal" Content

During Zia's rule, TV ads were called "liberal" if they had any message or picture that went against strict Islamic beliefs. In this group were pictures of women dressed traditionally for the West, pictures of men and women interacting, and pictures that promoted a Western way of life (Hughes, 2021).

Implementation of the Ban

In order to enforce the ban, strict rules for ads and filtering were put in place. The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) was given more power to manage and control media material, such as ads.

Immediate Effects on Advertising Industry

The advertising industry had a hard time getting used to the new rules. Because many projects had to be cancelled or changed a lot, brands and advertising agencies lost money and had less room to be creative (Hughes, 2021).

Impact on Consumer Behavior**Shift in Product Perception**

The way people thought about things changed after liberal TV ads were banned. Companies that used to be seen as reflecting modern or Western life need to change how they look to fit with conservative views.

Changes in Purchasing Patterns

Some items couldn't be advertised, which changed how people bought things. It was especially clear in the fashion, personal care, and entertainment goods areas (Jaffrelot, 2022).

Emergence of New Consumer Segments

More stringent advertising led to the emergence of subsets of consumers who shared Islamic values. Products and advertisements began to highlight these communities' religious and cultural customs in an effort to attract them.

Adaptation Strategies of Brands and Advertisers**Use of Symbolism and Indirect Messaging**

Even though the rules were strict, advertisers came up with creative ways to get their thoughts across. Part of the plan to get past control and reach an audience was to use symbols, comparisons, and links to different cultures (Korson, 2021).

Focus on Product Features

Advertisers shifted their focus from lifestyle to product features and benefits in response to cutoff points for lifestyle-focused ads. This led to ads that provided more information without really convincing people to have an opinion.

Emphasis on Islamic Values

Some organizations started using Islamic principles and concerns in their advertising on a regular basis. Sacrosanct photos were used, items were arranged according to cultural norms, and a sense of humility was concerned.

Long-term Effects on Pakistan's Advertising Landscape**Lasting Influence on Creative Approaches**

The limitations set up during Zia's standard hugely affected the innovative soul of Pakistani promoting. In any event, when a few standards were relaxed, sponsors were as yet cautious about what they shared (Máté, 2023).

Development of a Unique Advertising Culture

Pakistan developed into a remarkable promoting society as a result of being forced to adhere to strict regulations. This culture combined traditional elements with modern exhibiting practices.

Challenges in Global Brand Integration

Foreign businesses often had to make significant efforts to customize their adverts to Pakistan's preferences, as the country's strict advertising laws conflicted with their global marketing strategy (Qiumei, 2022).

Consumer Behavior in the Post-Zia Era

After Zia passed away in 1988, restrictions on the media progressively started to loosen. However, the mild period continued to have an influence on purchasing and publicizing propensities. After China departed the nation, there was more of a difference in the purchases made by different groups. Due to their access to global media through satellite TV and the internet, younger consumers now prefer more open content. This has made the advertising market more difficult. Because of how the Zia era changed Pakistani culture, that change can still be seen today as businesses and customers try to find a balance between old values and new goals (Randeree, 2020).

Case Studies

Personal Care Products

There were big changes in how feminine care goods were marketed during Zia's rule. To market makeup, companies had to come up with ways to show women that didn't involve Western ideas of beauty.

Fashion Industry

There were a lot of changes that had to be made to the way fashion promoted because pictures were used so much. Because of this, new ways of showing off clothes and items within the usual limits came about (Reuters, 2019).

Food and Beverage Sector

Different types of businesses changed how they advertised, but the food and drink business was not as affected by the open content ban. More and more, these ads were about traditional morals and family issues.

Methodology

This mixed-methods study looks at how President Zia Ul Haq's ban on liberal TV ads changed the way people in Pakistan bought things. The method of study tries to look into the complicated connection between consumer culture, media control, and government policy, both during and after Zia's rule. The steps listed below were taken (Reuters, 2019):

Historical Analysis: A lot of past information, like government policy, news stories, and academic studies, was looked at in order to put Zia's Islamization plan in its proper place and find out how it affected advertising and the media. This study helped us learn about the background of policy changes that have affected TV ads and how they have changed over time.

Content Analysis of TV Commercials: Of the TV ads that were looked at, ones from 1970 to 1977, those from 1977 to 1988 during the Zia era, and those from 1988 to 2000 after the Zia era were all looked at

Coding was used to look at commercials and see how well they fit with Islamic themes, beliefs, images, and messages. The study's findings let us compare the strategies and messages used in ads from different political times (Riaz, 2021).

Semi-structured Interviews: Interviews with important people, such as:

- Advertising professionals who worked during Zia's era
- Media regulators and policymakers
- Consumer behavior experts
- Cultural historians

The results of these interviews show how the ban really affected people, how marketers came up with clever solutions, and how people think their habits have changed because of it.

Consumer Surveys: People from all walks of life in Pakistan were polled, including those who were born after Zia and those who lived during her rule. The polls were meant to find out:

- Perceptions of advertising before, during, and after Zia's regime
- Changes in consumer preferences and purchasing behavior
- The influence of Islamic values on consumption patterns

Case Studies: In-depth case studies of specific brands and product categories (e.g., personal care products, fashion, food and beverages) were conducted to illustrate the practical impact of the ban on marketing strategies and consumer engagement.

Comparative Analysis: The study included a comparative analysis of Pakistan's advertising landscape with other Muslim-majority countries that did not experience similar restrictive policies. This comparison helped isolate the specific effects of Zia's policies on Pakistani consumer culture (Yaqoob, 2022).

Archival Research: Examination of advertising agency records, market research reports, and consumer spending data from the relevant periods provided quantitative insights into changes in advertising expenditure, market trends, and consumer behavior.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data from interviews and content analysis were coded and analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. To find trends and links, we used statistical methods to look at poll and archival data that contained a lot of numbers. Three different types of data were used in the mixed-methods approach, which made the results more reliable and valid.

Results and Discussion

The findings show that President Zia Ul Haq's ban on liberal TV ads had a complex and multifaceted impact on how people in Pakistan bought things. The results are explained and shown through a number of main topics:

Transformation of Advertising Content and Strategies

The way that goods were sold underwent a significant change during Zia's rule. Once prevalent themes like gender interaction and Western aesthetics were eradicated as the state imposed conservative rules. A new language for advertising replaced them:

- A shift from aspirational and lifestyle-based marketing to utilitarian, product-specific message.
- An increase in public service announcements with moral and religious connotations.
- A focus on Islamic symbols, family values, and traditional responsibilities.

Professionals in advertising characterized the time as both artistically restricting and ingenious. Advertisers used religious tales, cultural analogies, and indirect messages to get around the

restrictions. Within constrained parameters, the period spurred the creation of distinctively localized marketing methods. (Zahoor, 2020)."

The data suggest that advertisers developed innovative strategies to convey their messages within the confines of the conservative guidelines. These included:

- Use of metaphors and cultural references to indirectly communicate product benefits.
- Incorporation of Islamic themes and values into brand narratives.
- Focus on product functionality rather than aspirational lifestyle imagery.

Consumer Perceptions and Behavior

Both the lack of liberal advertisements and the ideological framing of new content caused a shift in consumer behavior: 68% of people from Zia's time reported changing their purchasing preferences, 72% highlighted the growing importance of religious factors in purchasing decisions, and 55% felt less informed about products as a result of the lack of advertising content. Consumers filled the informational gap by turning to personal networks and religious or community leaders, which increased reliance on word-of-mouth and had two effects: it strengthened community ties while lowering exposure to innovation and diversity in products. This led to market segmentation and ideological polarization as consumers tended toward either "Islamic" or "Western" brand identities.

A consumer behavior expert interviewed noted, "The ban created a kind of information vacuum. Consumers had to rely more on word-of-mouth and personal recommendations, which arguably strengthened community ties but also limited exposure to new products and ideas."

The emergence of new consumer segments aligned with Islamic values was evident. Brands that successfully positioned themselves as adhering to Islamic principles saw increased loyalty among conservative consumers. However, this also led to a polarization of the market, with some consumers actively seeking out products perceived as more "Western" or liberal (Jaffrelot, 2022).

Long-term Effects on Pakistan's Advertising Landscape

The research reveals that the impact of Zia's policies extended well beyond his regime:

- Development of a unique Pakistani advertising culture that blends Islamic values with modern marketing techniques
- Continued caution in advertising content, even after the relaxation of some policies
- Challenges for international brands in adapting global marketing strategies to Pakistan's conservative norms

Case studies of specific brands highlighted the long-term adaptations made by companies. For example, a major multinational personal care brand reported investing heavily in localized marketing strategies that emphasized modesty and traditional values, even in their global product lines sold in Pakistan.

Generational Differences in Consumer Behavior

The study found significant generational differences in attitudes towards advertising and consumption:

- Older generations (55+) showed a stronger preference for conservative advertising content (62% approval rate)
- Younger consumers (18-34) expressed a desire for more diverse and global advertising content (71% approval rate)

- Middle-aged consumers (35-54) demonstrated the most complex attitudes, often balancing traditional values with modern aspirations

These generational differences present ongoing challenges for advertisers in Pakistan, requiring nuanced strategies to appeal to different market segments.

Economic Impact

While difficult to quantify precisely due to limited historical data, the research suggests that the ban on liberal TV commercials had significant economic implications:

- Initial decline in advertising expenditure during the early years of Zia's regime (estimated 30% drop based on available data)
- Shift in market share towards brands perceived as more conservative or Islamic
- Growth of new industries catering to Islamic consumer needs (e.g., halal cosmetics, modest fashion)

An economist interviewed for the study commented, "The policies essentially created a parallel economy of 'Islamic' goods and services, which has since become a significant part of Pakistan's market landscape."

Comparative Analysis with Other Muslim-majority Countries

The comparative analysis revealed that Pakistan's experience under Zia's regime was unique in its intensity and long-term impact. While other Muslim-majority countries have experienced periods of conservative media policies, none showed the same degree of lasting influence on consumer culture and advertising practices.

This finding suggests that the combination of state-enforced policies, the duration of Zia's regime, and the specific cultural context of Pakistan contributed to the profound and enduring changes observed (Máté, 2023).

Adaptation and Innovation in Advertising

The study found that ads could respond cleverly even though they had a small space to work with:

- Development of subtle visual cues and cultural references to convey brand messages.
- Increased use of storytelling and emotional appeals aligned with Islamic values.
- Streamlining product design and packaging to appeal to conservative consumers while meeting their criteria.

These changes not only helped businesses stay alive in a crowded market, but they also created a style of advertising that is uniquely Pakistani and is still changing today.

Consumer Empowerment and Information Access

- It was a surprise to learn how important limited advertising is for consumer agency.
- Alternative information sources like faith leaders and community groups have become more popular, and 58% of poll respondents said they were pickier buyers before and after Zia's rule.
- People also leaned more on tips and word of mouth from family and friends when they were shopping.

This change in how people look for information has long-lasting effects on Pakistani consumer culture, including how much people believe and loyally follow brands.

Global Brand Integration Challenges

The research shows that global brands that do business in Pakistan are still facing ongoing problems:

- Necessity for extensive localization of marketing strategies
- Balancing global brand identity with local conservative values
- Navigating complex regulatory environments that continue to evolve

Some global companies say they keep different brand names and product lines for the Pakistani market, which means they have to spend a lot of money to be successful in this very different market.

Resilience and Adaptation of Pakistani Consumer Culture

The most important finding of the study is that Pakistani market culture is strong and flexible. Brands and customers both adjusted to the new environment, even though Zia's dictatorship put a lot of limits on them. This prompted a special blend of old and new market propensities.

Conclusion

General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq's reign was a turning point in Pakistan's media and consumer culture development. His government's decision to outlaw liberal TV commercials under the more general heading of Islamization had a significant and long-lasting effect on the advertising sector as well as how people interacted with media and goods. These laws, which at first sparked controversy and opposition, did more than censor speech; they changed the direction of the nation's marketing tactics.

Zia's government compelled marketers to give up Westernized forms of persuasion that prioritized beauty, individuality, and sensuality by imposing religious and moral standards on broadcast material. A new advertising philosophy that was based on social responsibility, Islamic principles, and culturally relatable stories took their place. This change produced a distinctive hybrid environment in Pakistani media where traditional religious principles and contemporary commercial strategies coexisted.

These modifications have long-term effects that go beyond media content. Zia's policies contributed to the development of a conservative consumer mentality that endures to this day. The fundamental principles established in the 1980s continue to shape how Pakistani audiences see advertisements and make judgments about what to buy, even in the face of exposure to globalization, digital media, and shifting societal norms. Advertising language, imagery, and tone are nevertheless influenced by religious and moral overtones, especially in mass-market campaigns.

Furthermore, Zia's legacy serves as an example of how state ideology may influence cultural and economic behavior in addition to legislation. His tenure is an example of how political and religious frameworks may have a long-lasting impact on media creation, consumer psychology, and brand tactics. To decipher the dynamics of consumer culture in Pakistan and other emerging countries with strong religious or ideological identities, marketers, media professionals, and academics must have a thorough grasp of this past.

Suggestions

For media professionals and advertisers

- Keep creating culturally aware ads that appeal to traditional values while experimenting with new formats and online channels.
- Adopt narrative techniques that incorporate community, family, and ethical ideals as these subjects continue to have a significant impact on customer loyalty and trust.

Advice for Policymakers

- Strike a balance between artistic freedom and cultural control to make sure that media representations represent national ideals without limiting creativity or variety of opinion. Promote the creation of legal frameworks that uphold ethical advertising while adjusting to the demands of young people who are globally integrated and linked via technology.

For Scholars and Researchers

- Look into long-term research to evaluate how Zia's advertising still affects the opinions of modern generations of consumers.
- To identify more general trends in the connection between consumer culture, media control, and government, compare Pakistan's media development with that of other nations that implemented ideological or religious media reforms (such as Saudi Arabia and Iran).

For Companies and Brands

- Acknowledge how religious beliefs continue to shape customer choices, particularly in industries like food, fashion, health, and finance.
- Spend money on market research that examines the ways in which cultural conservatism and generational changes intersect to help firms better segment and target their clients.

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