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Culinary-gastronomic Literacy Practices and Social Class: A Comparative Analysis of Restaurants' Hoardings in Pakistan

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Abstract

Background. Hoardings, as a significantly important marketing strategy (King & Devasagayam, 2017) and being part of culinary-gastronomic literacy practices, play an integral role in shaping consumers' culinary preferences along with frequently reinforcing social class divisions in restaurant discourses. Although the impact of advertising on consumer behaviour is well established, little is known about how restaurant hoardings directly convey social class differences in a stratified society like Pakistan. These hoardings serve as means of promoting restaurants while also communicating values, goals, stratified identities and social standards (Marino, 2018). Pakistan being a country where social class hierarchies are quite prominent, food consumption is closely associated with both cultural identity and social status (Maqsood, 2014; Mapes, 2018).

Purpose. Keeping above in view, this study aims to explore how the visual and textual elements as part of culinary-gastronomic literacy practices of restaurants' hoardings work in unison yet distinctively in selected restaurants in Pakistan to construct narratives that appeal to different socio-economic groups.

Materials and Methods. The analysis focuses on the culinary-gastronomic literacy practices of four middle-middle class (MMC) and four upper-class (UC) restaurants in Lahore and Islamabad, the two major cities in Pakistan; employing an integrated approach that combines the Grammar of Visual Design (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), the Ideological Model of Literacy (Street, 2003), and the 'Create-a-Guest' model (Shamne & Pavlova, 2017).

Results. The results show that middle-middle-class restaurants utilize the culinary literacy practices to project themes of affordability, tradition, and accessibility; while upper-class restaurants employ these to emphasize upon the themes of exclusivity, cosmopolitanism, and luxury to attract targeted clientele.

Conclusion. These insights provide a deeper understanding of how restaurants position and identify themselves within Pakistan's social hierarchy through distinct use of culinary-gastronomic-literacy practices.

Keywords: culinary-gastronomic literacy practices, integrated analysis, hoardings, pakistani restaurants, social class hierarchies, multi-modality, ideological model of literacy, create-a-guest model

Introduction

According to Ulver (2019), food, in the new digitalized world, is no more the means of sustenance, but has become culturally symbolic, while acting as an identity marker for the underlying social stratification in a society. Similarly, the hospitality industry, restaurants in particular depict this 'food as class-based identity marker' through their branding and marketing strategies (Marino, 2018). For example, hoardings, menus, and advertisements form part of a broader culinary-gastronomic literacy practices as marketing tool, shaping how consumers understand and interact with food (Appadurai, 1988). In recent years, culinary-gastronomic literacy has gained prominence in Pakistan, reflecting broader global trends in which food practices are increasingly seen as indicators of socio-cultural capital. The ways in which food is presented, consumed, and talked about are not only reflections of personal taste but also markers of social identity and class distinction (Marino, 2018). Therefore, culinary-gastronomic literacy practices represent the ability to navigate, understand, and appreciate the cultural, social, and economic dimensions of food practices within a specific context. In Pakistan, where class distinctions are often pronounced, restaurants cater to specific socio-economic groups through carefully curated visual and textual elements. As mentioned earlier Pakistan is a country marked by its rich culinary heritage and stark social stratification. Therefore, the way food is advertised—particularly through restaurant hoardings—provides a revealing lens, through which to explore these culinary literacy practices and understand how they integrate in establishing and maintaining the stratified identities (Paddock, 2011). Additionally, the role culinary-gastronomic literacy practices in general and hoardings in particular play in shaping and creating stratified identities of the restaurants catering to the patrons of different social classes is underexplored in Pakistan. Therefore, the study provides academically and socially useful insights into the perspective how social class being the static variable can influence/vary the use of culinary-gastronomic literacy practices among the restaurants which further adds to the discourses of the hospitality industry of a specific region.

Considering the above context, hoardings being large outdoor advertisements, are designed to capture attention and are influential particularly in shaping consumer perceptions and choices (Belk, 2016). They are strategically designed using a combination of literacy practices; text, images, and design to communicate messages quickly and effectively among the targeted class. Additionally, in the context of restaurants, hoardings are not just advertising the type of food or cuisines offered by a specific restaurant but they also convey the cultural and social connotations associated with dining out and class stratification.

For middle-middle class (MMC) and upper-class (UC) consumers in Pakistan, these hoardings are often a reflection of different class-associated values; ranging from authenticity and tradition to modernity and luxury. Therefore, understanding how these messages are constructed and conveyed through a tactful use of multimodal discourses is crucial for understanding the broader socio-economic dynamics at play. With regard to this the study delves into the integrated multimodal analysis of restaurant hoardings targeting the restaurants catering to the culinary needs of the middle-middle class (MMC) and upper-class (UC) patrons in Pakistan, focusing on how these advertisements construct and communicate their class-based unique identities through culinary-gastronomic literacy practices.

To fulfill the purpose mentioned above, this article aims to examine the hoardings of middle-middle class (MMC hence forth) and upper-class (UC hence forth) restaurants located at Lahore and Islamabad (the cosmopolitan cities in Pakistan) focusing on how they contribute to culinary-gastronomic literacy and its distinctive use. By employing an integrated approach including three theoretical frameworks the comparison takes place at analysing different kinds of literacy practices i.e., visual design, textual impact, spatial element and materiality in the advertisements of four MMC restaurants—Butt Karahi and Zakir Tikka from Lahore, Savour Foods and Usmania Restaurant from Islamabad—and four UC establishments— Doc-27, and Café Aylanto from Lahore, and P.F. Chang's and Tuscany Courtyard from Islamabad, By doing so, this study aims to unpack the different strategies and tactics employed to attract distinct consumer segments from the society and how these reflect broader socio-economic hierarchies specifically in Pakistan.

Research Question/s

Keeping in view the objectives of this research the following research main and subsidiary questions have provided the conceptual framework for this research:

1. How do hoardings from middle-middle class and upper-class restaurants in Pakistan reflect and shape culinary-gastronomic literacy practices?
2. How do these culinary-gastronomic literacy practices as multimodal discourse strategies employed in these hoardings?
 - i. How do the visual elements (e.g., colors, images, layout) of the hoardings convey the targeted socio-economic class?
 - ii. How do the textual elements (e.g., language, slogans, descriptions) align with the cultural and social values of the targeted audience?
 - iii. What are the underlying messages conveyed by the hoardings, and how do they reflect the broader social dynamics in Pakistan?
3. How do these culinary-gastronomic literacy practices of restaurants vary across socio-economic classes in Pakistan?

Literature Review: Culinary-Gastronomic Literacy Practices: A socio-cultural perspective

Culinary-gastronomic literacy practices refers to the ways in which individuals and groups engage with food, both practically and symbolically. This literacy is not merely about understanding ingredients or cooking techniques but also about how food is represented, consumed, and valued within specific cultural contexts (Appadurai, 1988). Restaurants, as sites of public consumption, play a crucial role in cultivating this literacy by presenting their offerings in ways that reflect cultural and social capital. The design of menus, hoardings, and advertisements can thus shape perceptions of taste, sophistication, and class (Ayora-Diaz, 2021). According to Fischler (1988) and Mennell (1996) argument, 'food practices are a key site for the expression of cultural identity and social distinction'.

Pakistan, where food is central to social life, culinary-gastronomic literacy practices often reflect broader social and cultural values. For example, traditional dishes may be associated with authenticity and cultural heritage, while modern, international cuisines may signify sophistication and cosmopolitanism (Leo, et.al., 2023). These distinctions are often reinforced through advertising, where different socio-economic classes are targeted with different messages. As Ayora-Diaz (2021) propounds that social class distinctions are deeply entrenched and culinary-gastronomic literacy plays a significant role in explicitly defining one's socio-economic social identity.

Relationship between Restaurant Branding, Class Segmentation & Food

According to Ayora-Diaz (2021) branding is a critical element in the restaurant industry; shaping consumer perceptions, influencing dining choices and establishing the restaurants' unique identity with reference to the social class they cater. Studies have shown that visual and textual elements in restaurant advertisements are tailored to reflect and reinforce the socio-economic status of their targeted audience (Kotler et.al., 2016). Additionally, food branding has become considerably significant in the present era and has attracted interests of the scholars (Mangiapane, et.al., 2023) As it has been commonly observed that restaurants catering to middle-middle-class often emphasize family environment, value of money and culturally grounded aspects. On contrary, restaurants associated with upper-class culinary needs tend to highlight foreign environments, individualized experiences and luxurious dining offerings (Belk, 2016; Ger, 1994). This striking distinction is particularly salient in Pakistan, where restaurants serve as markers of class identity and difference. Therefore, every restaurant's administration puts in conscious and careful efforts in making the 'brand-stand-out' incorporating strategically the diverse literacy practices (visual, verbal & non-verbal) as brand marketing tactic.

Keeping in view the aforementioned point advertising is a powerful tool for shaping consumer behavior, particularly in the context of food. According to Holt (2002), brands and their advertisements play a crucial role in shaping consumer culture by creating symbolic meanings around products. In the case of restaurant hoardings, these advertisements not only promote specific dishes or dining experiences but also construct a narrative that aligns with the cultural and social values of the target audience. According to Pietrykowski (2004) your food choices define your social class because 'you are what you eat'. Moreover, in a country like Pakistan, where food is a key marker of social identity, restaurant hoardings serve as a visual

representation of the culinary practices and preferences of different social classes and is a reflection of the broader social dynamics across the country.

Triangulation as Theoretical Binding

The research is grounded in integrational approach employing three theoretical frameworks; Multi-modal discourse analysis by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), Ideological Model of literacy practices by Street (2003) and 'Create-a-guest- model by Shamne and Pavlova (2017). The main facet of multi-modality is that it offers a framework for understanding how different modes of communication—text, image, color, layout and materiality—work in collaboration to create meanings (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) and establish identities in a broader social context (Street, 2003). In the context of restaurant hoardings as a significant advertising tool in culinary industry, MDA allows for an exploration of how different kinds of literacy practices such as typography, imagery, and color schemes interact with textual components like menu descriptions and slogans to target specific social classes. Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) are of the view that all modes of communication have their own affordances and limitations, and argue that effective communication often involves the strategic and tactful use of multiple modes to create and sustain business and establish specific identities (Shamne & Pavlova, 2017). In brand marketing, for instance, images can evoke emotions and create associations that cannot be achieved with text alone as it is claimed that a picture is worth a thousand words and together, they work to create meanings in more impactful way. Similarly, the layout of a hoarding can grab the viewer's attention and reinforce the overall message. MDA allows researchers to dissect these elements and understand how they contribute to the construction of meaning. Considering the significance of the model propounded by Kress and Ven-Leeuwen (2006), MDA along with Street's Ideological Model of Literacy Practices and Shamne & Pavlova 'Create-a-guest' the analysis of the hoardings of MMC and UC restaurants in Pakistan for the present study is conducted to have deeper insights. By examining the interplay between text, images, colour, layout and design the research seeks to uncover how these culinary-gastronomic literacy practices integrate to convey messages about culinary-gastronomic literacy with reference to social class stratification particularly in Pakistan. Furthermore, the element of the materiality of hoardings, such as the quality of printing is considered as an additional mode of communication that conveys information about the restaurant's class positioning and identity creation for this research.

Methods

This study adopts a qualitative research design based upon triangulated methodology employing Multi-modal Discourse analysis (MDA) by Kress and Ven-Leeuwen (2006), Create -a-guest' by Shamne and Pavlova (2017) and Street's (2003) Ideological Model of literacy Practices. This collaborative framework is adapted to explore how culinary-gastronomic literacy practices are utilized in the hoardings of MMC (middle-middle class) and UC (upper-class) restaurants in Pakistan. The choice of MDA is informed by its effectiveness in analyzing the interplay between different modes of communication—text, image, and layout—which are central to understanding the messages conveyed by these hoardings. Qualitative research allows for an in-depth exploration of these elements and their social implications, making it suitable considering the objectives of the study. Therefore, through a detailed multimodal discourse analysis, this research aims to uncover the underlying messages conveyed by restaurant hoardings in Pakistan and how these messages reflect and reinforce social class distinctions and identities. By focusing on the contrasting approaches adopted by restaurants targeting clientele from MMC and UC, this article contributes to a deeper understanding of how culinary-gastronomic literacy is constructed and communicated in a stratified society like Pakistan. Basing upon the integrated theoretical framework the analytical categories utilized for the analysis are; 1) the textual meta-function 2) the semiotic/ visual meta-functions as referred to by Kress and Ven-Leeuwen (2006) grounded in the concept of Street's Ideological Model (2003) along with the tactful and strategic incorporation of literacy practice to achieve the aim of 'creating-guest' by Shamne and Pavlova (2017). Furthermore, in order to validate the findings of the analysis unstructured/informal interviews of the managers/owners of the selected establishments have been conducted. The findings of these informal interviews have been incorporated in the main analysis where social class is considered as a static variable and culinary-gastronomic literacy practices as dynamic variable.

Data Collection & Sampling

It is important to mention here that this study is part of a larger study that is carried out for Doctoral degree requirement. Therefore, data for this study is taken out from a larger data collected (for the said PhD thesis) specifically focusing upon the hoardings (placed outside) of the selected restaurants catering to the culinary needs of MMC and UC customers in the two major cosmopolitan cities of Pakistan: Lahore, and Islamabad. These cities are selected due to their diverse socio-economic demographics and the presence of a wide range of dining establishments catering to different social classes. The hoardings displayed outside the restaurants' entries are photographed from different angles to have a proper visual understanding. The data sample for this research has been collected from eight restaurants located at Islamabad and Lahore separately. In this regard, 4, 4 restaurants from each city have been selected purposively. Out of these four restaurants from each city 2 restaurants are representatives of middle-middle-class (MMC) clientele and 2 are targeting upper-class (UC) patrons. The names and division of MMC and UC restaurants from the mentioned cities is given below:

Restaurant Type/Class	Islamabad	Lahore	Reference during Analysis
MMC (Middel-middle-class)	1. Savour Foods 2. Usmania Restaurant	3. Butt Karahi 4. Zakir Tikka	Savours: MMC-1 Usmania: MMC-2 Butt Karahi: MMC-3 Zakir Tikka: MMC-4
UC (Upper-class)	1. Tuscany Courtyard 2. PF. Changs	3. Doc-27 4. Café Aylanto	Tuscany: UC-1 PF. Changs: UC-2 Doc-27: UC-3 Café Aylanto: UC-4

Hoardings located at the entries of the selected restaurants are carefully photographed in their original context to capture the full scope of their multimodal elements for instance, for their visual design, textual strategy, and material quality. Moreover, it is important to mention that the data collection period for this research has spanned two years from 2020-2022 which is basically during post-Covid times.

Data Analysis

In order to identify and highlight the apparent distinctions (how culinary-gastronomic literacy practices are used) present between the hoardings of the selected restaurants targeting middle-middle-class (MMC) and upper-class (UC), it is observed that the hoardings representing MMC, typically feature a mix of traditional and modern literacy practices, with a strong emphasis on affordability and value. In contrast, the hoardings showcasing an attraction for UC patrons are characterized by a more polished but minimalist aesthetic, focusing on luxury, exclusivity, and international cuisines. The detailed analysis and hoarding images of how these selected restaurants utilize culinary-gastronomic literacy practices are given below. The images of hoardings are provided/shared to clarify the analysis for the readers.



Fig1: Hoardings of MMC-1 Restaurant with Different Angles



Fig2: Hoardings of MMC-2 Restaurant with Different Angles



Fig3: Hoardings of MMC-3 Restaurant with Different Angles



Fig4: Hoardings of MMC-4 Restaurant with Different Angles

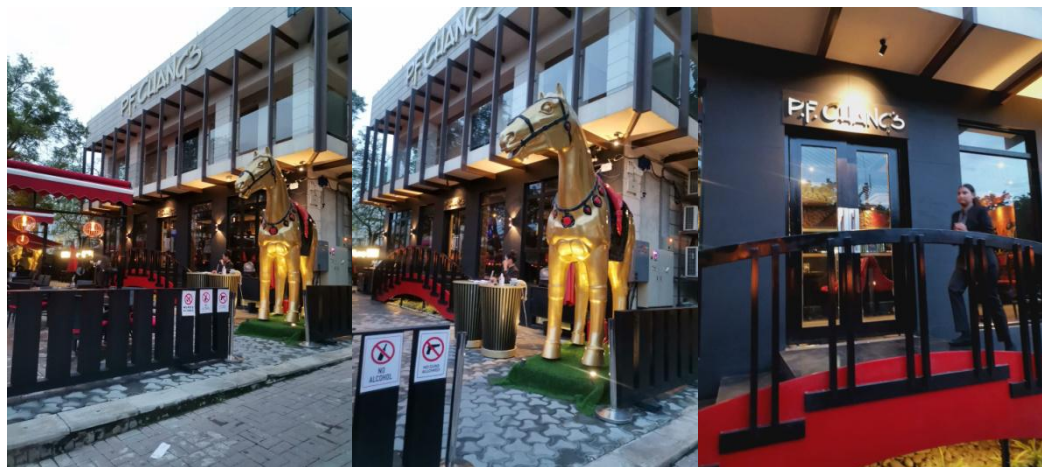


Fig 5: Hoardings of UC-1 Restaurant with Different Angles



Fig6: Hoardings of UC-2 Restaurant with Different Angles



Fig7: Hoardings of UC-3 Restaurant with Different Angles



Fig 8: Hoardings of UC-4 Restaurant with Different Angles

I. Textual Meta-function: Display of Restaurant Names on Hoardings

The categoric analysis is given below.

According to Zhang (2017), the name of the restaurant plays a pivotal role in attracting the clientele of a specific class; therefore, it needs understanding in the context of language and the identity a restaurant intends to create for itself in the eyes of the targeted clientele. In this regard, it is observed that all the selected four middle-middle-class (MMC henceforth) restaurants and four upper-class (UC henceforth) restaurants have named themselves explicitly in a connotative manner in order to ground themselves in the local context thereby capturing their clientele from the targeted social class. For example, concerning the use of language on the hoardings of selected MMC restaurants, the name of MMC-2, 'Usmania,' can be identified as being based on a religious reference to the Muslim Ottoman Empire (Fig: 2) (Keyder, 2018). As the MMC in Pakistan is mostly more religiously inclined as compared to the higher social classes, therefore it is easy to capture their imagination in the name of religion (Page, et.al., 2012). Moreover, the name 'Usmania' can also be taken as a marketing strategy to attract the targeted clientele, highlighting the idea that they can enjoy the royal experience of eating out for comparatively less money.

On the other hand, the name of MMC-3, 'Butt Karahi' can be identified as caste-oriented as 'Butt' is a Kashmiri caste that is famous for their love for food and is referred to as 'foodie' (Fig: 3) and are also self-obsessed in terms of their beauty and richness (Rao & Casimir, 2016). Hence, this name has been used to make the target clientele conscious of the assertion that the restaurant's food is rich in taste and quality. In addition, the naming is not just about uplifting the restaurant's image in the eyes of the targeted customers; the underlying purpose is also to make customers feel privileged and elevated (Batra, 2008). Somewhat differently, the name 'Zakir' from the restaurant's name of MMC-4 'Zakir Tikka' has been directly borrowed from the name of a famous Pakistani chef, who is popular because of his culinary expertise and cooking shows, which are regularly aired by the local channels in Pakistan (Fig: 4) (Zhang, 2017). Further, the analysis of the reviews collected from the managers of the three MMC mentioned above restaurants (Usmania, Butt Karahi, and Zakir Tikka) endorse the same notion that the names have been decided by the owners keeping in view the religious and cultural factors affecting or associated with the targeted social class. It is essential to mention here that except for MMC-2 (Usmania-fig-2), the managers of MMC-3 (Butt Karahi-fig 3) and MMC-4 (Zakir Tikka-fig 4) have to call their owners to reply to this or any questions asked from them. It is interesting to mention that, contrary to all three restaurants above of MMC, the case of the name of MMC-1 'Savour Foods' has been identified as an anomaly (Fig: 1). This is because the word 'Savour' has its roots in French language; and though it is directly related to the concept of taste of food, it cannot be interpreted as an instrument to attract the targeted middle-middle-class (MMC) in Pakistan (Ghaffar, Sarwat & Iqbal, 2023). Because of lack of any further evidence, the use of this word can therefore be ascribed to the imagination and discretion of the owners of 'Savour Foods' (Fig:1) as is said by one of the managers at this establishment that 'mei nhi janta k iska name Savour kiun hy' (I do not know why it is named as Savours). Moreover, the word '*ma sha ALLAH*' displayed above the restaurant name '*Savour Foods*' on the billboard (Fig:2) showcases the religious inclination of this establishment catering to the culinary needs of clientele from the middle-middle class.

However, when it comes to the projection of restaurants' names on hoardings of the selected UC restaurants, Han (2017) propound that customers place a great deal of weight on a high-end restaurant's name since it frequently communicates the brand identity, ambiance, and exclusivity of the establishment. A carefully considered name can conjure up specific images of the eating experience, such as elegance, sophistication, and top-notch food, all essential to drawing in a discriminating customer. In addition to helping the business stand out in a crowded market, the name promotes consumer loyalty and brand identification. Therefore, the name of upscale restaurants has a significant role in the total customer experience and brand perception, serving as more than just a label. Considering these points, it is interesting to mention that all the selected four UC restaurants' names are foreign (specifically Western) inspirations; none are locally or religiously named like MMC restaurants. The managers/owners of these selected upper-class (UC) restaurants endorse the same thing. For example, UC-1 'PF Chang' Bistro is a chain of the first internationally (American-based) recognized multi-unit Asian culinary brand to honor and celebrate wok cooking as the center of the guest experience (Fig: 5). It is a casual, delicate dining restaurant chain founded in 1993 by Paul Fleming and Philip Chiang that serves Asian fusion cuisine than further spread in the world. Concerning UC -2, 'Tuscany Courtyard' is an Italian-inspired name that refers to the exceptionally known culinary expertise of a village named Tuscan in Italy (Fig: 6). UC-3 'Doc-27' is a depiction of the owners' love for traveling, specifically sea voyage and experiencing cuisines across the globe (Fig: 7). The specialty of UC-3 also lies in offering a wide variety of international cuisines/recipes without restricting to any specific country/region. Similarly, UC-4 'Cafe Aylanto' is a contemporary restaurant that has savored the flavors of the Mediterranean in the shape of different dishes since 1996, where warm hospitality meets wholesome cuisine in a relaxed and sophisticated ambiance (Fig: 8). Moreover, mentioned by the managers of these UC establishments, all of them claim that their identity as fine-dining restaurants with consciously selected brand names is catering to the needs of the upper-class patrons in Pakistan.

II. Semiotic Meta-Function: Writing Fonts and Colours of Hoardings

The visual analysis of the hoardings has further highlighted the socioeconomic divide between the two types of restaurants catering to the culinary needs of MMC and UC customers, respectively. In this regard, careful observation reveals that MMC hoardings typically feature vibrant colors and dynamic compositions (See Figures 1-8). UC restaurants' hoardings, on the other hand, have used more subdued, elegant color palettes, with a preference for dark and rich tones that convey luxury and exclusivity (See Figures 5-8). This visual style aligns with the upper class's preference for exclusivity and high-end experiences and is in collaboration with Smith's findings (2020).

Moreover, the writing on the hoardings and the fonts also need interpretation in the context of language as they also play an essential role in creating guests and a unique brand identity (Bakator, 2017). The analysis of the collected data leads to the finding that all the middle-middle-class restaurants except one, i.e., Saviour Foods, use the Roman Urdu font while following the first letter capitalization rule with all letters bold to make them stand out (Fig: 1). Furthermore, Usmania also used the Urdu version of its name on the right side of the hoarding (Fig: 2). Examining this evidence under the lens of the argument by Thangaraj (2004) that commercial advertisements use fonts that are understandable by the consumers, the use of Roman Urdu has been found justified. However, the case of MMC-1 (Saviour Foods) is different and unique, and as mentioned above, this can, therefore, be ascribed to the imagination and discretion of the owners of 'Saviour Foods.' Concerning the use of color, the analysis of the hoardings and billboards of the selected MMC restaurants indicates that red is more prevalent, closely followed by the use of yellow, green, blue, and white. Colors, like language, vary in their connotative meaning, not only from one geographic location to another but also from class to class (Kauppinen-Räsänen & Jauffret, 2018); and according to Kandinsky, color is a power that directly influences the soul (Kandinsky, 1866-1944). For example, where the color red is considered more to be a representation of good luck, passion, happiness, and abundance in Eastern culture; in Western culture, it is associated more with anger and also loud expressions by the lower middle/working class (Turganbayeva et al., 2014). However, considering the commercial strategies of using different colors for marketing and advertising campaigns as determined by studies like Aslam (2006) and Pilelienė & Grigaliūnaitė (2017), it would be more appropriate to find a similar interpretation of the use of colors by the Pakistani restaurants.

According to the findings of Pilelienė & Grigaliūnaitė (2017) regarding the use of color temperature in advertising and its impact on consumer purchase intentions, the colors red and yellow and their various combinations thereof are primarily used because of their ability to generate the feelings of attraction, warmth, and excitement in the consumers. These findings, once applied to the case of the four restaurants being analyzed, justify the use of red and yellow colors in the billboards and hoardings as the primary aim of these restaurants is to attract the clientele while presenting their image as warm and hospitable (Figures-1 to 4). Moreover, the association of red with the element of excitement further strengthens this argument. White has been found logically justified as it provides a stark contrast and a bank background for the red-colored alphabets to stand out (Fig: 2). This use of contrast can be supported by the arguments of both O'Connor (2015) and Page, Thorsteinsson, and Han (2016), according to which commercial advertisements need to register a visible and dynamic impression on the minds of the consumers and the use of stark color contrasts mainly creates this impression.

On the other hand, using the two colors, green and blue, needs interpretation in separate directions. The use of the color green is associated with the national flag of Pakistan and the color's significance in the religion of Islam (Fig:1) (Mahmood & Kazim, 2018). As the MMC in Pakistan is more aligned with the concepts of religiousness and patriotism, as argued by Durrani & Dunne (2010), therefore the use of the color green has been found appropriate and justified by the four selected restaurants. However, the use of the color blue can again be identified as an anomaly (Fig: 2). Though findings of the studies by Lubrano (2005) and Lips-Wiersma et al. (2016) do indicate that blue is a color that represents the working classes (lower and middle classes); this interpretation is solely from a western perspective and associated with the term 'blue-collared' and cannot be applied to these classes in Pakistan. Hence, just like the name of the restaurant, i.e., 'Saviour Foods,' the use of the color blue can also be ascribed to the imagination and discretion of the owners of 'Saviour Foods.' Upon asking the managers of the four

selected MMC establishments about the strategy behind the color scheming of the hoardings and billboards along with overall ambiance and décor, the reply of all the managers is more or less similar as they all said that we do not know the reason behind using this specific color scheme because it is same since the first day of our joining this restaurant. For instance, one manager (MMC-4: Zakir Tikka) replied in these words, 'mjhe iska koi idea nhi (I have no idea about it)', manager (MMC-2: Usmania) responded, 'ye tu start se hi aise hy (it is same since start)', manager (MMC-1: Savours) reacted, 'owner ko sahi information ho gi iski (the owner would have the exact information about it)' and manager from MMC-3 (Butt Karahi) said, 'koi waja ho gi per mjhe oska idea nhi (there should be some reason, but I have no idea of it).'

On the contrary, high-end restaurants' choice of writing fonts and colors for their billboards and hoardings matters since it explicitly shapes consumers' perceptions of the brand's exclusivity and luxury. Elegant and sophisticated fonts can convey the restaurant's dedication to high-end, excellent cuisine when combined with a tasteful color scheme. As per a study the affluent consumers are drawn to the distinctive brand identification that the visual design elements contribute to by projecting a sense of grandeur and extending an invitation to partake in an extraordinary dining experience (Long, 2024). The advertisement is more likely to draw in the intended audience if it effectively uses fonts and colors, which can help improve readability and make it stand out in a congested visual environment (Kauppinen, et.al., 2018).

Considering the above context, the four selected UC restaurants strategically and tactfully decide their hoardings' fonts, color schemes, locations, and designs. For example, in UC-1, the font, color scheme, and design of the signage in the image reflect a sophisticated and modern aesthetic consistent with the branding of a high-end restaurant. Moreover, it is accounted that a clean, bold, and easy-to-read 'sans-serif typeface' font is used for the UC-1 name "P.F. Chang's" depiction. According to Lubrano (2005), the simplicity of the font suggests a modern and upscale atmosphere that appeals to a discerning clientele. The font color used is metallic or muted silverish-gray, which stands out against the light background of the building's exterior. Further, it is found that the subtle yet effective color scheme conveys a sense of luxury and refinement without being overly flashy. For example, the metallic sheen of the letters may also catch light in different ways, adding a dynamic element to the signage (Fig: 01). Moreover, the overall design of the signage is minimalistic, with the font taking center stage without any additional decorative elements. As propounded by Long, this minimalist approach is often associated with high-end branding, where less is more, allowing the brand's quality to speak for itself (2024). Besides, the understated elegance of the font and color scheme complements the restaurant's overall design and aesthetics, and the inclusion of the golden horse statue further adds to the touch of grandeur and reinforces the establishment's luxurious identity. In the case of UC-2, it is noticed that the establishment signage, "Tuscany Courtyard," employs a thoughtful combination of font, color scheme, and design elements to create a sophisticated yet inviting brand identity. It is accounted that the main font used is a serif typeface, which conveys elegance and tradition, aligning with the upscale image of the restaurant. In addition, the mustard-yellow background evokes warmth and a rustic ambiance reminiscent of the Tuscan landscape. At the same time, the dark brown text provides a strong contrast, enhancing readability and conveying stability. It is interesting to highlight that including decorative floral motifs above the text further reinforces the restaurant's identity to attract discerning patrons effectively. Together, these design choices communicate the restaurant's commitment and authenticity in offering a refined, calm, and welcoming culinary experience (Ghaffar, et.al., 2023).

Similarly, the hoarding image of UC-3 employs a minimalist design aesthetic that conveys sophistication and elegance. The font, a sans-serif typeface in all uppercase letters, is clean and modern, suggesting a contemporary dining experience. Again, the limited color palette (primarily of warm tones like gold and brown) is strategically connotative and creates a sense of luxury and intimacy. Besides, the use of ambient lighting further enhances the inviting atmosphere and, in collaboration, contributes to a visual identity that aligns with the upscale nature of the restaurant (Kress, 2006). Concerning UC-4 (Cafe Aylanto's) hoarding image presents a harmonious blend of natural elements and contemporary design. The restaurant's name is displayed in a playful, handwritten font that evokes a sense of warmth and informality. The vibrant yellow sign contrasts beautifully with the lush greenery, creating a visually appealing and inviting atmosphere. The earthy tones in the building's facade and potted plants further reinforce the connection to nature. While practical, the "Covid-Free Zone" signage also suggests a commitment to safety and well-being. Overall, the design elements work together to convey a relaxed and welcoming ambiance to appeal to the targeted clientele from UC (Kress, 2006). In short, the font color scheme and design of all UC restaurants are carefully chosen to project an image of modernity, elegance, and sophistication, aligning with the upscale identity of these restaurants and the targeted patrons. Furthermore, upon asking the managers/owners of the selected four UC establishments regarding the font, color scheme, and design of the hoardings, all of them responded that thoughtful consideration had been made to design and decide about the colors and overall impact of the hoardings following the cuisine specialty and the targeted patrons' aesthetics. According to them, interior decorators have been hired to design and decorate these restaurants' exterior and interior, considering the theme and the name inspirations along with the social class (UC) preferences.

III. Spatial Meta-Function

After carefully observing the spatial analysis, it is accounted that the layout of MMC restaurants' hoardings is often busier and more crowded, with multiple elements competing for the viewer's attention (figures 1-4). This reflects the need to convey much information quickly, such as cuisine type, underlying the notion of affordability and convenience. In comparison, the selected upper-class (UC) restaurants' hoardings (figures: 5-8) have employed more minimalist layouts, with ample white space and a clear hierarchy of information (Figures: 5-8). This strategically more restrained approach allows the luxury elements to stand out and conveys a sense of calm and sophistication, which appeals to the aesthetics of an upper-class clientele. This aligns with the findings of Hu, (2019) who argues the significance of poster location impacts the positioning of the brand in the eyes of the prospective customers.

IV. Materiality

According to Vichare (2023) the quality of product even in terms of advertising related aspects plays a significant role in creating an impact and image of the brand. The materiality of hoardings is another significant distinction depicting the class-specific identities of the selected eight restaurants. It is observed that selected MMC restaurants, i.e., Usmania, Savour Foods, Zakir Tikka, and Butt Karahi, tend to use cost-effective materials, reflecting their focus on affordability and inclusivity. On the contrary, restaurants like PF. Changs, Tuscany Courtyard, Doc-27, and Café Aylanto cater to UC culinary needs through premium materials that contribute to luxury and exclusivity.

Discussion on Major Findings

It is interesting to mention that during the comparative analysis of the hoardings of the selected restaurants not only differences are explored rather several recurrent themes have emerged reflecting the differing values and aspirations keeping in view the targeted audiences and their class specific preferences. Therefore, the researchers have compared these patterns between the two class-based groups of selected restaurants to determine how different strategies are employed tactfully to appeal to MMC and UC customers and fulfilling the goal of retaining and gaining business. On the basis of these recurrent themes the discussion on findings of the study is given below.

The first theme occurred during the analysis is of luxury and affordability. It is observed that UC hoardings frequently emphasize themes of luxury, exclusivity, and refinement, integrating language and visuals in a way that convey a high-end and sophisticated dining experience i.e., use of subtle colour-scheme and minimalist designs. However, the hoardings associated with MMC restaurants have focused on themes of affordability, tradition, and family values, tempting to consumers who prioritize value for money and cultural authenticity over luxury and exclusivity for instance the use of loud colour-scheme and crowded designs.

Moreover, during analysis it is found that the hoardings of selected UC establishments often present dining as a modern and cosmopolitan experience, with a focus on international cuisines and contemporary aesthetics reflected through the use of elegant fonts on the hoardings. Middle-middle-class (MMC) restaurants' hoardings, in contrast, balance modernity with tradition, emphasizing on the cultural heritage of the food being offered i.e. depicted through the use of traditional 'Roman Urdu' font.

Furthermore, it is accounted that the hoardings of UC establishments create a sense of exclusivity, appealing to consumers who value being part of a specific socio-economic group that enjoys privilege-based luxury experiences i.e., the overall layout & size of the hoardings see figures 5-8. In comparison, it is found that the hoardings of middle-middle-class (MMC) restaurants aims to be more inclusive, appealing to a wider audience with messages of shared experiences and family dining experiences i.e., the overall layout and size of the hoardings see figures 1-4.

In short, the comparative analysis highlights the stark differences in the hoardings projecting the selected MMC and UC restaurants visually and textually. Therefore, it can be said that culinary-gastronomic literacy practices are used strategically different across selected MMC and UC restaurants. Both types of establishments use them strategically as marketing tool to construct and communicate culturally stratified identities. For MMC restaurants the focus is on accessibility, tradition, and value, accordingly, the hoardings are designed to appeal to a wider audience. In contrast, hoardings of UC restaurants are designed to appeal to a more niche market, emphasizing exclusivity, sophistication, and a cosmopolitan lifestyle. These differences in hoarding strategies reflect the broader socio-economic dynamics in Pakistan, where class distinctions are maintained not only through economic means but also through cultural and social practices, including food consumption and dining-out. Keeping in view the above context, it can be said that the multimodal elements (as culinary-gastronomic literacy practices) of the hoardings serve as a means of reinforcing these class distinctions, with each class being targeted in ways that resonate with their specific tastes, aspirations, and identities. However, these choices are manifested in different ways i.e., materiality of hoardings with reference to cost effectiveness when it comes to MMC restaurants while emphasizing luxury when it's about projection of hoarding of upper-class (UC) restaurants.

As mentioned in the section of *methods* this article is a part of a larger study meant for Doctoral Degree and *hoardings analysis* is one strand among many working in collaboration to draw reliable findings on the said topic. Therefore, considering the scope of this article the triangulated analysis is only limited to the hoardings, located outside of the selected eight restaurants catering to the culinary needs of MMC and UC respectively.

Conclusion

The aforementioned findings have several implications for understanding culinary-gastronomic literacy practices in Pakistan. First, they highlight the role of advertising, particularly hoardings, in shaping consumers' perceptions of food and dining. By using different literacy practices, restaurants are able to target specific socio-economic classes and influence their culinary gastronomic needs and preferences. Second, the findings suggest that culinary-gastronomic literacy is not just about knowledge of food or cooking skills, but also about the ability to navigate and interpret the cultural and social meanings attached to different types of cuisines and establish their stratified identities. For the MMC, this literacy involves balancing tradition with modernity, while for the UC, it involves distinguishing oneself through the consumption of luxury and cosmopolitanism. Finally, the study underscores the importance of considering socio-economic context when analyzing culinary-gastronomic literacy practices.

In a word, this study has explored how hoardings function as culinary-gastronomic literacy practices in middle-middle-class (MMC) and upper-class (UC) Pakistani restaurants. By comparing the visual design, textual strategy, spatiality and materiality of hoardings from four MMC and four UC restaurants, this research has highlighted the different ways (reflecting their socio-economic status, cultural values, and aspirations) in which restaurants utilizing culinary-gastronomic literacy practices target distinct social classes. Thus, in Pakistan the culinary-gastronomic literacy practices of the restaurants are strictly tied to the

social class in terms of positioning themselves within Pakistan's social hierarchy. Therefore, the linguistics and semiotic choices made in terms of designing the hoardings of the restaurants are closely and explicitly related and reflective of the social class distinctions.

Considering the findings of the research, it would be valuable to investigate how these digital spaces convey and amplify social class markers through visual and textual content, particularly in comparison to physical hoardings keeping in view consistent prominence gained by the online advertising platforms like social media and food delivery apps. Additionally, the scope of the study can be expanded to other cities in Pakistan or other countries with similar social stratification. This can provide future researches a comparative perspective on how culinary-gastronomic literacy practices differ across cultural contexts. Lastly, future researches may incorporate consumer perspectives through qualitative surveys or interviews to understand in depth how these class-based narratives are perceived and internalized by the affluent audiences.

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Conflict of interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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